

STUTTERING DIDN'T STOP EITHER LA KINGS LEGEND DAVE TAYLOR OR YOURS TRULY

👤 Ryan Cowley 📅 October 22, 2015



Dave Taylor Photo credit: Rick Stewart/Getty Images Sport; Ryan Cowley Photo credit: Marc Lappano; Image credit: Chris Thomas

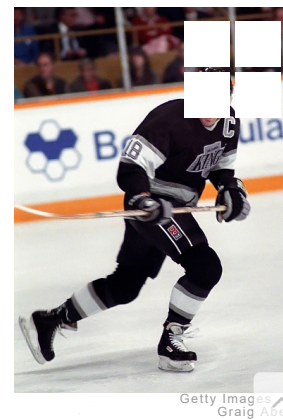
It is an affliction that has received some notoriety, but continues to leave many in the dark, and that is most evident from a personal standpoint. There are no universal explanations for these phenomena. For children, they can overcome it with early therapy. For adults, it is a chronic life-long disorder that may not result in achieving total fluency but through therapy, will help them obtain more control, significantly bettering their impediment.

Since childhood, I have stuttered. It was something I have learned to embrace as an adult but was ashamed of as a child and later as a teenager. It certainly took a long time to accept my limitations, but in the end, the realization was well worth it.

Of the approximately one percent of the world adult population who stutters, another is former captain — and later general manager — of the **Los Angeles Kings, Dave Taylor**.

Having garnered a great deal of early-career success playing on the famed '**Triple-Crown Line**' with **Marcel Dionne** and **Charlie Simmer**, Taylor almost never saw his boyhood dream come to fruition. He was deemed too light at 150 pounds to even play in the **NHL** — and being drafted in the 15th round certainly didn't help his cause. Despite having the odds stacked against him, though, Taylor was not only able to make the NHL but was able to celebrate a career that saw him score 431 goals and 1,069 points, joining an exclusive club of players in the latter category.

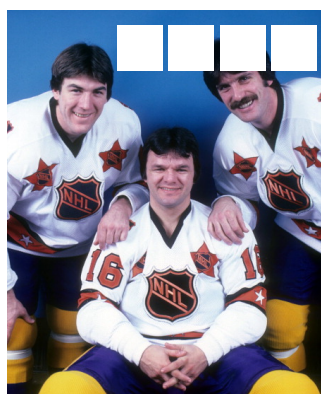
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In addition to his on-ice accomplishments, Taylor had the honour of being the Kings' captain for four seasons from 1985-86 to 1988-89. But while captaincy in hockey is one of the highest accolades, it does require a great deal of communication. While some captains in NHL history have been known to lead by example on the ice, many more have led the way through verbal communication, whether in the locker room, on the ice or even in the community. Dave Taylor was one of those captains.

"As long back as I can remember, I stuttered," Taylor told **Jerry Crowe** of the **Los Angeles Times** during a January 2011 interview. "I always dreaded having to speak in class. I was probably ashamed of it, so more often than not, I wouldn't say anything. Everybody said I was a quiet kid, but a lot of the time I was just afraid to speak."

"I've really made some good strides and I'm proud of that fact," Taylor also told Crowe. "I was able to take something that really controlled me and turn it to where I had most of the control."



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From Taylor's profile for **The Stuttering Foundation of America**:

"Dave Taylor has always been open about his stuttering. He has admitted in public that he once had to drop a class in college when he found out that an oral presentation was required. Also, early in his NHL career Taylor when interviewed after games on the radio, Taylor would always fake hyperventilation to guide him to fluency. Taylor credits his triumph over stuttering to his work with famed SLP Vivian Sheehan in Los Angeles."

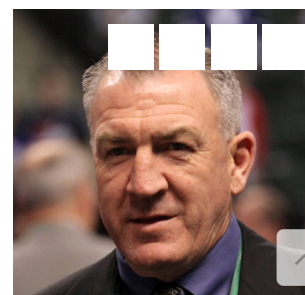
Vivian Sheehan, a Santa Monica-based speech therapist best known for her work with stutterers at the **UCLA Speech Psychology Center**, was recommended to Taylor by a friend.

Through speech therapy, Taylor has been able to make tremendous strides to overcome his stuttering to make public speeches as an NHL executive; first as the Kings' general manager (from 1997 to 2006) then as a Director of Player Personnel; first with the **Dallas Stars**, then with the **St. Louis Blues**.

