

Testimonials (Law Firms)

“One of the most powerful talks that I have ever been to”

- Partner, top 40 law firm

“The best mental health session we’ve had”

- Associate, top 75 law firm

“Eloquent and talented... would definitely recommend”

- Partner, Linklaters

“What you said... will definitely help people”

- Attendee, Linklaters

“A talk that everyone needs to hear”

- Organiser, City law firm

“I was the one at the back, sobbing and snorting”

- Associate lawyer, City law firm

“Most effective of all mental health talks I’ve attended”

- Lawyer, “Magic Circle” law firm

“Can’t recommend highly enough”

– HR, Slaughter and May

“Made me get in touch with friends who are struggling”

- Participant, “Magic Circle” law firm

Companies and organisations I’ve worked with:

Royal College of Art, University of the Arts London, The Idler Academy, The School of Life, London Business School, University of Edinburgh, Accenture, EY, D&AD, Ogilvy, Stella McCartney, American Express, Experian, HSBC, Triodos, Innocent, Moët Hennessy, Unilever, The Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland, Bupa, Great Ormond Street Hospital, Healthwatch, Monitor, Rocco Forte Hotels, Octavia, Aviva, FieldFisher, FTI, Slaughter and May, Linklaters, Freshfields, Mishcon de Reya, Macfarlanes, Birketts, Clyde & Co, Norton Rose Fulbright, Weil, SpaceNK, BBC, Channel 4, United Nations, Department Store for the Mind, Selfridges, White Stuff, Saracens, Google, Microsoft, O2, The Phone Co-op, Vodafone.

Breakdown: A Talk For Law Firms

I had a breakdown in 2018, went into psychiatric hospital for eight weeks and am much the better for it, thank you for asking.

I've delivered lots of talks about my experience – what led up to it, what happened in hospital, and how I gradually recovered – using drawings that I made in hospital. Here's one I gave in person:



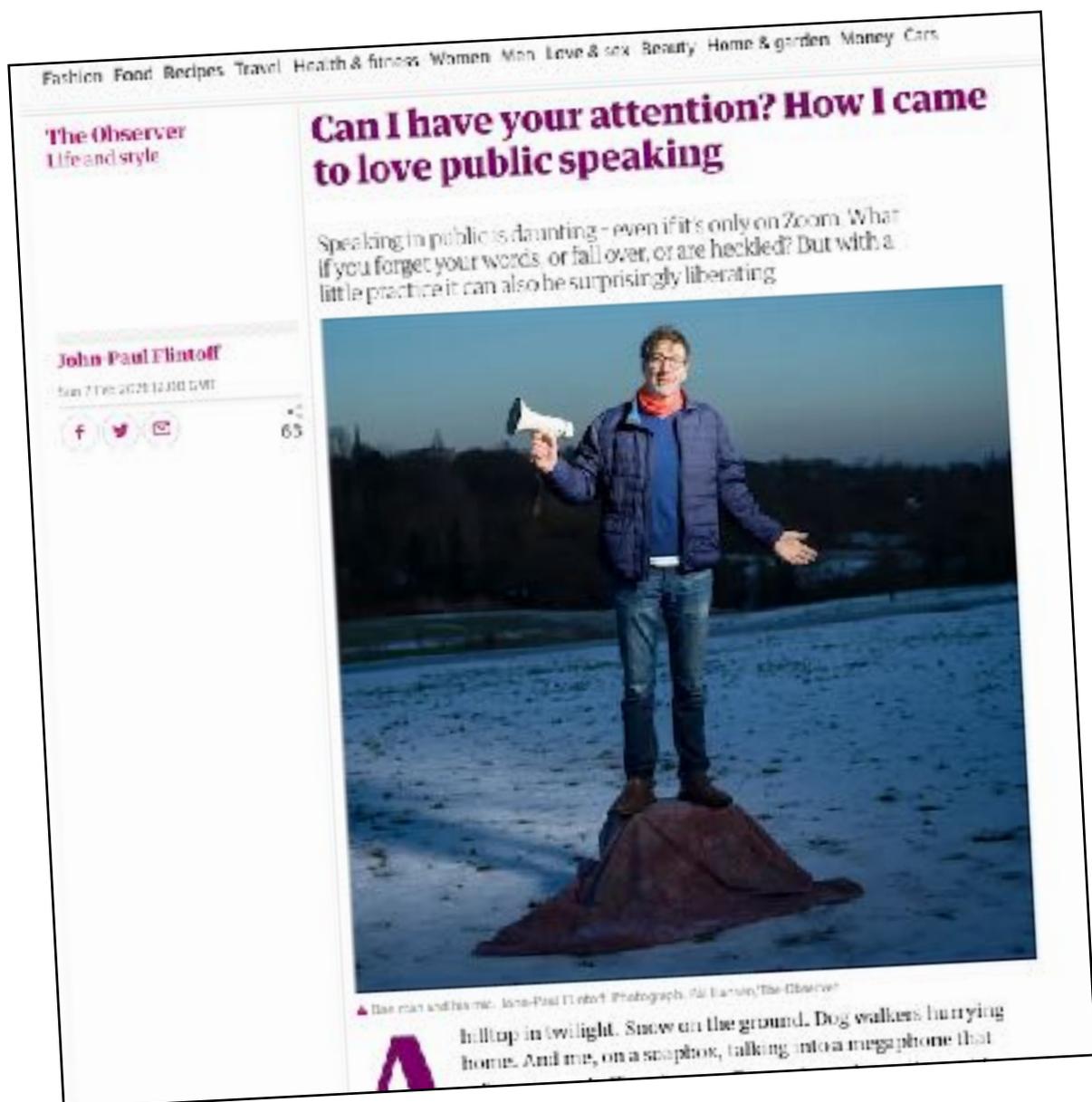
What with Covid, many of these talks have taken place online.

