



## Take Back Your Life Setting Priorities after Cancer

by Paula Holland De Long

**N**one of us chooses to come face to face with our own mortality. But you and I have stared it in the face and gone on to ask, "What's next?" Many cancer survivors feel compelled to live their lives differently in the wake of their cancer experience. Often, the priorities from your life before cancer don't fit anymore; they just don't feel right.

Like many survivors, you hunger for choices and a measure of control after facing the uncontrollable reality you've been through. You want to appreciate the here and now because you've learned that you can't be sure

day, being with people I loved, and having some free time to do nothing really resonated with me. I wanted them. So I made them priorities in my life. My priorities before cancer – a promotion, a bigger house, a brand new car – didn't matter any more.

**Know and honor your personal values.** You can use your values to help make life-giving choices as you honor the things you stand for and won't compromise on. Values are who you are, not who you aspire to be or who you think that you "should" or "have" to be. And they are not intrinsically right or wrong.

### Say yes to things that make you feel alive and no to things that bring you down.

what the future holds. You want to guide your life where you can and not worry about what you can't control. You want the rest of your life to matter. Here's how you can begin to prioritize your life after cancer.

**Use your intuition.** Whether you call it gut instinct, resonance, or intuition, using your feelings in addition to logic will help you recognize things that you want to prioritize. After my chemo ended, I knew in my heart and my gut that I was not going to be able to go back to the life that I had before my diagnosis.

I was intuitively drawn to things that made me feel good and made me feel alive. Spending time outside every

Accomplishment, creativity, excellence, honesty, humor, independence, joy, peace, recognition, spirituality, tradition, and vitality are a few examples of values that some people hold dear in life. Your instinct and intuition can help you name your values. Your values can be a compass guiding you as you journey through life. When you set priorities, make decisions, or shift perspectives, ask yourself, "Which values will I honor by choosing A or B?" Making your personal values a priority can make you feel more fulfilled. And you may find that you feel anxious, frustrated, unhappy, and dissatisfied when you don't make them a priority.

**Give yourself permission to make your own choices and prioritize your own life.** You will feel happier, more enthusiastic, and more committed to your priorities when you choose them, not when you feel like you should or must do something or when you are just trying to appease someone else. We all have different priorities.

Here are some lessons I've learned while setting my priorities:

- ◆ Creating priorities based on what matters most to you is NOT selfish or impolite.
- ◆ Being open to new possibilities and trying different ways of thinking and doing will keep you moving forward.
- ◆ Say yes to things that make you feel light and alive and no to things that make you feel heavy or bring you down.
- ◆ Try new things that resonate with you instead of always doing what is safe and familiar. The initial discomfort of change creates the empowering thrill of accomplishment.
- ◆ Do things because you choose to, not because you should, need to, or have to do them.



Paula De Long

Prioritizing your life after cancer can be a satisfying part of healing. Your intuition, values, and powers of choice bring a perspective of honesty, truth, and commitment to

the process that logic alone cannot provide. My own life as a survivor has become more passionate and rewarding since I started making my choices based on what matters most to me. See what can happen when you try it yourself.

**Editor's Note:** Paula Holland De Long, cancer survivor, life coach, and founder of Coach For Living, provides individual and group coaching for cancer survivors that promotes healing with joy, passion, and purpose. Contact Paula at (954) 565-6894, paulaholland@bellsouth.net, or www.CoachForLivingOnline.com.

**Action!** You can download a free values exercise at [www.CoachForLivingOnline.com](http://www.CoachForLivingOnline.com). ■