

Living and Thriving Beyond Brain Injury Awareness to Create a Good Life for Ourselves Discussion Presentation

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The Journey Began

Until I was able to move beyond my brain injury awareness, I had no idea how to live or thrive. I had no idea how to thrive because of my brain injury awareness.

Did not know how to thrive because I saw brain injury awareness as a **“stop sign”**, not as a **“yield sign”**.

Things Changed for Me

When anguish motivated me to begin examining the impact of my brain injury awareness. In the process, I discovered that my brain injury awareness kept me trapped. Kept me trapped and unable to see beyond my awareness.

Unconsciously Trapped in a Box and behind a Wall

Brain injury awareness, by itself, kept me trapped in a belief that would not or could not allow me to realize or accept my reality. Realize or accept the reality that I could learn how to thrive in my life, well-being and relationships.

Beyond Brain Injury Awareness

In my experience, I needed to move beyond having my brain injury awareness. I needed to move beyond my awareness to be able to get into action. Get into action because awareness only acknowledges that something has occurred.

Awareness is great, but unless the awareness leads to a place of acceptance, action will be a far cry from awareness. Acceptance gives the individual the ability to realize that things are not going to change unless...

“If nothing changes, nothing changes. If you keep doing what you’re doing, you’re going to keep getting what you’re getting. You want change, make some.”
Courtney C. Stevens

Get Better Unless

Unless, other steps are taken, launching action. Action that lays the foundation to bring about creative hope. Creative hope, as solutions are considered, instead of focusing on the awareness of what cannot be changed.

**Sure, our lives have been changed forever because of a traumatic brain injury,
but that does not have to limit our ability to thrive.**

Limit our lives or who we become in this life. By accepting what cannot be changed we are given the gift. The gift to learn how to thrive with our lives. The gift to discover ways to use what we have been given in excel and thrive.

“All life is an experiment, the more experiments the better.” Ralph Waldo Emerson

“Ideas do no always come in a flash, but by diligent trial-and-error experiments that take time and thought.” Charles K. Kao

In ways that will work for us. Ways that will work for us to enhance both our lives and the lives of others.

“Everyone 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

Pain for my Good

In my experience, I had to get to a place where one degree of pain had to be superseded by another degree of pain. Thank God this occurred so that I could find freedom from that which kept me stuck

Changing my Focus

I had to be able to stop focusing on what I could not change, to be able to change the things that I could. To change the things that I could to be able to create practical hope in my life, a little at a time.

Awareness, Acceptance and Action

As I changed my focus I realized that I could no longer buy into what other people sought to or needed to deny.

What I Discovered

Denial was a huge barrier that I needed to overcome in order to move from a place of awareness to a place of acceptance. A place of acceptance so that I could get into action. Get into action to be able to create a good life for myself.

“Trust yourself. Create the kind of life that you will be happy to live with all your life. Make the most of yourself by fanning the tiny, inner sparks of possibility into flames of achievement.” Golda Meir

Coming out of the Shadows

Below is a synopsis of what I discovered through my process. The process that helped me to recognize, confront and overcome. Overcome both my and other people's denial of the life that I was living with my awareness.

Denial Exposed

Denial can act like a warm blanket.

Denial can be used to suppress body memories.

Denial can be used to dismiss or invalidate another person's pain or reality.

Denial shields the individual from having to face the pain related to the loss.

Denial can also be used to ignore and avoid what we do not want to confront.

Denial can also be used as a door to shut out, that which is just too painful to address.

Denial can be used to erect a dam to hold back unwanted memories and emotional pain.

Denial can be used to justify the way in which other people treat us and the way that we treat ourselves.

Denial can be used as a disconnect, so that our heart's won't let our head know what is or what has happened.

Denial is a defense mechanism that protects the individual from having to face or confront the shock of a loss.

Denial can be used in order to avoid having to interpret or address one's own uncomfortable feelings and make changes.

Denial can also be used to defend, answer and explain away behaviors that undermine and invalidate our lives and our well-being.

My Experience

Denial led me to believe that I was my disability, deficits and limitations.