Talking online and screen-sharing turned out to be a great blessing, because people in the audience could comment to me privately in the chat, and ask questions that I could answer without giving away anybody's identity.

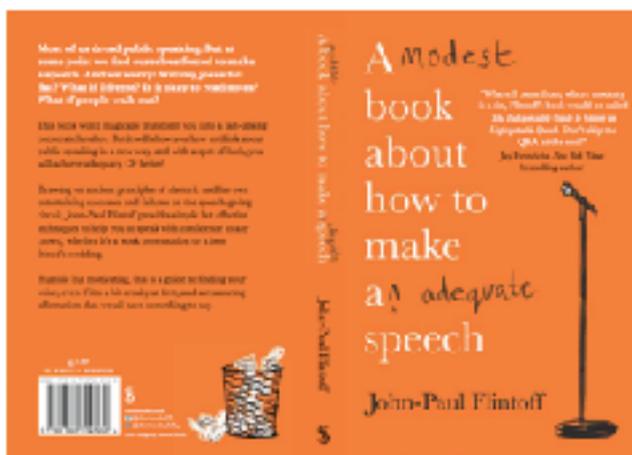
Those comments and questions were often very raw. And when I shared them (anonymously) with the rest of the organisation, the effect was very powerful.

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JOHN-PAUL FLINTOFF



Hi, I'm John-Paul. Writer, mostly, and a performer and illustrator.



I'm the author of six books, in 16 languages, including How To Change The World and A Modest Book About How To Make An Adequate Speech.

I worked for 15 years as writer and associate editor on the Financial Times, the Sunday Times and other papers and magazines.

“Eloquent and talented... would definitely recommend”- Partner, Linklaters



THIS IS ME

I thought only weak people would have a breakdown.

What's wrong with me?



I LOST A JOB

I took *voluntary* redundancy, but over time I felt like I'd been pushed out – unwanted



STOPPED FEELING NEEDED

Children grow up. It's normal and healthy. But it left a hole



LOST PEOPLE I LOVED

First a friend my age. Then a close relative. Then somebody stopped breathing in my arms



GOT IN DEBT

I lost confidence in myself. Then I lost control of my finances



DENIED I HAD A PROBLEM

Despite leaving the cooker on all day, and the front door wide open



EVENTUALLY TOLD MY WIFE

It's hard to convey how difficult and painful this was. I felt so ashamed



SHE FOUND HELP

I'd never have believed it, but it felt so good to put myself in somebody else's hands

A freelancer recounts how work problems triggered severe depression and how he turned things round

Earlier this year, I admitted myself to psychiatric hospital. I went in voluntarily, only to watch nurses search through my possessions to remove anything I could harm myself with: razor, pills, iPhone cable. I was put on watch, and for days I was not allowed outside unaccompanied.

I shared a ward with people in financial services, law, advertising, the drinks industry, commercial aviation, the military, and more. Many women diagnosed with depression, anxiety, bipolar, trauma, self-harm, personality disorders, and chronic addictions to drink, drugs and gambling.

The UK government's Thriving at Work review, published late last year, stated that poor mental health costs the UK economy up to £10bn a year. Of this, up to £4.2bn is a direct cost to employers, lost through sickness/absence, presenteeism and staff turnover.

But I was self-employed, a patient in this psychiatric hospital only thanks to my wife's workplace health insurance.

My breakdown was mainly related to work. A decade ago, I took voluntary redundancy from the best job I ever had, in publishing, I trained elsewhere to do similar work on a lucrative freelance contract, though without pension or holidays. I felt this was OK because I could be at home more for our daughters.

