

Making Our Lives Magical after a Brain Injury and Stroke Keynote Presentation

Craig J. Phillips MRC, BA Second Chance to Live



“Our disappointments and discouragement do not have to limit our ability to create a good life for ourselves.” Craig J. Phillips MRC, BA

Process, Journey and Evolution

Traumatic brain injury, car accident, in 1967 when I was 10 years old. Open skull fracture, right frontal lobe damage, a severe brain bruise with brain stem involvement. Coma for 3 weeks. Fractured left femur (thigh bone), traction 7 weeks, Spica (full-body) cast for 5 months. 2 EEG's, battery of psychosocial testing. Was not supposed to succeed beyond high school academically. Learned how to walk, talk, read, write and speak in complete sentences. Tutored at home in 5th grade. Mainstreamed back into elementary school in the 6th grade. Graduated on time with my high school class in 1975. Went on to obtain my undergraduate degree in 10 years (2 universities, 1 community college). I then went on to Obtain my master's degree (2 graduate schools) Rehabilitation Counseling. Credentials CRC.

20-year history of getting and losing jobs, client with 2 different State Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (Florida and North Carolina). 2nd Vocational Rehabilitation evaluation determined that I was not employable.

Applied 3 times for SSDI, the 3rd application approved. For many years I felt like someone who was all dressed up with nowhere to go. I experienced a lot of disappointments and discouragement despite all my best efforts to succeed academically and vocationally. But I am glad that I did not give up on finding a way to use my gifts, talents and abilities in ways that worked.

In my search I created **Second Chance to Live**, on **February 6, 2007**, **7 years** after my **2nd** Depart. of Voc. Rehab evaluation revealed I was employable and my **3rd** SSDI application was approved.

“Big things have small beginnings.” Prometheus

“Inch by inch, life's a cinch. Yard by yard, life's hard.” John Bytheway

Living with the impact of a brain injury, traumatic or acquired, can lead the individual with a feeling of helplessness. Helpless, with the thinking that their “lives” are over and they no longer matter to anyone, including themselves. So, they may ask, “what’s the point?”

In the process of their feeling helpless to do anything different, the individual may develop what is called, a learned helplessness. In the process they may begin to believe that they are “stuck”. Believing that they are a victim of life and their particular set of circumstances.

What Makes Life Magical?

Shared to encourage you. Encourage you to not give up on your process of creating a magical life after a brain injury or a stroke: [Biographical Information for Craig J. Phillips MRC, BA Second Chance to Live](#)

Magical — extremely or extraordinarily pleasant, enjoyable, or exciting (Merriam-Webster)

“It is not as important as what happened or happens to us, as how we respond or to what happened or happens to us.” Craig J. Phillips MRC, BA

Understanding Why we May Feel Helpless

The Pike Syndrome

A tank of is filled with water. A pane of glass is placed in the tank near one end of the tank. A big fish is released into the water at one end of the tank.

At the other end of the tank, on the other side of the pane of glass in the tank, little fish are introduced to the tank. A pane of glass separates the big fish from the little fish. In an interest to get to the food source (little fish) the big fish repeatedly hits the pane of glass.

Over time the big fish begins to associate pain with trying to get to the little fish. After a period of such conditioning the pane of glass is removed separating the big fish from the little fish. Although the big fish can now

readily get to the little fish (food source), because of the conditioning associated with trying to get to the little fish, the big fish gives up. The learned helplessness results in the big fish starving to death.

The Pane of Glass — Disappointment and Discouragement

As Individuals living with brain injuries, and many times invisible disabilities we can feel like the big fish in the big tank. The big fish that is trying to get to the little fish to find satisfaction and fulfillment. Satisfaction and fulfillment by achieving our hopes and dreams, yet continue to hit disappointment and discouragement.

Making Our Lives Magical by Not Giving Up Because of the Pane or Pain in Our Lives

Making our lives magical one day at a time by realizing that we have more power than we realize. Realize that we no longer have to or need to feel helpless. That living with a brain injury does not have to leave us feeling as though we have no other choice (s). That we are trapped, like victims of our set of circumstances.