Denial sought to silence my voice and keep me constrained and distracted.

Denial sought and seeks to identify me with what I am powerless to change.

Denial inhibited and discouraged my desire to explore beyond my brain injury awareness.

Denial sought and seeks to interfere with my ability to live and thrive in my life.

Denial shamed me for not being enough even though I sought to do my very best.

Denial keeps me focused on what I cannot change, instead of considering creating possibilities.

Denial led me to believe that what I thought and felt about myself was and does not matter.

Denial sought and seeks to undermine my self-esteem and keep me secluded in the shadows of isolation.

Denial sought and seeks to keep me focused on what I don't know that I can change.

Denial also sought to keep me distracted so that I could not, cannot, see a way to find destiny.

Denial sought and seeks to keep me distracted so that I could not/do not see the truth of who I can become.

Denial sought and seeks to devalue my worth and value because I survived a traumatic brain injury.

Denial sought and seeks to minimize, marginalize, dismiss and discount who I am as an individual.

Denial sought to keep me subservient to and dependent on "professionals" in the field of brain injury.

Denial sought and seeks to disparage my worth and value because I did/do not live up to denial's expectations.

Denial sought and seeks to keep me focused on what other people think of me because I am living with a brain injury.

Denial sought and seeks to keep me constrained by a diagnosis, a label, a stereotype and societal stigmatization.

"Trust yourself. Create the kind of self that you will be happy to live with all your life. Make the most of yourself by fanning the tiny, inner sparks of possibility into flames of achievement." Golda Meir

As I grew in my awareness

As my awareness grew I saw how my denial was limiting my life. I saw how denial hindered my motivation to make the most of my life. As my awareness grew, so did my motivation to confront my denial.

As I began to confront my denial, I became aware of how my life had been infected by a lie. A lie that told me that I was my brain injury and kept me frozen in time.

Why I Felt Stuck

As I examined the strategies that denial used to avoid the truth, I started having spiritual awakenings. One of these spiritual awakenings revealed that denial had been acting as a door.

A door that denied access to any and all unwanted thoughts or feelings that challenged this denial. In effect, whenever any unwanted thoughts or feelings sought to be heard or experienced, denial would minimize and discount.

A Code of Silence

Minimize and discount the relevance of those thoughts and feelings. Denial imposed a code of avoidance to mask what needed to be addressed. Denial, through shame; led me to believe that I was a failure, because I could not do anything.

Do anything to overcome what I was powerless to change.

Denial blinded my ability to consider the possibilities of what I had not tried. Denial sought to distract and undermine my ability to create hope. Create hope; a little at a time, to have a good life for myself.

Lessons from Confronting Denial

Through the process of confronting my denial I learned several valuable lessons. The lessons I learned may also be of benefit to you.

As I confronted my denial, I realized that I needed to keep the focus on myself. I needed to own my reality, even though other people could not accept my reality.

To own my reality, I needed to be accountable to and for how I was choosing to respond to the loss (s) that I discovered. The losses related to the impact of my traumatic brain injury.

The losses that I needed to own and the sadness connected to those losses. The sadness connected to those losses, regardless of whether anyone else could accept. Accept or understand how those losses affected and affect me.

That I needed to own my sadness because of my loss (s) that I experienced. That I needed to grieve those losses, instead of blaming myself for those losses.

I needed to feel...

I needed to feel my feelings. I needed to sit with my discomfort. I needed to determine why I was reacting to people, places and situations. In my awareness and acceptance, I discovered that I needed to determine why I thought that I needed to stay in...

Stay in and maintain both my denial and the denial that other people had for me. Had for me concerning the impact of my traumatic brain injury and my invisible disability.

How Denial Affected Relationships

To understand how denial was being played out in my relationships, I needed to look closer. In a denial system, that seeks to maintain that denial, reality does not exist. In such a system, feelings are often considered as a threat to be avoided.

To be avoided, especially when those feelings trigger a sense of shame. Shame is different from guilt, in that shame is a being wound. Guilt is something you can make amends for; however, shame is an internal message.

