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"A Different Light"

A Different Light –27th July 2023 – “Scammers pursue even the disabled”

Conned, tricked, spammed, slammed and scammed! Apparently, we are getting ripped off more and more. It is now so prevalent that Nigel Latta, New Zealand’s go-to psychologist has done a television series on the subject, “You’ve Been Scammed”. In this series Nigel demonstrates the various psychological tactics used by scammers to cajole, confuse and coerce people into unwittingly forking over wads of their hard-earned cash. He exposes the tactics used by scammers, -the psychological ruses to gain the confidence their targets. These include playing on peoples FOMO (Fear of Missing Out), by insisting that time is running out for this particular gold-plated opportunity. Even sleight of hand and distraction is used, conjuring up the skills of a classic magician.

Over the school holidays we had our granddaughter stay. One of the activities she took part in was a magician’s box of tricks which she used to enthusiastically perform tricks to her various whanau members. Tiny pompoms disappeared into false thumbs, cards appeared and disappeared, and a magic wand was waved about with much flourish. Tune in to Latta’s show and he will show you that the allure of the magician is all part of the scammer’s toolbox.

It's always baffling when you hear of people getting scammed particularly when you know them and that they are otherwise sensible people. A few years ago a friend of mine was convinced they had been randomly selected to buy an overseas trip at a heavily discounted price. The international jaunt included a Caribbean cruise and beach front 5 star accommodation. They put down a \$2000 deposit. I managed to convince them that this was a scam using those tried by true cliches like “if something is too good to be true, it probably is”. They eventually conceded and managed to have their bank reverse the financial transaction to get the \$2000 back. Believe it or not the scammers got back in touch with my friend and somehow managed to convince them to pay the \$2000

again. Jaw dropping! The scammers were obviously very talented in the art of manipulation. Time went by. The holiday never came. The \$2000 was gone. The subject was banished from conversation.

The NZ Cerebral Palsy Society who provides their members, who have Cerebral Palsy, with financial support that can go towards things like gym membership, Riding for the Disabled and transport costs, have been targeted by people pretending to have Cerebral Palsy and joining their organisation. This has forced the organisation ask their members to provide proof of their CP with a medical certificate.

Having Cerebral Palsy myself, I have always felt somewhat incredulous when asked to supply proof of having Cerebral Palsy. I mean it's very obvious to everyone when you have Cerebral Palsy. To fake Cerebral Palsy in person would be no mean feat! Although Daniel Day-Lewis did nail an Oscar for Best Actor in his portrayal of Christy Brown an Irish writer and painter who had Cerebral Palsy in the movie "My Left Foot". To my mind an actor who actually had Cerebral Palsy would have been far more appropriate but that is whole different kettle of fish.

Leah from Tiaho Trust was approached by someone fundraising for deaf people when she was in Paris. The person pretended to be Deaf. Another scam. Leah, who knows Sign Language thwarted the attempt by conversing back to them using Sign Language. The scammer quickly disappeared, with their cover being blown by their obvious lack of repertoire in sign language.

Yes, sadly disability can be a platform to launch scams by unscrupulous operators. Genuine disabled people are possibly the best detectors of such disingenuous exploits. Nothing about us without us. Particularly if you're using our disabilities to scam others.

Jonny Wilkinson is the CEO of Tiaho Trust - Disability A Matter of Perception, a Whangarei based disability advocacy organisation.