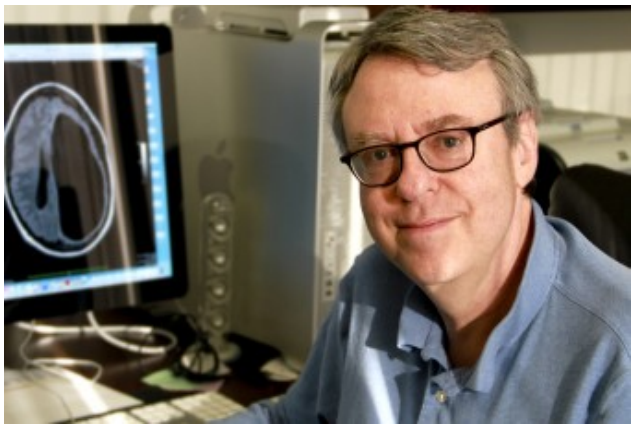
Employee Spotlight: Jordan Grafman, PhD

When you first meet Jordan Grafman, PhD, he comes across as a caring, humorous man that you can sit and talk to for hours. But then you learn that he is one of the nation's leading experts on penetrating brain injury. He is also the Director of Traumatic Brain Injury Research at Kessler Foundation.

He became interested in the brain at a young age when his father had a stroke and he saw how his behavior changed. This led to a fascination with how the brain controls function. Later, as a student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, he was inspired by his experiences with patients in the rehabilitation medicine department. This set Grafman on his career path. "I was inspired to learn more about the brain so I could help them," he said.



Dr. Grafman has more than 30 years of experience in studying brain function in traumatic brain injury (TBI), dementia, depression, and other degenerative neurological diseases. Prior to joining Kessler Foundation, he served as Chief of the Cognitive Neuroscience Section at the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, a division of the National Institutes of Health.

For nearly three decades, Dr. Grafman led the Vietnam Head Injury Project at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, establishing him as the leading expert in penetrating brain injuries in military personnel. He monitors the long-term effects that these injuries have on behavior, function, and employment outcomes in Vietnam veterans.

"They have taught me a great deal about recovery of function after brain damage and that individuals, even with brain damage, can lead incredibly productive and happy lives," said Dr. Grafman.

Kessler Foundation was delighted when Dr. Grafman joined its stellar research team as Director of TBI Research in January 2011. He is interested in examining how genetics influence recovery in individuals with TBI. Other goals for the lab include gaining a better understanding of the functions of the brain's frontal lobes, improving the evaluation and treatment of patients with TBI so they have better outcome, and sharing research efforts with the public to help improve the recovery of people with brain injuries.

"TBI is common and will remain with us even when other neurological disorders are cured," he explained. "Therefore, we have to aim our efforts at facilitating recovery of function and creating hospitable and encouraging environments for patients to return to

after rehabilitation in the hospital. TBI has a lasting impact on people and our Lab will be here when they need us."

Dr. Grafman also takes enormous pride in training medical students and post-doctoral fellows who go on to make further advances in the field. His staff is also treated with respect and appreciation. When they succeed, that means greater successes for people with TBI and their families.

Besides studying brain injury, Dr. Grafman applies his knowledge of the brain to his other interests. An avid sports fan, for example, he analyzed how the brain controls how sports fans behave. His book, entitled, *Your Brain on Cubs*, investigates how the brains of Chicago Cubs fans processed key games.

Outside of his research, he enjoys spending time with his wife and two young sons, ages 8 and 5. His youngest son was diagnosed with cerebral palsy, making him all the more sensitive to how a disability impacts a family. Typical boys, they love to stay active and explore their surroundings. "My wife and I have surrendered to the fact that we love to be around them," he joked. "And that makes them happy too."

Dr. Grafman is the perfect example of what can be achieved with a combination of personal drive, passion, humility, compassion, humor, and family. There is no doubt that he and the TBI team at Kessler Foundation will continue to make discoveries that improve the lives of individuals with brain injury.

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