

Facing Adversity and Having Options when Life Does Not Make Sense after Brain Injury Keynote Presentation

Brain Injury Awareness, Healing and Support Group

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

Some Background Information

My 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 get my undergraduate degree in 10 years (2 universities, 1 community college). Obtained 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. 2nd Vocational Rehabilitation evaluation determined that I was not employable. Applied 3 times for SSDI, the 3rd application approved. Felt like someone all dressed up with nowhere to go. A lot of disappointments and discouragement despite all my efforts.

Kept Search for a Way

Created Second Chance to Live 7 years after it was determined that I was not employable. I did so on February 6, 2007 to share what helped me to recover mentally, physically, spiritually and emotionally after my brain injury.

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

Understanding Adversity – All about Perspective

I have been thinking about my life and adversity. I have been thinking about my relationship with the God of my understanding.

Through my ongoing brain injury recovery process, I have come to realize that at times I was angry at God. I was angry at God because I was unable to see beyond my perspective of life and adversity.

I was angry at God and life itself because I kept running into one wall of adversity after another wall of adversity. If interested: [Autobiography](#)

Options Limited?

I was angry at God because I thought my options were limited. I was angry at God because I thought my circumstances were holding me back. I was angry at God because nothing I tried worked.

“History has demonstrated that the most notable winners usually encountered heartbreakingly obstacles before they triumphed. They won because they refused to be discouraged by their defeats.” B.C. Forbes

Felt Stuck

. I felt stuck because everything I tried did not work. But I am glad I did not give up.

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

I was angry at God because I did not understand the “why’s” of what I experienced through the ongoing adversity. The ongoing adversity, despite my best efforts to succeed.

I did not Realize that All the Adversity that I Encountered was Necessary for Me to Learn what I Needed to Learn

“If you take responsibility for yourself, you will develop a hunger to accomplish your dreams.” Les Brown

Learn what was not best for me. Learn what did not work. Learn so that I could try something different. Try something different to be able to take a different course of action. A different course of action to get different results. Results that would work for me.

“Persistence and resilience only come from having been given the chance to work through difficult problems.” Gever Tulley

What I Discovered

Although I may have seen the situations as a failure, what I discovered helped me to see things in a different way. A change in perspective that helped me to see that the situations or circumstances were not failures.

Just another opportunity to learn and move in a different direction.

“Do what you love. Know your own bone; gnaw at it, bury it, unearth it, and gnaw it still.” Henry David Thoreau

In a New Direction

Having this change in my perspective gave me the ability to see situations or circumstances differently. In the process, I was able to look at adversity in a different way. In a way and direction that made sense to me. In a way that would give me more information.

“Purpose is about a process and a journey, not a destination. I cannot know until I know and knowing just takes what it takes. There are no silver bullets or magic potions. By accepting that reality, I am given the gift of knowing. I am given the gift of knowing by trusting the process, a loving God and myself.” Craig J. Phillips MRC, BA

As a way to Set me in the Direction of Success

I am not suggesting that I am more aware of God’s perspective. What I am suggesting is that; in hind sight, I have come to understand God’s perspective. What I could not see; at the time, I now realize needed to take place. Take place to fulfill God’s ongoing plan and purpose for my life.

“We must be willing to let go of the life we planned so as to have the life that is waiting for us.” Joseph Campbell

At the Time, I did not Like the Process

I now realize that I became angry, because I did not value my experience. The experience (s) that was teaching me the next lesson. But thank God, that was not the end of the story. I discovered that I had other options. Consequently, I realized that I did not have to remain stuck. Stuck, with little or no hope.

What I Thought had been Unfair; I now Realize was Preparing me for Other Options

“The struggle you’re in today is developing the strength you need for tomorrow. Don’t give up.” Robert Tew

Not a Bad Deal or Bad Cards

In life we may feel that we have been given a raw deal. We may believe that life has dealt us a bad stack of cards. We may feel that life and our circumstances are simply UNFAIR. We may be angry at God. We may feel like a victim. We may find ourselves wanting to blame someone.

“Accept what is, let go of what was, have faith in what will be.” Sonia Ricotti

Stuck in the “What if”, the “Could of”, the “Would of” and the “Should of” Cycle

We may find ourselves stuck in the what if’s, the could of’s, would of’s and the should of’s cycle. We may be angry at the world. We may be lashing out at the people in our world. We may feel frustrated. We may feel rejected and abandoned. We may feel that life is no longer worth living.

“Be miserable. Or motivate yourself. Whatever has to be done, it’s always your choice.” Wayne Dyer

We may feel like we cannot trust the process, a loving God or ourselves. We may feel like we are stuck with in our body and our lives. We may feel that no one understands. We may feel lost in a sea of unanswered questions. We may have lost hope.

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

But there are Always Options

I GET IT

As an individual living with a brain injury and an invisible disability for 55 years I have cycled through each of these beliefs and feelings. In my experience, I have found a common theme. Although each of these beliefs and feelings appeared real and substantiated; at the time, my recovery

process has taught me. Taught me something completely different. Taught me that there are always different options.