An internal message that leaves the individual feeling trapped, alone and frozen like a deer in the headlights.

Debilitating Guilt and Debilitating Shame

Debilitating guilt and debilitating shame are very similar in that the individual is led to believe that they don't just make mistakes, but they believe they are a mistake. As a traumatic brain injury survivor and an invisible disability, I lived with a pervasive sense of debilitating shame for many years.

Debilitating shame kept me stuck in denial because I blamed and criticized myself. Blamed and criticized myself for being impacted by the unknown effects of a brain injury and invisible disability.

For many years I continued to internalize my inability to live up to expectations, despite my hard work and efforts to over achieve. Overachieve to that I could prove that I was/ am not a mistake.

I strove all the more to do more, to be enough because I bought into the notion that I did not just make mistakes, but was a mistake. As a bi-product of my striving, I remained in denial as I sought to justify, defend and explain.

Sought to Justify

For many years I sought to justify my worth and value through people pleasing, approval seeking and mind reading. I attempted to do more to be enough. When these strategies failed, I sought to discard parts of myself that I found to be displeasing.

Found displeasing to my family, friends, teachers, schoolmates, employers and coworkers. I did so in an attempt to prove that I was not a mistake. Slowly; but progressively, denial stole bits and pieces of my reality. In the process of discarding parts of my reality, I discarded me.

Trying to Do More, To Be More, to Be Enough

I discarded parts of myself that triggered feelings in other people. I did so in an attempt to not feel like a mistake. In the process of discarding parts of myself that were not pleasing to other people, I traded my judgment. I traded my reality for the denial that other people maintained.

In my experience, when I began to confront denial, for what denial was in my life, I experienced various reactions. Among these reactions was anger, for not being enough in the reality people needed me to believe about my reality.

Deserved to be Bullied

In the process, I discovered that I bought into the notion that I deserved to be shamed for not being enough. I bought into the notion that I deserved to be bullied. Bullied because I was unable to measure up to denial's expectations of me.

Because I internalized the anger that I received from other people as being my fault, I became angry at and with myself.

Angry at myself

I was angry at myself, angry at other people and angry at my reality. I was angry at my deficits and limitations. My anger many times came out sideways, because I did not know how to express my anger. Express my anger in healthy ways.

I was angry at life in general, because I felt helpless because I could not overcome what I was powerless to change.

Confronting my and other people's Denial

In the process of confronting both my and other people's denial, per my reality, I discovered that I had and held onto various resentments. Resentments toward various people, places, churches, educational institutions and different employers.

I also had and held resentments towards myself for not being and doing enough. In my process, I discovered that as I held onto my anger and my resentment, I pushed people

away from me. I also found that in the process of alienating other people, I was in effect alienating myself. My anger alienated me from myself.

Because I blamed myself, I alienated myself from myself. As a result, I had no idea how to have a relationship with myself. In the process, I became my own enemy.

When I realized that I needed to address my denial, anger, negativity, criticism and judgmental attitudes, I began a program of rigorous honesty. Through being honest with myself, my sense of helplessness was replaced with hope. As a bi-product, I began to have a relationship with myself.

Resentments are like drinking poison and hoping the other person dies. Holding onto anger, is like picking up a hot coal to throw at someone else, however we are the ones who get burned.

Examining my Resentments

Through my recovery process, I discovered that I needed to examine the resentments that I held toward other people and myself. In my process, I found that by examining my resentments I was able to begin looking at the patterns that I maintained.

Maintained in Relationships

Maintained in my relationships with other people and with myself. Through my process, I discovered that the resentments that I held toward other people, places and things and myself actually sustained.

Sustained and kept me stuck in the cycle of my denial, anger, negativity, criticism and judgmental attitudes.

A Key to Freedom

Through my process, I discovered that resentments held the key that kept me locked in a room of isolation and self-reproach. To break free, I needed to get busy. I needed to determine who I held resentments towards and why I sought to maintain those resentments.

