
Rowan Atkinson to Mr. Bean: A Story of Weakness to Success- Case Study

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“British comedy doesn’t always resonate with American audiences, but everyone loved *Mr. Bean*”

ABSTRACT

Introduction: The world renowned and one of the richest comedians is a stutterer. A British Rowan Atkinson who is known as Mr. Bean and famous among young and children equally is has a stutter disability. He had that disability by in his childhood which gave him a tough time in his childhood and at the start of his career. In this case study, I will highlight how Rowan Atkinson became Mr. Bean and how he continued his journey despite of his stuttering while everyone rejected him. As at the end of 2018, no other case study seemed to have addressed this severe problem of stuttering and formation of Mr. Bean.

Case Description: Rowan Atkinson was suffering from stammering from his childhood. He was a Shy and self-oriented person. Instead of all these factors he overcome his fear and conquered the world.

Comments: The chance of shyness, low confidence level and low level of employability increases in the presence of any disability. Rowan Atkinson is one of the persons with stuttering problem, but he did not close himself behind the door and faced the world with great courage, determination and enthusiasm.

Keywords: Stutter, Stammer, Success, Stammering affects

1. INTRODUCTION

When we talk about a successful person, we usually think about their bank balance, their monetary worth, a bestseller, or someone who in-charges a whole nation. By definition, “If you believe success is simply making (or having) a lot of money, you may be setting yourself up for failure”.¹ According to 12 rich, powerful people, success is defined as: happiness (Richard Branson), money

and power are not enough we need well-being, wisdom, wonder, and giving too (Huffington), you do not need money to be successful (Mark Cuban), a satisfaction (John Wooden), people's love (Warren Buffet), enjoying your work (Maya Angelou), an impact on society (Bill Gates), constant growth (Deepak Chopra), change people's lives (Barack Obama), grind (Thomas Edison), categorically individual (Stephen Covey), working hard when no one I looking you (John Paul).⁵

We have seen many people who became successful even with disabilities. Success does not mean that you must be physically fit to earn it. We have a lot of examples of successful people with any disability like Stephen Hawking (Amyotrophic lateral Sclerosis), Helen Keller (Blind and Deaf), John Nash (Schizophrenia), Christy Brown (Cerebral Palsy), Demosthenes (Stammer).²¹ Disability doesn't mean you are failure. Like many other disabilities, Stammering is one of them. Stammering or stuttering are synonyms²⁵ is one of the complex speech disorder which not only impact of person's psychological, cognitive but also on social behavior.²² Generally, in North America this disability termed as Stuttering while in Britain, it is tend to be used as Stammering.²⁵ It is also proposed that stutter rate is higher in men than in women²³ and it's about 4:1 or above.²⁴

Rowan Atkinson, who is a famous comedian, is a stutter. Mostly people are unaware of it. He made his weakness not a hurdle in the path of his success but his strength and became a world-renowned comedian. Yes, he is none other than Mr. Bean. A real-life Mr. bean is a stutterer. After completing his electrical engineering degree, he decided to be an actor, but nobody was willing to give him a chance because of his stutter. While finalizing Mr. Bean, he decided to do it as a silent character without uttering a single word. Rowan's first relation was with actress Leslie Ash which fizzled out in 1984. On the set of Blackadder, he met make-up artist Sunetra Sastry and they got married.¹⁶ After successful 25 years of his married life, he officially ended his marriage life in 2015.²⁰ He is a proud father of two children, a daughter and a son.¹⁸ Rowan don't like to talk more about his personal life.¹⁶ When he is not on set, he used to focus on fast cars and write for CAR, A British Car Magazine.¹⁴ In one of the internet video in July 2017, a rumor was sparked that Atkinson had died in a car crash but it was a false news. He is still alive and now he is 63.¹⁵

