



Case Report

Strategies for living with TBI- Simple not easy

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Being interdependent with the environment must be the goal for the coping strategies that I use. I choose who I want to be and how much I value who I am. My feelings about myself are a combination of my self-concept and my level of self-esteem. My self-concept is defined as, "Who I believe I am" and my self-esteem is rooted in how firm my belief is.

Only after acknowledging and then admitting that I have difficulties, can plans for future achievements have any changes for long-standing success.

Continuously and constantly learning old and new information and acquiring skills needs to be a priority. Though it takes me longer than others, I refuse to give up, no matter how long it takes to reach my goals.

Though like my old self, some things were very different. Suddenly, I had limitations which required goals founded in my new reality. I was only able to accept a little at a time.

Immediately after my trauma, denial dominated my life. Repeated failure eroded this denial. Improvement was not possible until I experienced fully what I had lost. When I was done grieving for each lost ability, I became ready to accept that loss and carry-on with my recovery.

Five success strategies

Since awareness precedes taking effective action to solve problems, *I needed to pay attention to what I could not do.*

Awareness comes before acting to solve problems. The degree of difficulty encountered depends on what needs to be fixed. When I'm seriously committed to change, then capitalizing on strengths and managing weaknesses, becomes the most direct route to accomplishing goals.

Now, I will discuss five problems and the coping or Success Strategies that I use to overcome them.

My primary difficulty is my ability to organize and prepare for action. My first Success Strategy is to do one thing at a time and what is most necessary first. It's in my best interests to finish whatever task I start, before I move-on to a new project. In other words, I've learned to prioritize.

My next difficulty concerns my energy and stamina. My second Success Strategy is to get adequate rest and try to achieve as constant a state of tranquility as possible. If I want to remain persistent, I try to schedule activities when I'm at my best and for me, that's in the day light hours.

Simultaneously, I need to be vigilante about how I eat, sleep, exercise and take my medications. My doctors, who are all specialists, have prescribed many drugs for me. I have learned to use medication organizers to help me remember when to take which pills. (I use three one-week organizers. Then, every two weeks, I refill two of them, while using one). This makes taking an excessive quantity of drugs very simple.

My third Success Strategy is to just do it. If I want to live as well as I can, not have seizures, be free from pain, and able to sleep through the night, I follow my doctor's instructions.

After my injury, I found relationships difficult to maintain. I had become demanding, selfish and rather unpleasant to be with. My fourth Success Strategy is to treat others the way I want to be treated. This applies to everyone, from doctors and health care workers, to anyone who provides me with assistance with anything, at any time, in any location.

Finding solutions to my memory difficulties continues to be an ongoing problem. I put something somewhere, and nearly immediately forget where I put it. I miss appointments or things that I know I want to do. My fifth Success Strategy is to use calendars or note pads to remind me of my commitments. Along with those tools, I post reminder messages in places where I know I will see them. That could be on the back of my



front door, on my refrigerator or kitchen table. To refrain from misplacing objects, I must put things in the same place, even when it's inconvenient to do so. That's the only remedy I've found for this problem.

I've lived with my difficulties for a very long time and I've come to understand, that if I want to win the war with my limitations, I need to have a Battle Plan.

Mine is:

- It's best to confront rather than avoid the difficulties created by my injury, disability or illness.
- I need to think of myself as having a battle with the deficits created by the trauma that I sustained.
- If I remain ignorant and unaware of my problems, I will be unable to avoid or reduce my own suffering.

When I familiarize myself with the difficulties that might occur my distress seems to be reduced, as well as my fear and anxiety about life with all my problems. When I no longer need to be afraid of what might happen, I'm better able to prepare for the options or Success Strategies, I need to use.

Life has taught me that if I want to make changes, I must have goals. Those goals must be realistic and attainable. I recognize my difficulties in the here and now. When bringing about genuine change, a sustained effort must be made. It takes determination, effort and time to modify behavior. While it's important to set reasonable expectations and respect the reality of every situation, I must never lose sight of what I eventually hope to achieve.

Three statements that I often repeat to myself are:

- 1) Recovery does not mean that you wake up one day and you're fine.
- 2) It does not mean that your memory becomes intact.
- 3) It does not mean that you don't get confused and is certainly does not mean you regain the life you had prior to the injury, disability or illness.

Recovery to a person with an injury, disability or illness is making progress. Making progress is accepting your deficits, learning success strategies to help you with those deficits and learning to love and value yourself.

Does anyone live free from suffering and loss! I don't think so.

Is Recovery Worth the Struggle? Yes - It absolutely is!

Living has taught me that I was not singled out for the terrible misfortunes that I've experienced. That insight alone does not reduce the suffering that comes from struggling with the unfortunate facts of my life.

Today, I work as a Trauma Recovery Expert/Disability Life Coach. The actions that deplete my energy are ones that I just

don't do. I lead an interdependent life and I'm comfortable asking for assistance when I need it.

Successful people not only have goals, but they have goals that are meaningful for them. They know where they want to go, and they enjoy the journey. When someone is moving toward realizing goals that they have identified, difficulties become solvable problems, not insurmountable obstacles.

With any wound, it takes time to recover. Behavior after tragedy is like being on a roller-coaster. Having memory and balance problems is just part of your new way of being. When the realization smacks you, that you just can't do things the way you used to, then a choice must be made. Do you give up and stop trying or do you fight the long battle back to living as well as you can?

After over fifty years of recovering from a severe brain stem injury, I've learned that I needed to accept what I absolutely could not do, before I would allow myself to learn the skills necessary, to do what I want.

Then, I must realize that every day and every task is different. Just because I'm able to do something on one day, at a particular time, doesn't mean that I will be able to perform in a similar fashion, on another day or at another time.

Brain injury is the problem. Making progress is simple, but it certainly isn't easy.

Recovery is a continuous process. What each person can do, when they begin the journey is where they start. How they make progress is up to each individual. Since taking sole care of myself has become one of my problems and needing assistance to live comfortably is my new normal, healthy interdependence must become my new goal. I must combine my independent spirit with my needs for care.

Change is never comfortable. Most people resist change because the tendency to want life's circumstances to remain the same and familiar is strong. However, the only constant in life is change. When life's circumstances shift, welcoming change as an opportunity to learn and grow is a positive means for dealing with that which is uncertain.

Moving forward after trauma is scary! Will I ever be able to be independent again? Which of my day-to-day tasks will require some assistance? How can I be interdependent with my surroundings? How has my injury, disability or illness changed my plans or goals for the future?

Let's Review:

1. When faced with an obstacle or challenging set of circumstances, what do I say to myself?

Recovery is not only making progress, it is taking one step at a time.

2. Why is setting goals important?



If you don't know where you want to go, or if you fail to see the place where you want to be, you could lose motivation.

3. To recover, what qualities are required?

Recovery demands commitment and a sustained determination to overcome obstacles and attain goals.

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