



Editor's note - Copied below is an email sent to Peter Reitzes (StutterTalk co-host) on April 4, 2010 by Wesley Cook. In 2002 Mr. Cook was featured on the television shows Good Morning America and The Oprah Winfrey Show regarding his experiences with the SpeechEasy device and stuttering.

Email from Wesley Cook

I get an email with respect to the SpeechEasy every year or so, which I always find surprising both in terms of my name still floating around and people actually knowing how to find me!

By the way, I checked out the website [StutterTalk], and kudos to you for creating such a welcoming and informative forum.

Getting back to your question, yes, I appeared in a segment on GMA [Good Morning America], and then that segment was aired again on the Oprah episode which featured Mr. Babcock. What a whirlwind of events.

As for the SpeechEasy, the immediate consequence was quite phenomenal. I remember the day when I received the device, the researchers at ECU [East Carolina University] asked us to go out and test it. So, my parents and I went to the nearby mall and grabbed some lunch, and that was probably the first time I had been able to order food (from a counter-type operation) on my own. Quite a confidence booster. That success continued for some time. The whole ECU experience lasted for the better part of a year (testing, fitting, therapy, etc.) and culminated in several phone calls that landed me on the TV spots and multiple interviews in local papers and other publications. While the initial result was great, for whatever reason, the benefit seemed to subside given time. Remember I was one of the first maybe dozen people to go full steam ahead with the study, so there were still kinks to be worked out. For instance, in crowded rooms, the external noise seemed to drown out the "echo" of the SpeechEasy, lessening the benefit. Additionally, there was a low hum coming out of the device nearly all the time. At some point, it became almost a chore to continue down that path. All the while, I was graduating from college, finding a job, and working incredibly long hours (as a CPA). The drive down to ECU from my hometown is about 5 hours, so I found it nearly impossible to forge ahead the way I may have wanted or needed. So, to answer your question directly, I, too, found a decline in the benefit of the device over time. I stopped using it about a year or two following all the events of 2001. Due to the noise issues I mentioned above and a slightly self-conscious attitude toward the appearance of an object in my ear, I just eventually decided to go it alone. Entering the workforce made me decide real quickly that with device or not, I had to find the confidence in myself that I needed to overcome stuttering and the fears associated with it.

I have not kept up with the research at ECU, nor the device, so I am unaware of where exactly the project stands and the verdict falls. Since that time I was approached by GMA for a follow-up segment,



which I declined. I've always felt a sense of respect for the guys at ECU and what they did (and hopefully are still doing), so I don't want my personal decisions to not use the device or my personal experiences with the device to be indicative of its success or my feelings towards it.

For what its worth, I've found that dealing with stuttering has to come from within. There has to be a confidence and a humility. Since those years with the SpeechEasy, I've moved my way up in my career, made great friends and contacts, been married, and done a lot of things, from a speech perspective, that I never dreamed possible. I feel like while I was growing up. I was allowed to rely on others to get me through tough spots too many times. Being out on my own, hopefully due to increasing amounts of maturity under my belt, I'm now able to give presentations at work, pick up a phone and call someone, and not worry (all of the time) about what people think of me and if I will mess up, so to speak. Don't get me wrong, I still have a long way to go and some things still really freak me out, but I'm doing measurably better than when I had my 15 minutes of fame.

So, in closing, thank you for the email, and thank you for the work you're doing.

Please feel free to email me if you have any further questions.

Best regards,

Wes