I could not have imagined how bad it would be for my self-esteem to be the only man in the school parents' groups – recipients of emails routinely addressed to "Girld". No, when our daughter became teenager and turned increasingly towards her mother, how useless I would feel.

My lucrative freelance contract ended after five years. To keep my income, I diversified: training others and doing public speaking, which I enjoyed.

My accountant suggested I work through a limited company, and I consented to the additional financial complexity. Accountancy bills shot up, so I subscribed to Xero, an online bookkeeping platform. I devoted hours to deciphering its mysteries, and importing data.

I got a new accountant, who said I could be earning significantly more. He had not used Xero, but was keen to start.

Outside work, 2015 was a difficult year. We lost a close friend, then a close relative within a month of each other. Soon after, my daughter became gravely ill, and then my wife found a lump that needed investigation. I felt numb, but did not share my feelings with anybody.

The new accountant sent an invoice for more than £4,000 but, increasingly informed, I did nothing. A month later, I looked what I took to be an accident.

It was absurd then I started to "lie" correspondingly by dropping it on the floor beside my desk. This partly explains how I failed to pay insurance premiums, so that when I went into hospital and for months after, there would



'I felt numb, but did not share my feelings with anybody'

Poor mental health costs the UK economy up to £10bn a year, and up to £4.2bn is a direct cost to employers

By Andrew

be no emergency cover for my mortgage payments. But that came later.

When the accountant's third invoice arrived, I noticed that the figure was slightly different. It was not a reminder but a third monthly bill, each for more than £4,000.

I panicked. My wife was facing surgery. I could not bring myself to tell her I had amassed bills of £12,000. I felt ashamed at what I assumed to be my own incompetence. I never imagined I would be one of those men who felt uncomfortable to cry over a wife's illness – but I was. When I did tell her, she was furious. How could it be so much? She asked why I did not challenge the bills. I could not explain, but looking back I see that I had lost all confidence in myself.

Nervously I phoned the accountant. He said he had done work worth £25,000, but had written off 50 per cent. This made me feel guilty. I can only imagine I was charged, wrongly, for every minute his team spent learning Xero. He wrote off all but £4,000 and I found yet another accountant.

By now, my confidence was in ruins, and work was drying up. Three times in a row, speaking events were cancelled. I became convinced that nobody wanted me, not my work. I spent long hours at my desk without ever achieving much.

I took no exercise, neglected patients and rarely saw anyone. When I did, one evening, an old friend joked that he did

not really know what I did for a living any more – and I realised in horror that I did not know either. That lost its purpose of purpose.

Falling behind on payroll, VAT, corporation tax and Companies House returns, and up to my limit on credit cards, I became intensely fearful. Every business website promised my insurance.

I phoned my parents, saying I felt worthless, and before Christmas I told my wife I wished I was worthless. She sent me to a psychiatrist.

Checking into hospital, I sent a message to some old friends, saying I felt like a failure, and deeply ashamed. I feared they would be repelled. I was so wrong. I got replies congratulating me on having the courage to share what I was going through, and requesting visit.

Nobody had seen this coming, because I had hidden my struggles from everyone. A friend who had a breakdown years before phoned me in hospital. "I hear you are in my alma mater." I can't tell you how much that helped to normalise what I was going through.

I resolved to do everything possible to get better: group therapy, cognitive behavioural therapy, drama therapy and art therapy, yoga and singing. I bought running shoes and a Fitbit for when I walked over exercise. I monitored my food and wine intake, meditated, went to bed early, and took my medication. In therapy, I shared things I had

never spoken about. And I heard others do the same.

A military officer, responsible for overseeing the wellbeing of thousands, admitted to a history of self-harm. A commercial pilot talked about his anxiety, how he drank excessively to manage it, and how that affected his family.

Leaving hospital, I joined support groups and continued to see my therapist. I met old friends and former colleagues, and am rebuilding a sense of who I am and what my priorities are.

Being self-employed had been wonderful for several years, but in adversity I lost focus and felt alone. I am sure many others have found the same.

Sharing financial difficulties was excruciating, but I have learnt that if I need help I should have the humility to ask for it. My father took over my credit card debts, and my father-in-law took care of my accounts and correspondance with HMRC.

With incredible generosity, friends offered to lead me away, and one paid me to do today a week at his small company in a role that could only be done by me. I have done a little public speaking, mostly about mental health, but I am focusing on the work I love best.

Writing this, I feel like I am describing somebody else entirely. I have come a long way, and I am grateful to be here.

Andrew is a former investment manager

A friend who had a breakdown phoned me in hospital: 'I hear you are in my alma mater'. I can't tell you how much that helped