

Author Q&A

Q: What was your writing process like for this book? How did your aphasia affect your ability to write and what are some ways you overcame it?

A: When I just started the process of writing a memoir, which was about four to five years ago, my writing was below average, and because of that, I almost stopped. I had to really think about how I could get my ideas and thoughts from my brain onto paper. I had to put those ideas into sentences and then into a draft of the manuscript.

When I first had the idea to write a memoir, I knew I would need a ghostwriter to help. I used a dictionary and English usage texts to help me as well. And my comprehension of what I experienced when I had the stroke and my recovery became clearer every year. As I moved forward with the project, I noticed that each year my writing improved, and I continued to practice. So eventually, I overcame the aphasia factor.

Q: Were there any times you seriously considered giving up during your recovery?

A: Yes, after Kelly introduced the golf teacher to me when we went to Scottsdale for a vacation of sorts and also during several stages of rehab. I would practice my golf swing and couldn't do anything to hit the ball beyond ten or twenty yards. It was so frustrating, and it wasn't because

I didn't have my strength back or I didn't know the sport of golf; it was my coordination and taking my time and keeping a calm presence—it had to do with all of the little things that go into making a fluid swing and hitting the ball.

Q: What was more difficult for you—the physical or mental parts of recovery?

A: The mental parts of recovery were the hardest.

I had to succumb to the fact that I have aphasia, and with that there are limitations. Once I accepted that, speech and talking became easier. It was very slow at first, but I could see that achievements could be made.

Q: What do you consider to be the most important thing people should know about having a stroke or stroke recovery?

A: Just know that you cannot give up. There are many options that you can take to help you get better. And practice, practice, practice, even when you want to quit or give up or it looks like a bleak or somber situation. Try again the next day or next week or even next month. Keep trying—persistence is key!

Q: In the epilogue, you mention that you wouldn't change the fact that you had a stroke or any other subsequent events in your life, but *if* you could change anything about your life before the stroke would you?

A: In that sense, yes, I would have done a better job communicating with my loved ones, and I would have taken more time to hang out with friends and my family.. They would have been more of a priority.

Q: What accomplishment are you most proud of since your stroke?

A: When I went to the program called Archeworks in Chicago, the first time I got up in the front of a small group of listeners (almost 100 people) since I had my stroke and delivered a presentation on our progress. I was nervous and worried that I would mess up before I actually delivered the speech.

Q: What are some things that you still struggle with today? Do you expect to overcome them eventually?

A: I always experience anxiety in some of the situations I am in, which usually means my speech is not as fluent or I miss some of the words that I usually have no trouble with or my sentences are a little off. But I measure myself on my progress from year to year. I always make sure that I am improving from one speech to the next or just in conversation. And I continue to practice.

So, yes, I will eventually overcome my struggles with speech and aphasia.

Q: What kind of therapy was most helpful to you and why do you think this was so?

A: One to one private therapy: We began with verbs and prepositions and how to use them in sentences and then moved to casual conversational speaking. It gave me the opportunity to practice my speech and state my ideas with the same therapist, who I could bond with and form a relationship with. This became someone who really cared about me as a person and was able to give me the necessary attention.

Q: Obviously, your determination played a significant role in your remarkable recovery. Do you think it's possible for others to reach the level of recovery at the speed you did without that same level of determination?

A: Hahaha . . . That's a tough question. I think it would be very tough for a person to achieve the level of recovery that I had without putting determination into the mix. Determination was my bread and butter . . . I woke up every day and made sure that I did something that day to recover my abilities after my stroke. But it really depends on what type of medical incident you've had.

Q: How has your stroke and recovery journey changed your relationships with people—both those close to you and strangers or acquaintances?

A: My relationships with my family have definitely changed for the

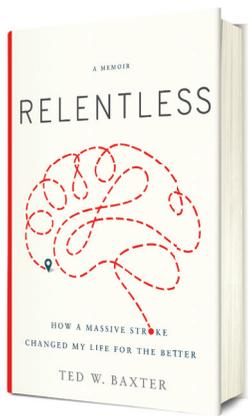
better. We have become very close. My relationships with old friends and acquaintances have somewhat declined, mainly due to my aspirations now (health, hospitals, and nonprofits), which are different than those of my old friends and acquaintances. I have closer relationships with real friends than before. You realize who your real friends are when they call you just to talk and check on you, even when you can't talk back, which was my situation for a while.

Q: What is the next step for you? Do you have any new projects or goals in mind?

A: I want to continue to help organizations like the American Heart and Stroke Association and health institutions that support causes that relate to stroke rehabilitation and recovery.

Q: The stroke changed pretty much all aspects of your life, but is there anything that hasn't changed?

A: Inside, my will, hard work, and determination haven't changed. I've always enjoyed watching sports, eating great food, and enjoying good movies and plays—this hasn't changed.



Relentless: How a Massive Stroke Changed My Life for the Better by Ted W. Baxter is available for purchase everywhere books are sold.