



# First step in beating depression is admitting it

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**ATLANTA, Georgia (CNN) --Tom Johnson, former CEO of CNN, and J.B. Fuqua, one of Georgia's most prominent businessmen and philanthropists, have been friends for years and shared a deep secret.**

Depression.

"I met J.B. Fuqua in the early '60s. I was then a young reporter and he was the chairman of the Democratic Party of Georgia," recalled Johnson, now 60.

From that early meeting they kept a friendship as Johnson went on to be publisher of the Los Angeles Times, before running CNN.

Fuqua, now 83, helped elect governors and presidents while building a fortune collecting and selling businesses. Now, he gives it away -- more than \$100 million in charity in recent years.

"Along the way I saw the evidence that J.B. was dealing with depression. I was coping with my own depression," Johnson said. "It was not so difficult to bring it up with J.B., because I knew I was almost with a fellow traveler on this very tough journey."

Now the two friends have gone public in Fuqua's memoir, "Fuqua: How I Made My Fortune Using Other People's Money" (Longstreet). Johnson wrote the foreword.

They kept their secret because of the stigma associated with mental illness. Only their families and closest friends knew.

"I thought it might adversely affect my business relationships or my personal relationships," Fuqua said.

"My family knew. I'm sure that some people suspected but didn't know. They thought I was a little peculiar, particularly when I would go for long periods of just total silence."

Fuqua struggled with severe depression for more than 50 years.

"I would sometimes cancel engagements for no reason whatsoever; cancel important meetings sometimes," Fuqua said.

"I didn't want to go out, be in a group of people -- just wanted to be left alone. I just wanted to go to bed and sleep. And I slept a great deal. A depressed person knows that when they're asleep nothing bad can happen."

Fuqua cannot say what triggered his frequent bouts of depression, which got more severe as he grew older. For Tom Johnson, stress appeared to take the greatest toll.

Stress trigger

"There was a big trigger for me. I was ousted as publisher of the Los Angeles Times in 1989," Johnson said.

"So much of my self worth was tied with my position. It felt like I was being enveloped in darkness. It was a sense of loss of enthusiasm, a loss of happiness, a significant decline in self worth."

Dr. Charles Nemeroff, who has treated both Johnson and Fuqua, said stress is a major factor for everyone and a

CEO's higher stress level makes them more vulnerable to depression.

"They drive themselves inordinately more than other individuals do," said Dr. Charles Nemeroff, chairman of the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Emory University School of Medicine.

"So they tend not to take as good care of themselves, both physically and psychologically, and in the end that takes a toll," Nemeroff said.

"There's another factor that we don't often think about, and that's the frequent travel, the jumping across time zones, jet lag. We know that disruption in sleep-wake cycles is another precipitant for depression."

Getting help

Johnson did not want to get treatment. He thought he could "tough it out."

"I think that's almost an immediate reaction by people who have accomplished a lot in their lives," Johnson said. "I had always just taken on every challenge that I could take on.

Nemeroff says it is hard for men to ask for help, and even harder for those in leadership positions.

"They view this not as a true disorder but as some kind of weakness of character, and if only they could just pull themselves up by their bootstraps they would be fine," Nemeroff said.

"And for them, asking for help is a sign of weakness. When in fact, they've asked for help many times in their professional careers to solve problems."

And CEOs are experts at surrounding themselves with the best people who can help mask their condition. Johnson had his assistants plan meetings around his down times.

"I just felt that you didn't want a leader who was at times going into his side office, lying on the floor, putting a pillow on his head," Johnson said.

Johnson's wife pulled him into treatment after he lost his job as publisher of the Los Angeles Times.

But he said it wasn't until he moved to Atlanta and his job at CNN that he found a treatment that worked for him: talk therapy and the drug, Effexor.

"I don't want to suggest to anybody that it will work for them, but it has worked for me," Johnson said.

"It really has enabled me to get back to where I honestly feel like the person I was before it all hit. I just want everyone to know you can deal with it and deal with it successfully. Don't give up hope."

Shock treatment stigma

Medications did not work for Fuqua. Five years ago he tried ECT -- or shock therapy -- an effective treatment with its own stigma.

"It cured me from having bouts of serious depression," Fuqua said. "It is a simple, painless procedure."

"ECT works in many patients in which anti-depressants don't work," Nemeroff said. "ECT works faster than anti-depressants, and after 40 years we still don't know exactly how it works."

The stigma of ECT is largely due to its portrayal in the movies "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" and "A Beautiful Mind."

"They unfortunately depicted ECT in a barbaric, primitive and completely unrealistic view," Nemeroff said.

Today, the semi-retired Fuqua said he is happier than he has ever been: "For a man of my age, I think I feel good. I'm happy."

"My last several years at CNN were years when I felt like my old self," Johnson said, "back to the person that I was in my 20s and 30s -- my very best years."

But still at the top of his game, Johnson retired from CNN last year.

"I needed to escape from stress before stress took me down again," Johnson said.

Tom Johnson and J.B. Fuqua devoted their lives to leading people and businesses. The next chapter: leading others to treatment and eliminating the stigma of depression.

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