

Choose to Live Your Best Life Now. A cancer survivor says, “Why wait?”

By Paula Holland De Long

If you're like me, you may have had moments in your lifetime when you realized how fleeting and precious life really is. The birth of a child; the loss of a loved one; surviving a life-threatening disease, accident or violence; a spiritual event or other life altering experience can remind each of us not to take being fully present and alive for granted.



My personal reminder came with my diagnosis and treatment of breast cancer. Staying safe and comfortable, doing things out of habit and making choices because I thought I should instead of because I wanted to govern my life before I became a survivor. Cancer changed the way I looked at the world. It taught me to consciously choose hope instead of fear, light instead of dark, gray instead of just black or white, peace over anxiety, sharing over hiding and love over loneliness. Realizing that my time really could be limited in the foreseeable future jumpstarted my need for joy, passion, happiness, respect, and dignity in my life NOW.

It doesn't need to take a crisis like cancer to shake up your world and remind you what's important. Like millions of survivors, you can learn to be who you are instead of who others say you should be. You can find ways to bring the things that make you feel happy, passionate and fulfilled into your world every single day.

The lessons I've learned from cancer can help anyone create a more joyful, balanced, empowered future.

Life Giving Choice #1: Choose to be present and appreciate the moment you're in. Why wait? This moment is all you really have at any given time; the past is gone and the future hasn't happened yet. We tend to forget how fleeting the chance to savor our life moments like the gifts that they are can be. After cancer, you may find a new appreciation for the day-to-day gifts that feed your spirit and can help lift your spirits in no time. You can:

- Become conscious of your breathing. This will take you out of the past or future and back to the moment.

- Listen to your intuition and connect with the things you're drawn to without asking "why?"
- Scan the scenery around you and look for things that make you smile or that resonate with you. Stay with them for a few moments.
- Engage the people around you. Practice random acts of kindness. Share a smile or a joke with the person next to you. Spend a few minutes playing with your child or pet. Hug someone for no reason.
- Close your eyes and remember a thrilling moment in your life. Imagine it's happening right now.

Notice how your own tension subsides as your mind quiets and you get into the present and out of the past and future.

Life Giving Choice #2: Choose to be compassionate with yourself, those you love and the world around you. Compassion for yourself and others is critical during and after a life altering event like cancer, when your expectations and emotions are like a roller coaster and may be difficult to manage.

Remember that **no one, including you, is perfect**, and that we're on a continuous journey of learning and choice as we strive for health and happiness together. You can **use compassion to help make life-giving choices** in your life now.

- Look for the lesson or humor when you think you've failed instead of making yourself wrong or feeling guilty or ashamed.
- When others don't meet your expectations try asking yourself what you would have done if you walked in their shoes, or how you would want to be treated if the situation were reversed.
- Try to be curious and supportive with yourself and others instead of harsh, judgmental or defensive.

Choosing to be compassionate with yourself and the world around you can help you stay focused on things that build up your positive energy and make you feel good about life immediately.

Life Giving Choice #3: Practice connecting with others when you talk.

Many of my clients come to me for help with personal or professional relationships. Often, no matter what the situation, their concerns and feelings come from misconceptions and

assumptions they've created for themselves and/or those in their lives. They're not communicating on the same page.

I help them **create a "nobody gets to be wrong" environment** where everyone can share their emotions and opinions in a healthy way. Here are a few tips on how you can learn to communicate successfully with others.

- Ask for what you want clearly and specifically, without making others wrong or defensive. Assuming they "should" know what you need or want is unfair and unrealistic and sets you up for disappointment.
- Don't be afraid to tell the truth. Acknowledge the elephant in the room. Facing the truth is much less stressful than convincing yourself it isn't real.
- Step back and look at situations from the other person's perspective. Don't judge, just observe or experience it. Share your appreciation and understanding of their viewpoint, even if you disagree.
- Learn to listen and make the other person feel heard. Sometimes we need to release our emotions and we just need someone to listen. We don't need any judging or fixing, and we don't want to talk about how what we're experiencing relates to the other person.
- Consciously choose to share the gift of your time and total attention with people in your life, or ask for that gift yourself. You'll be surprised how good you feel afterwards.

Connected communication fosters honesty, trust, commitment and intimacy in any type of relationship.

The true beauty of connected communication is the mindset that it is not all about me, you, him, or her. It's about what we can do to make each other the best we can possibly be. The ability to communicate effectively helps create the freedom to be yourself and to accept others as they are.

I always wonder why appreciation of our lives isn't a daily priority. Does it really take a crisis or life altering event to remind each of us how precious life is and motivate us to step out of our routine and appreciate what we have? What are you saying "yes" to when you put off giving yourself permission to be happy now? That the demands of the world around us matter more than the people we love and the values we hold dear? That having stuff is more important than having time to nurture ourselves and the world around us? We human beings have this incredible reservoir of courage and strength to draw from when we need it or when we choose to access it. You can choose to tap into this strength anytime, not just during times of crisis or change. You can choose to live your best life now. Why wait to try?

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Life coach and cancer survivor Paula Holland De Long is an authority on how the lessons of survivorship can bring joy, passion and purpose to anyone's life. Her support programs for survivors are currently offered through cancer treatment centers and support organizations and her women's teleconference action groups attract participants from around the country. To learn more about how to live your best life now visit www.CoachForLivingOnline.com.