

ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

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If I came to you and said, "I have all the answers to how you can conquer cancer," what would you think? You might be pretty hopeful if you had cancer and were looking for THE ANSWER. You might be pretty skeptical too, wondering how I might know the answer when nobody else does. As the old joke goes, I have some good news and I have some bad news. The good news is, THERE ARE ANSWERS. The bad news is I DON'T HAVE THE ANSWERS, I JUST HAVE THE QUESTIONS.

There is some more good news. I know where to find the answers. Inside you. We'll make it a game. We'll play "20 questions." The questions are somewhat provocative. Some of them are hard. You may never have asked these questions before. I make no apology for their difficulty. Cancer asks some very difficult questions. If you wish to be a winner, you have to be willing to try just a little harder than the next guy. Remember, no matter how grim the situation, some people do very well. Why shouldn't you be one of them?

TRY THIS TEST

This is an open book test. Everybody who tries gets an "A." To get the most benefit, answer all of the questions. Write something in each space even if you don't know the correct answer. You'll get at least partial credit and might even surprise yourself with the right answer. If the question doesn't seem clear, give it your best shot anyway.

I QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

WHAT IS SUCCESS FOR YOU?

That's easy. Getting rid of the cancer and forgetting all about it. Most people want to be cured, to have the disease removed from their body. What else might success be? Emerging with your body intact? Doing things **your** way? Understanding why it happened? (You are not allowed to blame yourself, that is against the rules of the Geneva Convention!) Learning more about yourself?

This is probably the most important question you can ask. What **do** you want? Consider all the aspects of success: physical, emotional, spiritual, social, intellectual, etc.

This is not a trick question. However, the answer is tricky because it changes from time to time. You can come back and answer this question again and again. For the way you are feeling right this moment:

WHAT IS SUCCESS FOR YOU?

WHAT IS YOUR STYLE?

Are you a Warrior? Are you an Earth Mother? Are you an Innocent Child? A Martyr? An Injured Party? A Wounded Healer? Everybody has his own style, whether it is described as an archetype or not. It's important to recognize your own style and see what is authentically you. If you are quick to anger, use that trait as one of your tools to fight the cancer. If you are innocent and look to others for help in making decisions, surround yourself with trustworthy advisors. If you have been wronged, use that righteous indignation to remind you that you have the right to live as a worthwhile being.

Answering this question will take two parts. First think about several situations in which your particular style was evident and write down words or phrases that would describe that style. Choose situations in which you were successful or proud of yourself. Then think of ways to use those traits.

What if you don't like what you see about yourself? What if your style isn't like John Wayne or Catherine Hepburn? What if there are things you'd like to change? Write those down, too, but remember, this is not a "to do" list of character traits you're supposed to alter today after living with them for 40 years. The real purpose of knowing your own style is **THAT IS WHERE YOU ARE STRONGEST**. Work from your strengths. If you have trouble seeing the strengths in your style, ask a friend. They'll help you.

WHAT IS YOUR STYLE?

HOW CAN YOU USE THIS TO YOUR ADVANTAGE?

WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FORWARD TO?

Why on Earth do you want to stay around? Is there something good in your life that makes the struggle worthwhile? What are your goals? Are there things you want to do tomorrow, next week, next year? Can you picture people you love around you or is there only the anticipation of more loneliness? Is the only thing ahead of you more stress and work or is there space for play and relaxation?

You can answer this question in different ways. If you wish, put down the kinds of problems you anticipate, but also leave room for the solutions. Even if they are not

apparent immediately, be open to them arriving just as you need them. Otherwise, write out good things you can anticipate in the future.

WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FORWARD TO?

TODAY _____
TOMORROW _____
NEXT WEEK _____
THIS MONTH _____
THIS YEAR _____
NEXT YEAR _____
IN 5 YEARS _____
IN 10 YEARS _____
IN 20 YEARS _____

WHAT ARE YOU WILLING TO DO?

Where do you draw the line? You want to be cured but are not willing to have surgery? You want to live but don't want to ask for help? You'd rather die than to cry in front of somebody? You want to be healed but are unwilling to forgive that @*@\$%# who did you wrong?

"Willing to do for what?" you say. That depends on what you get. Faust sold his soul to the devil for knowledge. You can answer this question several times. First consider what you are willing to do to be cured of cancer. Then consider what you would do to be healed, to become whole again.

WHAT ARE YOU WILLING TO DO?

HAVE SURGERY _____ RADIATION THERAPY _____ CHEMOTHERAPY _____
CHANGE YOUR DIET _____ EAT MORE _____ EAT LESS _____
TAKE VITAMINS _____
CHANGE YOUR BELIEF THAT _____
CHANGE YOUR ATTITUDE THAT _____
STOP _____ THAT IS MAKING YOUR LIFE
MISERABLE.
START _____ THAT WOULD MAKE YOUR LIFE
WORTHWHILE.
TELL _____ YOU LOVE HIM OR HER?
FORGIVE _____ & _____ & _____ & _____ TOO.

WHAT ARE YOU AFRAID OF?