But getting to where he is today certainly wasn't easy. While he could not have been any more reliable as a player on the ice — akin to, according to Crowe, "Joe DiMaggio in center field," doing interviews off the ice was a challenge to say the least.

"Whether it was in college or when I got to L.A.," Taylor told Crowe, "I always found the interviews very difficult."

In said interview, Jerry Crowe also spoke with Taylor's wife, **Beth**, who said of her husband that during one particular interview, he "stumbled 10 or 12 times." Mrs.



Taylor also remembered “talking to him afterward and he said, ‘That’s it. I really need to call somebody because I can’t be doing that.’ ”



When Taylor met with Sheehan and her husband Joseph, a UCLA psychology professor and stutterer, he was introduced to group therapy where he learned that he was not alone.

“Nobody could speak,” Taylor said. “Nobody could say their own name. It was interesting to see that obviously you’re not the only one that has this problem.”

After two years of working with the Sheehans, Taylor became so comfortable that, upon being asked, he agreed to speak at a national convention of stutterers. Taylor continued to address large crowds such as in 1995 at **The Forum** when the Los Angeles Kings retired his No. 18; and at his alma mater, **Clarkson University** in Potsdam, N.Y., upon being awarded with an honorary doctorate.

To read Jerry Crowe’s story on Dave Taylor in its entirety, [click here](#).

On a personal level, Taylor’s story hit home quite a few times. As an adult, I struggle immensely speaking on the phone. In fact, while I am not proud of it, I admit that I avoid using it whenever possible.

Thanks to the advent of the Internet, however, I am able to order a pizza, make an everyday purchase or, better, sending a message to someone without saying a word. Of course, while that is helpful, it admittedly isn’t the most adaptive solution as no one can make positive steps towards overcoming stuttering without speaking. Still, thanks to modern-day technology — particularly text and e-mail — communication is easier for yours truly. But if I need to use the phone, I’ll have a family member or a friend call or if my speech is bad enough at a restaurant, for example, I will order by simply pointing to what I want.

As a journalist, my speech impediment poses a significant barrier. However, if I am interested to speaking with anyone — particular within the Kings organization — I will e-mail them and explain my situation. Thankfully, but not surprisingly, everyone who has responded to my requests has exemplified understanding and patience to a “T”. In fact, those who preferred to converse over the phone agreed to let me e-mail them my questions ahead of time so they can simply call and answer my questions, all the while being compassionate to my situation.

As accommodating as my interviewers have been, it is a personal goal of mine to be able to speak fluently enough on the phone that I can carry on a conversation. After all, while many people tend to take it for granted, I can only imagine how much easier my life would be if I could speak on the phone with ease. The amount of jobs I have turned down simply because using the

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phone was a requirement has occurred more often than I would like to mention, and I would just rather not continue that way.

I need a person's visual attention to speak fluently — and even that is difficult at times. Over the phone is especially challenging because I can't see the person — or, rather, they can't see me. Even speaking to someone in the room who is occupied by something else or speaking to a driver as a passenger makes the ordeal a difficult one. In fairness to the latter, however, no one certainly cannot be faulted for not taking their eyes off the road.

There was one instance a couple of years ago where I was invited to speak on a podcast to share my insights on the Los Angeles Kings in what was a preview for the lockout-shortened 2013 season. Naturally, I was nervous but thought I could get by nonetheless. Unfortunately, that was not the case. The hosts, both taken aback by my speech impediment, decided to e-mail me afterwards to remind me how bad the session went — as if I needed to feel worse. Needless to say, despite the Kings' run to the **Western Final** that spring and their **Stanley Cup** win the following year, which included a historic run along the way, I was never asked by the duo to participate again. As for yours truly, I have refused every podcast request since then.

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There have been other unpleasant situations but most of them have been ones that I took with a grain of salt and moved on from. Very few instances, including the aforementioned, have left me feeling embarrassed and, to an extent, hopeless, which, even I admit, is imprudent.

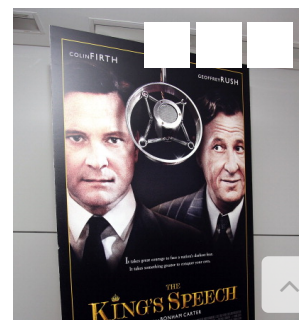
When the film, **'The King's Speech'** was released in 2010, I was ecstatic.

Never before had a movie about stuttering hit the mainstream. Even as an avid moviegoer, seeing it four times in the theatre was personally excessive, but worth it nonetheless.