1.1 CHILDHOOD & EARLY LIFE:

A rubber-faced comedian³ Rowan Sebastian Atkinson is a son of Ella May and Eric Atkinson. He was born in January 6, 1995 in Newcastle upon Tyne, England with a zodiac sign Capricorn.⁷ His nick name is Row.⁸ He is 5'11". He was the youngest of the four children born to the couple.¹⁰ His father Eric Atkinson owned a farm.⁸ He studied at Durham Cathedral Chorister's School⁹ and was always bullied by his classmates. He and former British Prime Minister¹¹, Tony Blair¹⁶ attended the same prep school.¹¹ He also studied at St. Bees School and then studied Electrical Engineering at Newcastle University. In 1975, he continued studied his Electrical Engineering at The Queen's College, Oxford.¹⁰ He figured out his talent of comedy when he was attending Oxford university.¹⁰ He had a hernia surgery in 2009.⁸

Atkinson's A-level Physics master Chris Robson told that Atkinson was not an outstanding student but when is was on stage, he was exceptional.⁶ His childhood influences were Charlie Chaplin and Peter Seller.¹² Interestingly, Rowan came to act by chance. His father was strict enough that they had no TV in the house till Rowan was 12.¹⁶ He is also a Shy person in nature and can wiggle his ears.¹⁸

1.2 CAREER:

He started his acting career in 1978 for BBC Radio 3 with the name "The Atkinson People". In 1979, he starred in a comedy TV show "Not The Nine O'Clock News". After that he earned a role in "Blackadder", which was aired in 1983. In the same year, he made his picture with supporting role "Never Say Never Again". From 1987 to 1989 he was called for the festival "Just For Laughs". In the year 1990, he was casted as Mr. Bean in a show titled "Mr. Bean". Many sequels of Mr. Bean were made and aired on TV until 1995. In 1994, he gained recognition for his voiceover as a bird "Zazu" in Disney's "The Lion King" and "Four Weddings and a Funeral". From 2001 to 2003, he did supporting roles in films. In addition to supporting role, he did a big hit with the title "Mr. Bean's Holiday" which released in 2007. In 2011, he appeared on a big screen in the sequel of James Bond named as "Johnny English". In 2013, Rowan took a role in "Quartermine's Terms" at a theater in London.¹⁰ Most recently (2018), he returned back to theater in "Johnny English Strikes Again".¹⁴

1.3 ROWAN ATKINSON TO MR. BEAN:

Rowan is a comic character actor with two characters, when he is talking and when he is silent. While talking he is always sleek and usually lingers over the juicy words B and P which is a way to overcome his stutter and when he is silent, he is Mr. Bean.³ Mr. Bean a comic play aired in 90s and came aired via PBS, HBO, and Fox Family.¹⁷

In an interview, Atkinson recalled *The Story of Mr. Bean* and said that he was not a writer by birth. Additionally he said, I just stood in front of mirror and did mess with my face hence a strange, surreal, silent character evolved.¹⁸ The character Mr. Bean was firstly named as Mr. White, then they tried its name with vegetables and decided Mr. Cauliflower and eventually Mr. Bean was aired.¹⁸

Mr. Bean was a child grown in a man's body.¹⁸ The impressive part of Mr. Bean was his communication with gestures, funny noises, and oddball physical cues. Rowan kept playing Mr. Bean for 22 years⁴ with 104 episodes²⁰ and 2011 was the last year of Mr. Bean on stage.⁴ A character of Mr. bean was silently there for 10 years before he was given a name. Mr. Bean was the highest rating show of 90s and has been sold to more than 50 airlines and 245 countries.² in an interview to The Gaurdian, Rowan Atkinson addressed himself a perfectionist and said it is more of a disease rather than a quality.²

1.4 AWARDS & ACHIEVEMENTS:

Rowan won an International Emmy and a British Academy Award from *The Nine O'Clock News*, but it was Mr. Bean which gave him worldwide recognition.¹³