I just needed to look for them

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

But I need to be Willing to Not Give Up. To Not give Up no Matter How Long “it” Takes

“You may be the only person left who believes in you, but it’s enough. It takes just one star to pierce a universe of darkness. Never give up.”

Richelle E. Goodrich

“Don’t give up! Never give up trying to build the world you can see, even if other can’t see it. Listen to your own drum and your drum only. It is the one that makes the sweetest sound” Simon Sineck

Through my recovery process, I have come to realize that I have not been dealt a raw deal or an unfair stack of cards. On the contrary, I have come to realize that “deals” and “cards” do not determine my destiny. I have come to realize that life is what I make of it. What I make of it with God’s help, leading, guidance and direction.

“Carpe diem. Seize the day, boys. Make your lives extraordinary.”

Robin Williams, John Keating — Dead Poets Society

Wisdom has Taught me that I Always have Different Options. I Always Can Use the Power of Choice

I Don’t have to Stay Stuck

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

“Nothing is a waste of time if you use the experience wisely.” Auguste Rodin

Blaming Anyone Does No Good

“Time stays long enough for anyone who will use it.” Leonardo da Vinci

I have also come to realize that I am not a victim. Blaming anyone for anything is pointless. Blaming or pointing the finger in anyone's direction is a waste of time, energy. Blaming accomplishes nothing. Blaming only keeps me stuck by believing that I have no options.

“Research your own experience. Absorb what is useful, reject what is useless and add specifically your own creation.” Bruce Lee

Consequently; instead of viewing life through the what if's, should have's, and could of's, I can choose to see my life through a series of different options and choices.

What Helps Me

“Big things have small beginnings.” Prometheus

Having this change of perspective reinforces the realization that we have the power. The power to look at circumstances through the lens of learning opportunities. With our change of perspective, we no longer have to see the adversity; that we experience, through the lens of disappointment and discouragement.

“Keep away from people who try to belittle your ambitions. Small people always do that, but the really great make you feel that you, too, can become great.” Mark Twain

Owning Our Power

Being Encouraged Through a Different Lens

“Believe in yourself, go after your dreams, and don’t let anyone put you in a box.” Daya

“Not everyone will understand your journey. That’s OK. You’re here to live your life, not to make everyone understand.” Banksy

Because we now choose to view our circumstances and experiences through the lens of a learning curve, we no longer have to stay stuck.

We now realize that anger can be channeled in either positive or negative ways. If we are angry at our adversity, we can use our anger positively.

“Everyone is trying to accomplish something big, not realizing that life is made up of little things.” Frank A. Clark

We can Choose to Look for Different Options

“Nothing in the universe can stop you from letting go and starting over.” Guy Finley

Based on Choices

As an adult, I have come to realize that all my reactions are based in choices. Choice that I have made; for a variety of reasons, in my past. Choice that I am making in my present. What I need to remember is that I get to look through adversity in different ways.

“So often we become so focused on the finish line that we fail to enjoy the journey.” Dieter F. Uchtdorf

Don't Have to stay Stuck Like a Deer in the Headlights

I can stay stuck, believing I am a victim of adversity, or I can see myself empowered through different options. Different options that exist through taking different actions. Different actions through using the power of choice.

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

We get to Choose to Not give UP!

“Dreams do not vanish, so long as people do not abandon them.”
Phantom F. Harlock

Options Exist

With our awareness, we can take a proactive role in our present. We can take an active role amidst our adversity through remembering that options exist. We can take the time to ask seek and pray for guidance to see and use those options.

“Decision is the spark that ignites action. Until a decision, nothing happens.” Wilfred A. Peterson

The options that will empower our process, give us hope and make sense of our lives.

More will be Revealed with Time

“Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the judgement that something is more important than fear.” Ambrose Redmon

With My Understanding

With my understanding, my perspective of God has changed.

With my understanding, I need to remember that I always have options and choices.

With my understanding, I have come to realize that God is not doing to me, but God is doing for me.

With my understanding, choice reminds me that nothing goes to waste if I use the experience wisely.

With my awareness, choice reminds me that I am being empowered by each lesson found in my experience.

With my understanding and change of perspective, I see how God uses my circumstances to empower my process.

With my understanding, I need to remember that I always have options and choices in whatever adversity I may face.

With my awareness, choice reminds me that I can look at adversity (what may appear as dark clouds) as silver linings.

With my change of perspective, I now realize that my circumstances are being used to build me up, not tear or keep me down.

With my understanding I have come to realize that God is for me, not punishing me, as I remember that I always have options.

With my awareness, I have come to recognize that as I walk through each door, I am always greeted by a familiar friend. Opportunity.

With my understanding, choice also reminds me that my circumstances are not meant to be gauntlets, but portals that open to opportunities.

With my understanding, choice then encourages me to remember that each circumstance, lesson and opportunity is leading me to my destiny.

With my understanding, I now see how adversity is being used to give me hope. Give me hope by teaching me what I could not or would not be otherwise willing to learn.

