

## Working Now for a New Attitude

I'M NOT AN EXTREME STUTTERER, BUT IT IS ENOUGH TO change and inconvenience my life. To me, stuttering is a very shameful thing. I know that I shouldn't feel that way, but I don't want anybody to know. Outwardly, my speech is pretty smooth, and I work very hard to substitute words I can say for words I can't say easily.

I am too prideful about it. Stuttering has a stigma about it that people who stutter must have something wrong with them. I have always felt like it was shameful to my father. So, that was



Tiffany  
relaxes  
on the  
Monterey,  
California,  
beach.

kind of hard. As a very little girl, I didn't talk much around him because I was afraid of stuttering.

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There are so many times and so many situations when I feel like I could help or be welcoming to people, but I don't because of my stuttering. For example, I could say, "Hey, do you want to come to my church?" or "My name is..." but I would just freeze up. I just wouldn't be able to say anything. That is so hard to deal with because I end up feeling really guilty, very worthless. I am very hard on myself that way.

I don't really avoid situations, but I avoid saying things that I really want to say. I end up feeling like I'm missing out on many opportunities. I feel like I fail by not saying things to people. I really feel that it's an important thing to reach out and to be of service to others, but I often fail to do it because I'm so self-conscious. It's not worth the embarrassment or risk of embarrassment.

There have been many life decisions that I have made because I am afraid of the way other people view stutterers. Most people think that there is something wrong with stutterers or that they are less intelligent. I have been known as a very intelligent person and don't feel like I'm stupid. But knowing what other people might think of me makes me feel very insecure about my stuttering.

I was afraid to go to college. I just hated the classroom atmosphere. For example, if anyone asked me to read aloud, I had to "psych" myself up to do it. Usually, I did fine, but sometimes I wished that I could just crawl into a hole and die. I also had to trick myself

into maybe going to college; therefore, I participated in a college scholarship pageant. If I won the scholarship, I would be forced to go to college. I didn't end up winning the scholarship, and I just didn't really want to go to college, so I joined the military. I thought that would be the

Tiffany with husband Jamie, and baby Nicholas makes three.





Tiffany skydiving in 1998 near San Diego, California.

easiest thing for me to do to get out of a really small town. Plus, I was drawn to the military environment.

Joining the military proved to be a really good thing for me. Because I do better in high-pressure rather than relaxed and casual atmospheres, I joined the toughest branch, the Marine Corps. I did fine. I was always forced to talk, and required to do it on command. I could do that with ease because I didn't have to choose things to say. I also had to be confident, which helped a little. I did very well in the Marine Corps and within three and a half years I was promoted to E5, which usually took five or six years.

While in the military, I think I tried to throw myself into situations that made me deal with my stuttering. Kind of conquer it. I thought, "I just have to get over this." I signed up for a speech class. We did a few little speeches "impromptu" or we read things aloud. But, for some reason I got scared and said to myself, "I can't take this class anymore!" Sometimes I feel fine getting up in front of people and talking, but other times I just can't do it.

After leaving the military, I also pushed myself into jobs that put me in situations where I would have to deal with my stuttering. For example, my first job was as a sales person at Victoria's Secret. There were times when it was hard for me to ask customers certain questions. If I had to say, "Would you like to apply for a Victoria's Secret credit card?" I couldn't do it sometimes, so I just wouldn't say it regardless of the repercussions. Also there are many times when "my vocabulary fails me." (Too chicken to try the word

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I know, I act the ignorant party.) I feel like I'm shortchanging myself because I know these things, but I'm too embarrassed to try and risk being ashamed.

**I would just love to talk to people, but sometimes it's so hard. Through the years I think people just kind of left me alone. I didn't really have many friends and didn't really develop my social skills like I should have because I was so terrified.**

My fear about stuttering also often changes people's perceptions of me. They often seem to think that I'm quiet because I think I'm better than they are, but that is not it at all. I would just love to talk to people, but sometimes it's so hard. Through the years I think people just kind of left me alone. I didn't really have many friends and didn't really develop my social skills like I should have because I was so terrified.

Now, most of the friends that I have know that I stutter, and it is so much easier. My husband never knew until I told him six months into our marriage. These days, if I stumble over a word, he'll encourage me, "Come on, you can do it."

That helps me so much. There have been so many different times that I wanted to tell people because I felt it would help me. If people know, I usually don't have a problem. If I meet someone who knows that I stutter, I probably wouldn't stutter because I wouldn't feel like I had to perform in front of him or her. But, it would be kind of awkward to meet somebody and say, "Hey, I stutter, my name is..." To me that would be so hard.

Like many who stutter, I have also been in search of the "magical cure." I remember one time when I thought that I had discovered it. I thought that I wouldn't stutter anymore if I took a really deep breath before I started talking. I guess it worked a few times for me, but I soon discovered it wasn't that helpful.

Now, I am working to get to the point when I can just make light of it and joke about my stuttering. However, it is sometimes still very serious for me. I know other people who have stuttered



Tiffany and Jamie.

and just say, “Huh, oh well,” and go on with life. They say “whatever it takes,” even if it means people looking at them funny.

I admire that in people and wish that I could do that. That is now what I am working towards, but I think that that attitude is easier for some personalities than others. Another thing I wish for is that people would treat me as a person, not a stutterer. I am a person, a woman, a wife, a mother, a veteran, and more. Stuttering is just a part.

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401-001-TR-ST-001-2001