From singing — just ask **Carly Simon** — to swearing — consult **Samuel L. Jackson** — to speaking while listening to music through headphones, the movie covers accurate methods to help control stuttering. Since yours truly was never able to carry a tune, the former has never been a personal method for fluency, although the other two have helped.

For many reasons, including seeing **Helena Bonham-Carter** star in a movie that did not involve **Tim Burton**, the movie was refreshing and, to this day, remains one of my all-time favourites. Even when it won the **Academy Award** for **Best Picture**, I yelled as if the Kings had scored in overtime.

And who says movies can't leave a positive impact?



Just this year, a young comedian by the name of **Drew Lynch** graced the stage of 'America's Got Talent.' A stutterer, Lynch wowed the show's judges and audience not only with his material but with his perseverance. The native of Indianapolis fared so well on 'America's Got Talent' that he was named 2015's runner-up and is now touring the United States, using a self-deprecating approach to get laughs — and why not? As a stand-up comedian myself, I used the same approach, telling the audience that I bought a stuttering GPS for my car. I explained that I was heading to Los Angeles but unfortunately, because of the severity of my device's stutter, I wound up in Denver. That is all I am willing to share as much of my stuttering humour is too adult to share.



As for Dave Taylor, I have only met the man on two occasions, both very brief, so I didn't have much of an opportunity to speak with him. That being said, I have learned a lot from the longtime King, like so many others who have gone through life as a stutterer. From actor **James Earl Jones** to journalist **John Stossel** to athlete-turned-analyst Bill Walton, they have used stuttering not as an obstacle but as a way to embrace themselves, to stand out and, in a sense, tell the doubters that while verbal communication is difficult, there are other avenues to the top.

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I have been in so many situations where those who do not understand my affliction have talked to me as if I were a child, yet there are many more who have been so understanding that they will insist that I take my time while they wait for me to speak, even if it means a few minutes out of their busy days. Then, in turn, I like to answer those on social media who post negative stories and ask if there are any good people out there anymore with a resounding, "Yes!"

Today, October 22, marks International Stuttering Awareness Day. It has fallen on this date each year since 1998 and while the affliction should gain notoriety on any day of the year, October 22 should hold a special significance to stuttering, and it does.

From www.isastutter.org:

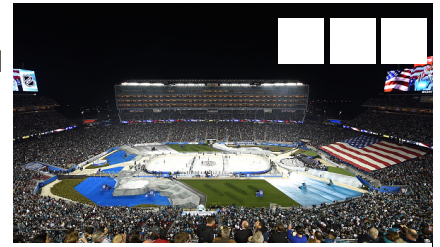
"There is big media coverage in many countries. People who stutter from self-help groups as well as professionals are interviewed for TV and newspapers. Excellent projects, interesting discussions and parties occur around the World around October 22. It is so gratifying to see how the national associations use this Day for working and celebrating."

Like Dave Taylor, like yours truly, like so many other stutterers, because we may not always be able to speak as fluently as we would like, it does not change who we are as people and what we are capable of.

Dave Taylor worked his way from the nickel mines of **Levack, Ontario**, to forge an illustrious 17-year playing career — even as a late draft choice who was deemed undersized — before embarking on a successful career as an NHL executive.

As for yours truly, he started writing about his beloved **Boston Red Sox** in 2006 as part of his own **MySpace** blog before writing about his beloved Los Angeles Kings on **Facebook** in 2009 before being discovered by a determined young executive by the name of **Michael Hirschbein** who had just helped start a sports social network. Yours truly was given the chance to write about his Kings with a bit more exposure. My dedication and talent led me to cover such events as the **Stanley Cup Final**, the **NHL Draft**, the **Stadium Series**

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and the **Hockey Hall of Fame Induction Weekend**. For the higher-ups, including Mr. Hirschbein, who did know that I was a stutterer, they just didn't care enough to let it stop me — and neither did yours truly. In fact, with Mr. Hirschbein's case, merit and loyalty were simply too significant to let a speech impediment play a deciding role.

While this writer continues his determination to accomplish a lot more in this industry, what I have accomplished thus far underlines just how trivial being a stutterer is, especially when I have so many other assets that help me speak more fluently and articulately. While being a stutterer is something I do embrace, it does not define me as a person.

Despite his stuttering, Dave Taylor has accomplished so much — as an athlete, as an executive and as a person — that a speech impediment cannot stand in the way of such success. Despite my stuttering, so have I — and quite frankly, I wouldn't have it any other way.