Overcoming a Learned Helplessness

The good news is that we do not have to be limited or be dissuaded by the “pane” of a diagnosis or a prognosis. Like the big fish, we can learn to swim freely. Swim freely to go after what we need to do to improve the quality of our lives, well-beings and relationships. Swim freely to discover what works for us.

The “pane of glass” of our or other’s expectations that lead us to feel helpless focusing on our limitations.

Although we may have Limitations, our Capacity to Thrive is Limitless

The pane of our disappointment and discouragement is only an indication. An indication that we need to try something different to get different results. By learning to use our gifts, talents and abilities in ways that work for us,

we are able to move from beyond a feeling of being limited, to an assurance to being limitless.

An assurance that we are limitless by finding a way that will work for us. A way that will make our lives, well-beings and relationship magical. A way that will no longer leave us feeling limited, because of our limitations. In a way that will enhance our ability to live our lives, limitlessly, beyond our brain injury and or stroke.

To Be Able to Move from Feeling Limited to Feeling Limitless

In my experience, I needed to stop denying and defending what I was powerless to change. I needed to grieve the impact of my brain injury to begin to create and make my life magical. I needed to confront my and other's denial, be angry about, try to change and then be depressed about the impact of my brain injury.

I needed to accept what I could not change to be able to see that I had other choices. Choices that would give me the permission to explore beyond my deficits and limitations. Choices that would open the door to help me to realize that I could get into action. Get into action, in order to be able to stop feeling limited.

Start Seeing my Set of Circumstances in a Different Way

In the process, I was able to start seeing my set of circumstances in a different way. Start seeing them through the lens of "Why not Me?", instead of "Why Me?" Through the lens of "What Is?" instead of through the lens of "What Is Not?". In the process, I was able to stop focusing on what I was powerless to change.

In the process, I was able to stop focusing on the symptoms, limitations and deficits of my brain injury.

Setting Goals and Creating a Magical Way of Living after Brain Injury and Stroke

Through using the principles of neuroplasticity and repetitive mirrored movements we are able to achieve what we never dreamed possible. Working on one skill at a time and repeating that skill (a bazillion times) we achieve milestones. As we are able to combine skills and skill sets together, we are able to create magic.

Neuroplasticity 2021 Using Modern Arnis, Kali, Western Boxing, Knife and Wing Chun



Create a magical life for ourselves by involving “who we are” in our ongoing brain injury recovery process.

Essential Principles that Will Empower Our Ability to Live Our Lives Magically

Hard work, Commitment, Determination, Drive, Discipline, Fortitude, Persistence, Tenacity, Courage

Advocating for Ourselves in Mind, Body, Spirit, Soul and Emotions

Through being and staying committed to the process of developing what makes “who we are”, we can enhance our lives, well-beings and relationships. By developing our mind, body, spirit, soul and emotions in our ongoing brain injury recovery process, we are able to learn how to thrive and make our lives magical.

Through being committed to an ongoing holistic recovery process, we can cultivate skills and skill sets that empower our ability to create a magical life for ourselves. In the process, we enhance our gifts, talents and abilities in my life. In the process we are able to be of maximum service to a loving God and to other people.

Brain-Body Connection Craig J Phillips MRC, BA, Second Chance to Live March 2024



12 Ways to Advocate for a Magical Life after Brain Injury and Stroke

Through seeking to make my life magical, despite my limitations, I discovered a set of ways. A set of ways that helped and continue to help me to create magic. Magic in my life, well-being and in my relationships. Create magic in my life as I grow in my awareness, practice acceptance and I am able to take new action.

Benefits that I have Gained through Working the 12 Ways

Ways that help me to Identify what Works, does not Work and gets in the Way of making life Magical.

These 12 ways have helped me to be able to accept the things that I cannot change, change the things I can and let go of the rest to a loving God. To a loving God to help me to sort out, to fulfill my purpose and to be of service. These set of ways also have helped me to break free of/from a feeling helpless.

Helpless because of the Impact of my Brain Injury, my Invisible Disability and my Set of Circumstances.

Working the 12 Ways have Helped me in the Following Ways.