Why I maintained those resentment towards individuals, family members, places, churches, significant relationships and institutions. I needed to do so that I could come out of my isolation. I needed to do so to find freedom from feelings of alienation and self-reproach.

Be at Peace

I needed to do the work so to be at peace with myself and learn to how to trust the process, a loving God and myself. I needed to do the work of examining my resentments to be able to break free from the denial that kept me stuck.

In my experience

In my experience I needed to examine specific time periods in my life in order to be able to identify my resentments. Specifically, I needed to examine how I related to my family, friends, educational venues, churches, employers and other significant relationships.

Because I wanted to be free of the negative energy that my resentments created and held, I did an inventory of my resentments. An inventory of my resentments during specific times in my life. I examined as far back as I could remember.

I started when I was 6 years of age, then from ages 6-12, 12-18, 18-24, 24-30, 30- 36, 36-42 and so on. Through my proactive participation in this exercise, I was able to identify specific **patterns of behavior**. Behavior (s) that I used to relate both to other people and to myself.

Relate to other people and myself during those time periods. As I identified patterns in my behavior (s), I was able to address what was my part, what was not my part and how I could be freed from the negative consequences of my resentments.

Accepting what I cannot change

As a bi-product, I was able to begin to recognize where other people ended and where I began. Consequently, I was able to begin to establish healthier relationships with both other people and with myself. Healthier relationships with the people who choose to remain in denial.

People who choose to remain in denial, while realizing that I no longer need to remain or participate in that denial. As a bi-product of working through my resentments, I was/am able to learn how to trust the process, a loving God and myself.

This too is a process, one day at a time.

“Sometimes the easiest way to solve a problem is to stop participating in the problem.” Johnathan Mead

Below are 12 Ways that helped me accept the people, places and things that I could not change, so that I could discover what I could change. 12 Ways that helped me to move beyond my brain injury awareness to create a good life for myself and be of service.

When I Got busy, I got Better

In my experience and through my process I discovered a set of ways. A set of ways that have helped me to learn to live and thrive in my ongoing brain injury recovery process. These set of ways may also help you to live and thrive in your ongoing brain injury recovery process.

Inch by inch, life's a cinch. Yard by yard, it's very hard.

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

Defining Success for myself

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

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

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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 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.

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.

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.

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.

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

Below are several quotes that encourage me to live and thrive beyond my brain injury awareness. Below these quotes is the article in which I share how I incorporate these quotes into living and thriving beyond brain injury awareness.

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

“You can’t connect the dots looking forward. You can only connect them looking backward. So, you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future. You have to trust in something — your gut, destiny, life, karma, whatever. Because believing that the dots will connect down the road, will give you the

confidence to follow your heart, even when it leads you off the well-worn path.
And that will make all the difference.” Steve Jobs

“Seek out that particular mental attribute which makes you feel most deeply and vitally alive, along which comes the inner voice which says, “This is the real me.”
And when you have found that attitude, follow it.” William James

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

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure, it is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people will not feel insecure around you. We were all meant to shine as children do. It is not just in some of us, it is in everyone. And as we let our own light to shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same, as we are liberated from our own fear. Our presence automatically liberates others.” Marianne Williamson

“Insist on yourself, never imitate. Your own gift you can present with the cumulative force of a whole life’s cultivation, but of the adopted talent of another, you only have an extemporaneous half-possession. Do that which is assigned to you and you cannot hope too much or dare too much.” Henry David Thoreau

“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 by not giving up. I am given the gift of knowing by trusting the process, a loving God and myself.” Craig J. Phillips MRC, BA

“I was told over and over again that I would never be successful. That I was not going to be competitive and the technique was simply not going to work. All I could do is shrug and say, “We’ll just have to see.” Dick Fosbury (Inventor of the Fosbury Flop and winner of an Olympic gold medal in the High Jump at the Olympic Games Mexico City 1968)

“Your time is limited so don’t waste it living someone else’s life. Don’t be trapped by dogma, which is living with the results of other people’s thinking. Don’t let the noise of other’s opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most importantly, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow know what you truly want to become. Everything else is secondary.” Steve Jobs