

BRAIN INJURY SPEAKS

By Tyrone Bell

Without a brain injury, we are likely to have what may be described as a clean, clear and crisp voice. We may be blessed with clarity of expression and enjoy conversations generally, even with giving interviews. However, have you noticed how in interviews nowadays, nobody uses the words “yes” or “no”. It’s always “absolutely” or “absolutely not”. This reflects the fact that language is always changing, and what may be popular now, may fall out of style in a short while. I guess this is also one way of using popular speech; expressions that are trendy and everybody is in the habit of using them today, may soon vanish tomorrow.

For people who have not suffered the ravages of a brain injury, or for those brain injury survivors whose voices remain intact, they may continue to use language appropriately.... Then there was also the lady who sang the popular song “*darling you send me, honest you do*” as “*darling you send me, on a ski-doo*” or when “*girl with kaleidoscope eyes*” is sung as “*girl with colitis goes by.*” These are common cases of our hearing what we think the song says. We may probably sing the wrong words for many years and they may make sense to us, though what we sing may be wrong. There are also cases when we use euphemisms to dress-up things

and make them sound better. “**Problems**” become “**issues**” and “**children**” become “**little people,**” etc.

After a brain injury, the survivor may become cognitively affected. If this is the case, the survivor may not be able to use or understand speech properly. To a person who is not at all familiar with the brain injury environment, it may be a big shocker to hear other people express themselves in certain ways which may be very strange.

During my rehabilitation period in the hospitals and a group home, I interacted with survivors who had lost the ability to use language properly. Some expressions were used very often and made absolutely no sense. They included expressions like “**thank you.**” This was used if the affected person was expressing gratitude, asking a question, giving an answer, making a statement, sad, happy, requesting help, anything! Some other expressions that I have heard used (where they don’t apply), include “**put it this way**” and “**stupid thing**”. But by far, the one that I have heard most often is “**you know.**” In many of these cases, there is nothing wrong with the survivor’s voice quality; each word is crisp and clear. A brain injury may cause an affected person when speaking, to use these or other expressions, in instances where they don’t apply in any way, and the affected person is not able to help it.



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