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At no loss for words

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WORDS THAT INSPIRE Life Coach and NLP Master Practitioner Hiten Vyas

A stammer need not undermine your courage to speak or face the world, says Hiten Vyas, narrating how overcoming this stumbling block transformed his life

Sitting in a circle around the teacher, 10-year-old Hiten Vyas couldn't get the words out to ask questions. He struggled, but his speech was blocked. He went home confused, but soon he knew. He had a stammer. In fear and anxiety, he sealed his lips. Ashamed, he hid his stammer even from his family. He remembers how at fifteen, every morning he would list situations he would have to speak in and avoid them. He wouldn't pick up the phone, wouldn't attend parties. He believed no girl would accept him. He was labelled shy. When he had to speak, he resorted to long pauses, chose words he could speak without a struggle, or finished the sentence quickly. At the hint of stammering, he took a breath and forced the words out. But his anxiety stayed. Stammering wrecked his confidence, plunged him in low self-esteem.

Hiten Vyas, PhD, is now a Life Coach and Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) Master Practitioner. And he definitely takes phone calls. His metamorphosis is a life lesson for all.

Frustrated that he was missing out on life, at 23, he turned to the Internet. He browsed, discovered people with similar struggles. "I wrote a desperate message on a forum about how I hid my problem from everyone," he said. "A kind Indian girl who stammered, encouraged me to tell my parents about it." Soon after, he happened to watch a TV programme on stammering, with his family. He found the words to tell them that he too had a stammer. "They were very supportive."

A speech therapy course followed. He learnt about the types and severities of the condition. Instructors taught him a new way of breathing to create fluency. It seemed to help people, but it wasn't for him. "You see, my biggest frustration was I could talk without problem a lot of the time, and the stammering came out of nowhere," he said. "For me anxiety that I may stammer and what people would think of me were the biggest problems."

Discovering NLP

He discovered NLP which treats anxiety associated with stammering. The NLP he had with a professor in Kerala "helped me tremendously to change the beliefs I had about myself and my stammering, helped me increase my self-confidence and raise my self-worth." Now he knew: the only way to overcome the fear of stammering was to speak. He would speak up first at training courses, force himself to start conversations with strangers in streets, or phone random companies about their products. He joined a public speaking group. "In my late twenties, during one year, I talked more than I did in the previous 10 years!"

He had to spread the word. He made friends with Dr. Satyendra Srivastava, Founder, Indian Stammering Association, and helps the association promote events for people who stammer in India. He has put his findings in a series of e-books — *Job Interview Confidence: Replacing Anxiety with Self-Belief*, *Phone Confidence: Stop Avoiding and Start*

Answering, Presentation Confidence: Stand Up and Be Heard and *Mindfulness Meditation For People Who Stammer*, available in India through Pohti.com and Infibeam.com.

I ask him about women who stammer. More men stammer, he says, the ratio being 4:1. That's probably why that issues faced by women with a stammer do not get coverage. Also in Indian communities, there are gender differences and cultural issues such as 'bringing shame' to the family, which may impact whether people want to disclose their problem. "Who knows how many women who stammer suffer in silence?" He suggests people listen to <http://stutterrockstar.com/category/women-who-stutter-podcast> by Pam Mertz, a U.S. woman with a stammer.

Words of advice

His advice those with a stammer: read motivational books, read about those who overcame difficulties. Change; learn to acquire confidence and assertiveness. Accept stammering as a unique part of you, but do it from a position of strength. "Yes, I stammer and I'm still going to achieve what I want in life." If your stammer is severe, seek speech/language therapy. Learn techniques to create fluency. Use opportunities to speak with courage. Speaking helps break down fear and anxiety, build confidence. Join a public-speaking/debating group, practise speaking in a supportive environment.

USEFUL SITES

* www.hitenvyas.com

* <http://t-tisa.blogspot.in/2012/11/communication-workshop-in-hyderabad-on.html>

* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LjUji5MoWY4&list=UUJVeIRjMhc2V69PznFuAu5A&index=1>

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