1.5 NET WORTH:

It is estimated that Atkinson net worth \$130 million which make him the 23rd comedian with the highest net worth.⁴ He also do charity. Atkinson has supported many charity houses like amnesty International, CAFOD, Charity projects entertainment fund, comic relief, global goals, kids company, UNICEF, prince's trust, save the children.¹⁹ Rowan is politically active too.²⁰

2. CASE DESCRIPTION

2.1 HOW STAMMERING AFFECTS OTHER PEOPLE?

A study suggested that people with stammering disabilities are more likely to choose less socio-economic professions rather than high socio-economic profession because they are afraid of people.²⁶ Fear of stuttering may stop people to make a valuable contribution to success. A survey by A BSA research program reported that 90% stutterer got frustrated, 71% stutterer didn't share their ideas of growth due to lack of proper oral communication and 51% stutterer had decided to not apply for promotions because they didn't want to be exposed to the world.²⁷ Another report expressed that child with stuttering disability are tend to show involuntary movements like blinking of eyes, quivering lips, tapping the feet. This report also addresses that mostly stutterer avoid social gatherings, they feel frustrated, fear, shame.²⁸ A study by Kasbi F et al revealed that stuttering has negative impact on quality of life.²⁹ Stuttering not only affects individual himself but his family too.³⁰

2.2 HOW ROWAN ATKINSON OVERCOME HIS DISABILITY?

Rowan has stuttering problem from his childhood which always kept him alone and stayed away from people. He was afraid of being bullied and shy by nature. He stood against his fear and decided to face the world with his same disability. He did two things to overcome his disability. Firstly, he beat his fear by exposing himself to the same fear. Psychology says exposure to your fear is an effective way to get out of it.³² According to neuroscience, fear goes out when you come into an action.³³ Another research proves that by facing one's fear, it gradually declines.³⁴ Secondly, he used to sleek and usually lingers over the juicy words B and P which is a way to overcome his stutter.⁶ He said that his stutter went away when he was doing any character.³¹ He could not vanish his stutter but found a way out to overcome it.

3. CONCLUSION: WEAKNESS BECAME SUCCESS

He doesn't like giving interviews because of stammer.⁸ In August 23, 2007 *Time Magazine* published Atkinson's interview with a question, "Did you ever overcome your serious stutter?" and he replied it comes and goes, when he played other than himself, stammering disappeared.⁶ This is his stammering disease which made him Mr. Bean. He was a silent and shy child. His fellow used

to bully him because of his stuttering. He used to remain alone. At Oxford, he made sketches which his friends saw, and he was inspired. When he decided to continue his career in entertainment industry, everybody rejected him due to his speech disability. He wasn't disappointed and started BBC radio. Mr. Bean a silent but funny character is because of his stuttering. He did it silently because he couldn't speak fluently. But he didn't know his character of Mr. Bean would become a big hit of late 90s and early 20s. He opened a door for many others with this disability. He never quit, never disappointed but kept working and now he is one of the world's renowned comedians. Success is not about having enough money in your bank account but happiness and recognition with tireless hard work and enthusiasm. Real success is overcoming your weakness and turns it into your strength. Success doesn't need excuses but passion, determination, and hard work. Like many others, he did not sit behind the closed door and spent his life in a very small circle of people, but he defeated his disability and became a shining star.

4. DISCUSSION

This case study is all about a person who struggled for himself, had beaten all the odds and earned not only his name but wealth too. We have seen many people around us who are not as perfect as us. They are to be told that they cannot do anything because they are not like us. They are always been bullied by their fellows and surrounding people. They cannot be a public speaker because they stutter, they cannot perform well in interview because they cannot communicate well, and they cannot face the world with full confidence because they cannot talk to people with eye to eye. All these odds should be omitted. Now the world has changed. The purpose of this case study is to motivate all those people who are suffering from any disability and never tried themselves. Every person is specially gifted with some special skills what all you need is to discover that skill, polish it and make your position in this world. Let's people know that don't treat you diseased or disabled but specially abled. Work hard, try again and again, never disappoint if one door doesn't open for you try another, and let your name shine as much as you can.

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