Working the 12 Ways may also Help you in These Ways Too:

Learn how to trust the process, a loving God and myself by:

Grieving what I Could not Change

Changing the Things, I Can

Creating my New Normal

Defining Success for myself

Finding and Living my Purpose

Owning my Power to be of Service

Developing My Brain/Body Connection

Advocating for Myself in my Mind, Body, Spirit, Soul and Emotion

Cultivating a Healthy Relationship with myself, a loving God, people

Understanding Why I feel Misunderstood/Shunned to Find Freedom

Grieving the Guilt and Shame of my brain injury/invisible disability

Creating and Continuing to Develop my Own Unique Genius in Life

Discovering How to Make my Life Magical, One Day at a Time

So that I could Stop Fighting with and Against Myself

Opening the Door to Hope a Little at a Time

**The 12 Ways Explained and Creating a Magical Way of Life
after Brain Injury and or Stroke**

**When I reached a point in time when I could no longer defend or deny
the impact of my brain injury and invisible disability I began to grieve.**

1. Admitted that we are powerless over the impact and effects of our brain injury and invisible disability. That our lives have forever changed because of our brain injury. Although we are

powerless over the impact of our brain injury and our invisible disability, we are not helpless. As a result, we no longer need to feel like a victim or that we are helpless to change because of our brain injury/invisible disability.

By realizing that all my efforts to try to change what could not be changed, I surrendered. By surrendering I became open and willing.

2. Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could help us to accept what we are powerless to change (the impact of our brain injury and our invisible disability). Consequently, we can rely on the power that many of us have found to be God. We can rely on a loving God to help us to stop sabotaging and undermining our lives, well-beings and relationships by trying not to be impacted by a brain injury. We can rely on a loving God to help us to accept ourselves and to create a good life for ourselves.

Through accepting my inability to change what I simply could not change; I made a decision to ask for help from a power greater.

3. With the awareness that we need this power in our lives, we can make a decision to ask Him to lead and guide our process and journey. We no longer have to figure things out on our own. Instead, we can ask Him to help us own our power. Own our power as an individual living with a brain injury and an invisible disability. Own our power through what we can do, not what we can't do. Own our power (what is in our power to control) in our mind, body, spirit, soul and emotions in ways that work for us, a little at a time/ one day at a time.

By asking for help, I began to examine patterns of what got in the way of my ability to create hope in my life, well-being and relationships.

4. With the help of a loving God, we can begin to examine areas of our lives that no longer work for us. That undermine and sabotage our lives, our well-beings and our relationships. With the help of a loving God, we can look for patterns. Patterns such as defense mechanisms in which we strive to defend, answer and explain what we can't do. Patterns that keep you and I believing/feeling that we are victims of our brain injury, our invisible disability and our circumstances.

As I examined what got in the way of my life, my well-being and my relationships I realized that needed to learn how to trust.

5. We no longer have to remain isolated/alienated because of what we are no longer able to accomplish with because of our brain injuries. By admitting to ourselves, a loving God and another person what we are unable to accomplish, we can come out of the shadows of isolation and break free from feelings of alienation. Alienation from ourselves, a loving God and other people, because of what we can no longer accomplish. By letting go of these expectations we can learn how to trust, again — a loving God, ourselves and other people.

By realizing that I needed to trust, I discovered that I needed to let go of what no longer worked for me to discover what works for me.

6. Through being sick and tired of being sick and tired of getting the same results, we become willing to try something different. Become willing to try something different to get different results in our lives and relationships. Through being willing, we can ask a loving God to help us to stop doing things that no longer work for us. Doing things that get in the way and sabotage of our ability to get on with creating a good life for ourselves. In the process, we become entirely ready. Entirely ready to let go of what no longer works for us living our lives.

To discover what would work for me, I needed to let go of my will to ask a loving God to lead and guide my discovery process.

7. Through being ready to let go of what no longer works for us, we can be actively involved. Actively involved in the process of discovering how to use our gifts, talents and abilities. Discovering how to use our gifts, talents and abilities through trial and error. In the process, we can find ways that will fit our gifts, talents and abilities. We can humbly ask a loving God to help us in/with this process of self-discovery. In the process of letting go and self-discovery we can find and have/experience peace in our lives and relationships.