Many people are more afraid of dying than they are eager to be living. Are you running away from death or towards life? Are you afraid to show your vulnerability? Your strength? Are you afraid to show who you really are, that you might not be accepted? Are you afraid you might break down? How does fear paralyze you, blind

you, rob you of your power? If you are afraid of God's judgement, don't worry. Your judgement of yourself is much harsher than His.

Answering this question is hard. If you say what you're afraid of you have to admit that you're afraid of something. Not only that, but by naming it and making it real on paper, *the whole world will find out!* Again I have some good news and some bad news. The bad news is the fear is there whether you acknowledge it or not. The good news is *everybody else is afraid of the same things!* You are not alone! There is more good news. By writing out your fears, they get smaller, not larger. Besides, once you know what they are you can deal with them more effectively.

WHAT ARE YOU AFRAID OF?

ARE YOU "TERMINAL?"

"Terminal" is more a state of mind than body. Have you given up? Are you just waiting to die or are you living each moment as fully as possible? Far too many people believe that nothing can be done if the doctor says he or she can't do it. Doctors don't know everything.

The myth of cancer is so powerful that it acts like a voodoo curse. Once the word is used, the person dies because they believe they are dying. I've known people with "terminal cancer" who have lived for many years, sometimes longer than their doctors. I have also had a patient 5 days after he was told he had lung cancer. In 5 days he was no sicker than he was at the time of diagnosis. He just died.

ARE YOU TERMINAL?

ARE YOU A PROFESSIONAL CANCER PATIENT?

Is all of your time devoted to fighting the cancer? Do you think about the cancer all the time? Do you avoid thinking about the cancer all the time?

Don't lose your amateur standing! The purpose of life is to live it. If you are so focused on fighting the cancer that you forget about having fun, being creative, loving someone you're missing the point. There are times when cancer treatment should be the highest priority, but not to the exclusion of everything else.

To answer this question look at the balance in your life. Ask yourself if you would be healthier or more whole if you did more of this or less of that. Trust your intuition.

ARE YOU A PROFESSIONAL CANCER PATIENT?

WHO IS THERE FOR YOU?

What is your support system? What doctor(s)? Friends? Family members? Neighbors? Counselors? Groups? Books? What are you doing that makes it hard for them to support you? What could you do to make it easier? What other resources could you use?

This is a good question for someone to help you. You might be too modest, too shy, or too reluctant to put down some names. You might have forgotten your brother who is an oncologist in Chicago, or your cousin who is a retired nurse, or your daughter who is home from school and wants to spend time with you. It is more blessed to give than to receive the Bible says. Why not give somebody a chance to show his love for you? It is an act of generosity to allow someone the richness of giving.

WHO IS THERE FOR YOU?

FAMILY _____
FRIENDS _____
DOCTORS _____
OTHER PROFESSIONALS _____
GROUPS _____
OTHER RESOURCES _____

WHAT DO YOU TELL YOUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS?

What do you tell your children? What do you tell your boss, co-workers, friends? Your family and friends want to help. They are one of your strongest resources. They need your guidance, however, to know how to help. Let them know what you want or don't want. If you need encouragement, put a sign on your door, "I NEED A HUG TODAY." If you could use some help with housework, deputize someone to arrange for cleaning and cooking to be done.

What about the "well meaning" aunt or co-worker who is always saying the wrong thing, like "you look so well for having cancer, I can't believe it." You can have compassion for them because they are dealing with their own stuff and don't really see you at all. You do not have to hang out with them. Stick with the optimists.

WHAT DO I TELL MY FAMILY AND FRIENDS?

MY SPOUSE _____
MY CHILDREN _____
MY PARENTS _____

MY FRIEND _____
MY FRIEND _____
MY FRIEND _____

HAVE YOU CONSIDERED ALL YOUR OPTIONS?

Have you considered getting a second opinion from another doctor? From another specialty? Have you looked at complementary therapies such as body therapy, dietary changes, psychological techniques, etc? What have you read? What have you been meaning to read? Who have you talked to? Who have you been meaning to talk to? What programs and support systems have you evaluated?

Answer this question according to categories. You may feel complete in some areas and want to explore more in other areas. You don't have to do everything at once. Some options may be saved for later.

WHAT ARE YOUR OPTIONS FOR:
MEDICAL/SURGICAL/ETC. TREATMENT? _____

COMPLEMENTARY THERAPY? _____

EMOTIONAL SUPPORT? _____

INFORMATION? _____

PRACTICAL HELP? _____

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP YOURSELF?

Are you doing everything you can to help yourself?

Just as you would ask your doctor to do everything he can to help you, ask the same of yourself. You wouldn't want a half-hearted try from your doctor, so put in 100% effort yourself. After all, it is your life at stake.

How do you know if you're doing everything? Ask yourself, "Am I doing all I can to help myself?" If you say, "yes," give yourself a gold star and keep it up. If you have any doubts, write down the first few things that come to mind. Then get some help in doing them. If they were easy, you would have done them last week.

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP MYSELF?

WHAT IS YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD?

What kind of a question is *that*? In dealing with cancer you need all the help you can get. Why not use God? Like chicken soup, a little prayer never hurt. It can get awfully lonely sometimes. Having a friend in high places helps.

