

GTR REACH: Finding My Voice: Stuttering, Strength, and the Power of Inclusive Workplaces

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Thank you [Naevin Wasara Abeyasekara](#) for sharing your journey during an RBC GTR REACH event on the Common Ground Conversation Circle - Speech Disorders Event. Here is the feature from the event where we learnt that stuttering affects between 1% and 4% of Canadians. That means several of our RBC colleagues, and many of the clients we serve every day, experience it. People who stutter know exactly what they want to say; the challenge is in smooth delivery, not in the thinking behind it.

As RBC professionals, we can make a real difference be patient and let colleagues and clients finish their thoughts without interruption, recognize that stress (like interviews or high-pressure meetings) can temporarily worsen stuttering and isn't a reflection of capability, and focus on the content of what's being said rather than how it's delivered. When we create space for everyone to communicate at their own pace, we build a more inclusive environment where all voices, whether colleagues in meetings or clients at the counter, are truly heard and valued.

Naevin's Story: "Keep Calm and Stutter On"

Naevin Abeyasekara, a Vice President in RBC Capital Markets' Global Transaction Banking group, recently shared his personal journey with stuttering at an RBC Reach Common Ground event held virtually on Feb 11th, 2026. His story is one of resilience, self-discovery, and the profound impact an inclusive workplace can have on someone's career.

Naevin's stutter was first noticed by his mother when he was six. She enrolled him in speech therapy immediately, a process that lasted nearly six years and gave him not just techniques, but a safe space to process the frustration that comes with a voice that doesn't always cooperate. His father, meanwhile, struggled to accept the diagnosis, creating a complex family backdrop that shaped Naevin's early relationship with his own speech.

"Here is the thing about stuttering that people rarely understand," Naevin told the audience. "It is highly paradoxical. You don't choose when you stutter. The speech section of your brain decides that for you. It blocks words you said perfectly yesterday and throws you a curveball when you least expect it."

School was where the anxiety took root—new teachers, round-the-room introductions, the constant dread of will I block? Bullying in junior school pushed him inward, turning a talkative child into a withdrawn one. But then something shifted. Inspired by *The King's Speech*, the story of King George VI leading a nation through World War II while battling a severe stutter—Naevin adopted what he calls a "just do it" perspective. If a king could rally a country mid-crisis, he could get through a classroom introduction.

By high school, he was captaining the rowing team and emceeing events. At university in the UK and Malaysia, his fluency hit its peak—batchmates were surprised when he eventually told them about his stutter. And when he joined RBC's Kuala Lumpur office, he carried that momentum forward, volunteering for every speaking opportunity that scared him: meetings, Town Halls, client presentations, short-term assignments in RBC offices in Luxembourg and Australia.

"I decided that hiding was more exhausting than stuttering," Naevin said. "My stutter just became another characteristic. I could command a room even if my delivery wasn't perfect by traditional standards."

That journey eventually brought him to Toronto, where he completed a Master's at Queen's University and continued building his career in Capital Markets. Today, his work focuses on bridging transaction banking strategy with modern technology to drive better business initiatives—drawing on eight years of experience and a truly global perspective. All while advocating for stuttering at the workplace and general life.

Building an Inclusive Environment

True inclusion means judging people on their competence, not their fluency—and understanding that stuttering is a neurological mechanism entirely unrelated to intelligence, preparation, or confidence. Naevin's own career is proof: with his senior leadership, who evaluated him on potential rather than delivery gave him the opportunity that ultimately shaped his path to a VP-level role. We can all foster that same environment by resisting

the urge to finish someone's sentences, never bypassing a colleague for speaking roles because of their stutter, giving people the time and space to land their point, maintaining eye contact through pauses instead of looking away, and—for hiring managers—using structured interviews with standardized scoring that evaluate the content of an answer rather than the smoothness of its delivery.

Learn More

- <https://stutter.ca/learn-more> — Key facts about stuttering in Canada, including prevalence, onset, and recovery rates.
- <https://stutter.ca/articles/2025/05/best-practices-hiring-managers> — Practical guidance on interviewing and evaluating candidates who stutter fairly and inclusively.

When we create space for everyone to communicate at their own pace, we build a workplace where all voices are truly heard and valued—not for how they sound, but for what they say.

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