By examining the patterns of what no longer works for me, as I live my life, I am able to make peace with what no longer works for me.

8. Through letting go of what no longer works we can pursue what works for us. In the process, we can stop being a prisoner to our deficits and imitations. Instead of trying to not be impacted by our deficits and limitations, we accept them. As a result, we are able to stop fighting with and against ourselves. Stop fighting with ourselves and other people by trying to prove that we do not have those deficits and limitations. As we stop fighting with our deficits and limitations, we gain the freedom to run our own race. In the process, we become the individual that we choose and decide to become in our lives.

I am able to make peace with what no longer works for me in my life, well-being and relationships by changing the way I use my energy.

9. We can let go of the life that we had planned to create the life that works for us. In the process, we can learn how to own the power in our mind, body, spirit, soul and emotions. Own our power through the use of our time and energy. In the process, we can create our new normal in ways that work for us. In ways that work for us, through being an advocate for our mind, body, soul, spirit and emotions.

As I seek to change the way that I interact in my life and relationships I continue to be aware of what no longer works for me each day.

10. And the good news is that we don't have to figure out how everything will fit together. Fit together as we seek to own the power in our mind, body, spirit, soul and emotions. Instead, we can take the process, one day at a time, one step at a time. In the process, we can ask a loving God to lead, guide and direct our steps, one day at a time. In the process, we can trust the process. Trust that the dots will connect forward as we learn how to use our gifts, talents and abilities.

Because I realize that brain injury recovery is an ongoing process, I ask a loving God to guide, lead and direct my process, each day.

11. We can ask a loving God to give us direction each day. We can do the footwork, while letting go of the outcomes by trusting the process, a loving God and ourselves. We can learn to trust through doing the footwork and letting go of the outcomes. We can let go of the outcomes one day at a time. We can trust that more will be revealed with time. We can ask and

trust that we are being guided in the direction of fulfilling our purpose, to be of service.

As I continue to ask a loving God to lead, guide and direct my process in ways that work for me, I encourage others to do the same.

12. As we grow in the understanding of ourselves (with the help of a loving God) we continue to use our gifts, talents and abilities. Use our gifts, talents and abilities in ways that work for us. In the process, we learn from our circumstances, our experiences, our lessons and opportunities. In the process, we create hope in our lives, well-beings, relationships. In the process, we create our destinies one lesson, one opportunity and one day at a time. In the process, we share hope with other individuals who are living with a brain injury to not give up. To not give up because more will be revealed to us with time.

Resources on Second Chance to Live to Encourage and Empower our Ongoing Brain Injury Recovery

Second Chance to Live Resources – Empowering the Individual, not the Brain Injury

Detail about My Process and Journey during 56 Years living with a Brain Injury and Invisible Disability

Second Chance to Live Author’s Autobiography in Bullet Points

Quotes to Encourage you and Me to Make our Lives Magical

“Every strike brings me closer to the next home run.” Babe Ruth

“Inch by Inch, life’s a cinch. Yard by Yard it’s very hard.” John Bytheway

“Discipline is the bridge between goals and accomplishment.” Jim Rohn

“Regardless of your lot in life, you can build something beautiful on it.” Zig Ziglar

**“I have not failed. I have just found 10,000 ways that won’t work.”
Thomas Edison**

“As long as a man stands in his own way, everything seems to be in his way.” Ralph Waldo Emerson

“The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don’t have any.” Alice Walker

“Goals give you a mark to shoot for and keep you motivated when you face adversity.” Benjamin Watson

“There’s only one corner of the universe that you can be certain of improving, and that’s your own self.” Aldous Huxley

“Everyone is a genius, but if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing it is stupid.” Albert Einstein

“In my experience, I have found that it is not as important as what happened or happens to me, but how I respond to what happens to me.” Craig J. Phillips MRC, BA

“When one door of happiness closes, another opens; but often we look so long at the closed door that we do not see the one which has been opened for us.” Helen Keller

“I am only one, but still, I am one. I cannot do everything, but still, I can do something; and because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do something that I can do.” Helen Keller

“If you advance confidently in the direction of your dreams and endeavor to live the life that you have imagined...you will meet with a success unexpected in common hours.” Henry David Thoreau