According to my best sources, God does not live in any particular church, temple or mosque. He/She looks the way you need Him/Her to look. At some point you will have to make an arbitrary decision: either the universe is benign or it isn't. (Since you can't prove it one way or the other, why not assume that it's benign.) If it is benign, then God is likely to be benevolent. He may have a strange sense of humor; or it may be that we just don't get the joke. In any event:

WHAT IS YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD?

II QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR DOCTOR

This list of questions is not approved by the AMA. In fact there may be some doctors out there who would be upset if you asked them these questions directly. Nevertheless, you need to know the answers because your body and your life is at stake. If you can't ask them directly, find out indirectly. Talk with the nurse, she or he is in an ideal position to know some things. Remember, though, she has a vested interest. Talk with nurses at the hospital. Talk with pharmacists and pharmaceutical representatives. Speak with your family doctor.

CAN I TRUST YOU?

Doctor, whose side are you on? Are you really paying attention to me? Can you see all of me, not just my disease? Doctors are human and no matter how well motivated, they are not perfect. What you want is somebody who will recognize that there is a person who has cancer and that both must be considered.

Answers: _____

HOW GOOD ARE YOU?

Doctor, how good are you at what you do? Are you board certified? Do you practice at a good hospital? Can you get along with other people I want on my team? Will you be upset if I ask for a second opinion? No one doctor is good at everything.

Your surgeon may have great hands but a poor bedside manner. Your family doctor may understand you but not understand radiation therapy. You may need a team of doctors to meet all your needs. At minimum, however, they should be competent in their fields and not have egos so big they bump into other people.

ANSWERS: _____

WHAT ARE MY OPTIONS?

Doctor, have you considered everything that is available? Have you considered medical as well as surgical treatments? Would I do better if I combined treatments? If there is no standard treatment, what research and experimental treatments are available? If I got a second opinion would they say the same thing as you?

While there are experts on certain cancers, no doctor knows everything about everything. He will know more about his own specialty than other fields and may be inclined to recommend his own treatment because he is most familiar with it. It may be the best treatment, too. However, sometimes there are several treatments that work equally well and the choice is more one of patient preference.

ANSWERS: _____

WHAT IS THE TREATMENT LIKE?

Doctor, how often do you get good results from this treatment? Does "good" mean that the cancer is permanently cured or that life is prolonged or that the cancer shrinks? How often do your patients experience side effects? What are they?

A "response" may mean one thing to the doctor and quite another to you. Make sure you understand what the doctor is telling you. While some treatments may not promise cure, the people who respond may live longer than those who don't. There's a lot you can do in an extra 6 months or more! Don't try to pin your doctor down to an exact number since different studies generally vary in the reported response rate. Just because there are side effects doesn't mean that you will get them. Find out which are likely and decide whether you can put up with them. For the rare ones, remember the disease has side effects too.

ANSWERS: _____

IS THIS AN EMERGENCY?

Doctor, how long do I have to make a decision? Can I think things over? How seriously threatened is my life right now?

Although you may feel panic when you are first diagnosed, the urgency to start treatment depends on how sick you are, not how worried you are. You may feel most comfortable acting promptly. You should make a decision that you can live with.

ANSWERS: _____

DOCTOR, WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP?

What symptoms should I report to you? Is there a good time for me to call you if I have questions? Are there specific things I should do or avoid? Are there specific foods or vitamins I should eat or avoid?

You're both working on the same team, right? Make it easy for your doctor to help you. There may be specific items he needs to know each time you visit such as fevers, nausea, activity level, etc. If you bring in a written list answering all his questions, he may have more time to answer you questions.

ANSWERS: _____

WHAT ARE MY RESOURCES?

Doctor, what support groups are available? Where can I get more literature? Are there dietitians, physical therapists, counselors, etc. nearby?

ANSWERS: _____

WHAT ARE THE "ODDS?"

Jimmy the Greek calls football games, boxing matches, even arm wrestling. Your doctor can report statistics that apply to groups of people that may or may not be like you. He doesn't know the odds of your survival. Be careful how you hear statistics. Different studies typically vary as much as 100% in their survival rates. The median survival means that half the people live longer than that number. It is not the time left on your own person parking meter.

DOCTOR, HOW LONG AM I GOING TO LIVE?

Don't ask your doctor this. He doesn't know. Only God knows. See below.

DOCTOR, WILL YOU TAKE CARE OF ME EVEN IF I DON'T DO AS YOU SAY?

If I decide to forego treatment, will you still take care of me? Will you do it as well off treatment as on? If you feel you can't take good care of me, will you refer me to someone who will?

ANSWERS: _____

III QUESTIONS TO ASK GOD

HOW LONG AM I GOING TO LIVE?

Good question. He will have to look it up. While you're waiting for the answer, live a little. It's good for you.

WHY ME?

People always ask that. What if God replied, "Why not you?" You know that He works in mysterious ways. He won't give you anything you can't handle. Besides, as the old story goes, the times you see only one set of footsteps, He is carrying you.

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