With my understanding, choice reminds me that I can always choose to be empowered by the lesson (s) found within my experiences. The lessons in my experience, because of adversity.

With my understanding, choice also reminds me that each circumstance; found within adversity, is designed to be an advocate. Be my advocate and not an adversary.

With my understanding, I realize that because my circumstances are meant to build me up, they are preparing and empowering. Preparing me to take advantage of opportunities.

With my awareness, I have come to realize that my circumstances are being used to guide me. Guide me through the opening doors of my experience.

“It is not that I am so smart, it is just that I stay with problems longer.”
Albert Einstein

“Ability is what you’re capable of doing. Motivation determines what you do. Attitude determines how well you do it.” Lou Holtz

Choice Reminds Me

As I continue to walk through the door (s); of experiences and the portals of opportunities, choice reminds me:

Choice reminds me hope exists, one day at a time.

Choice reminds me that I don’t have the big picture.

Choice reminds me to let go of the outcomes of my footwork.

Choice reminds me that all things are working together for my good.

Choice reminds me that by letting go of the outcomes, I have options.

Choice reminds me that I do not have to lean on my own understanding.

Choice reminds me that I can trust the process, a loving God and myself.

Choice reminds that I can create hope in my life, one experience at a time.

Choice reminds me to trust the process, as more will be revealed with time.

Choice reminds me that I can ask for help from the God of my understanding.

Choice reminds me to trust the process even when things do not make sense to me

Choice reminds me to keep moving in the direction of my dreams and my destiny.

Choice reminds me that I can trust a loving God to guide me through the lessons that I learn.

Choice reminds me to trust the process, even when the lessons do not make sense to me at the time.

“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” Romans 8:28 Bible, New Testament

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

Below are 12 ways that I adapted from 12 Steps that many Recovery Programs Use to empower the Individual’s Recovery Process

12 Ways to Enhance Our Lives, Well-Beings and Relationships after a Brain Injury

Opening the Door to Hope a Little at a Time

“Big things have small beginnings.” Prometheus

In my experience and through my process I discovered a set of ways. A set of ways that have helped me in my ongoing brain injury recovery process, one day at a time. These set of ways may also help you in your ongoing brain injury recovery process, one day at a time.

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

These 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.

“Adventure is not outside man. It is within.” George Eliot

“Believe in yourself. Go after your dreams and don’t let anyone put you in a box.” Daya

Benefits that I have Gained through Working the 12 Ways

Accepting my Reality

Creating my New Normal

Changing the Things, I Can

Defining Success for myself

Finding and Living my Purpose

Owning my Power to be of Service

Brain Injury and The Power of “I CAN”

Developing My Brain / Body Connection

Finding the Freedom from Feeling Stuck

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

Examine the Messages that I am Listening to and telling myself

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

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

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

Understanding Why I feel Misunderstood / Shunned to Find Freedom Creating and Continuing to Develop my Own Unique Genius in Life

Way # 1

My Perspective

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.

“Nothing in the universe can stop you from letting go and starting over.” Guy Finley

Application

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.

Way # 2

My Perspective

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

“We must be willing to let go of the life we have planned, so as to have the life that is waiting for us.” E.M. Forster.

Application

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.

Way # 3

My Perspective

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

“Decision is the spark that ignites action. Until a decision, nothing happens.” Wilfred A. Peterson

Application

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.

Way # 4

My Perspective

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.

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

Application

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.

Way # 5

My Perspective

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.

“Accept what is, let go of what was, have faith in what will be.” Sonia Ricotti

Application

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 and invisible disabilities. 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.

Way # 6

My Perspective

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.

“Nothing is a waste of time, if you use the experience wisely.”
Auguste Rodin

Application

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.

Way # 7

My Perspective

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

“Be miserable. Or motivate yourself. Whatever has to be done, it’s always your choice.” Wayne Dyer

Application

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.

Way # 8

My Perspective

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.

“If you take responsibility for yourself, you will develop a hunger to accomplish your dreams.” Les Brown

Application

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 limitations. 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.

Way # 9

My Perspective

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.

“If you do not like something, change it. If you cannot change it, change the way that you think about it.” Mary Engelbreit

Application

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, in our mind, body, soul, spirit and emotions.

Way # 10

My Perspective

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.

“Time stays long enough for anyone who will use it.” Leonardo da Vinci

Application

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. Learn to use our gifts, talents and abilities in ways that work for us.

Way # 11

My Perspective

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.

“If you feel like you don't fit into the world you inherited it is because you were born to help create a new one.” Ross Caligiuri

Application

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 to us with time. We can ask and trust that we are being guided in the direction of fulfilling our purpose, to be of service.

Way # 12

My Perspective

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.

“Ideas do not always come in a flash but by diligent trial-and-error experiments that take time and thought.” Charles K. Kao

Application

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. Learn from them, instead of being threatened by our circumstances, experiences, 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 experience, one opportunity and one day at a time. In the process, we share hope.

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

