

## 7 Success Lessons Learned from Cancer

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I never set out to be a “survivor.” My life’s aspirations were pretty basic: become successful professionally, marry my soul mate, have two beautiful children and perhaps even retire early. Getting cancer certainly wasn’t on the list. But there I was, lying on the operating table the day of my surgery, shivering - not knowing how much longer I actually had to live and

hoping that, when I opened my eyes, I would awaken from the nightmare. It didn’t happen. Cancer was a cold, hard reality that has certainly changed me. I look different, feel different and act different. Besides indelibly altering my outlook on life, cancer taught me hard-learned lessons on how to conduct business and realize success in a more significant and gratifying way.

**Here are 7 business lessons I learned from cancer that can help others in their own endeavors:**

1. **Fight for what you believe in.** I have a tattoo on my left forearm that says, in Chinese, “**to turn defeat into victory.**” That is how important the concept is to me. If you don’t take a stand for those issues that really matter to you, someone else is going to make the decision for you. Regardless of how extremely difficult a business or workplace challenge might appear in the moment, it’s only temporary. It is human nature to question our own ability, especially when we are facing a challenge that is taxing, difficult, new or involves opposition or criticism from others. When you have a viable position that bucks the status quo, don’t be afraid to take a stand in line with your vision and values. And, be prepared. Base your position on facts, figures and well-researched information rather than trying to make emotional appeals. Anticipate objections and backlash and be prepared to counter with an even stronger argument. Be as transparent as possible so that there is no seemingly clandestine agenda or bias to be exposed later on. And, most importantly, hold steadfast to your standards and ideals all along the way.
2. **If you don’t love what you do, quit doing it.** Love what you do, and be surrounded by people who share your passion. **No matter your age, education, or tenure in the**

**business world, NOW is the time to focus on what you're passionate about.** Don't wait for conditions to be perfect or for your life to be threatened. Don't just go through the motions half-ass. Find the gasoline that lights your fire. Quench your thirst for learning and investigate outside of your comfort zone. Empower yourself to make decisions and take actions, and uncover the value in your effort even when you fail. Then try again.

3. **Make life better for those around you.** I now understand that the quality and happiness of life directly impacts quality of work. **Ask yourself 'what can I do to help'—whether in relation to a colleague, an employee, a boss, a business partner. And, don't expect anything in return.** A spirit of altruism is the best way to proffer help without any level of expectation, so there will be no disappointments in kind. If you're an employer, discern how you can go over and above to help an employee apparently struggling with a personal issue, which could include paying for their health insurance premium for a period and giving them paid time off to deal with a difficult life situation. If you're an employee, offer to grab coffee or lunch for your boss or a colleague "on your dime." Stock the employee break room with pastries "just because." Call a business partner or prospect just to say "hi" and don't talk any business. Even more simply, greet people with positivity. Encourage them. Compliment them. Lend them a helping hand. Notice their progress, cheer them on and make them smile. The more happiness and success you help others find, the more fulfillment you will realize every single day of your life. If it makes the world a better place, even for a fleeting moment, you have succeeded.
4. **Do your own thing and do it your way.** The concept of going your own way and doing your own thing is not new. The problem is, most people don't do it because it bucks tradition and goes against the grain, and frankly, it scares the s#! out of most people. But on the other hand, it can provide you with a hell of a lot of freedom, and provide you a life-long exemption from blindly or reluctantly following protocol. Mavericks live according to their own agenda and goals and, even in the corporate world, there is more latitude to blaze new trails in business than you might think. **The key is to look at each task for the opportunities they present.** Sure, there may be a "perfectly fine" or traditional way of doing something to achieve a good result. But, when you have a better approach or process in mind that can achieve an even more desirable result, it may just be time to go rogue. In today's cut-throat culture, originality is perhaps your greatest gift. Use it.
5. **Risk it right now.** At this very moment you have everything you need. Sound impossible? It happens to be true, you just may not appreciate it. Do you have food, clothing and shelter? Then you have everything you need and, once you live by this simple philosophy, taking risks becomes far easier. **The most important part of this notion is that most business opportunities don't wait around, so take action now.** Don't make the mistake of waiting on someone or something to come along to make taking that leap of faith more viable. "Perfect timing" is a fallacy—there are few if any such moments in life. Don't wait so long that you can't take a risk even when you want to, only to be consumed with remorse for what "could have been." Now is the time to capitalize on opportunities that present. Make it so.
6. **Live life like a two year old.** In other words, fall down often, screw up repeatedly and occasionally be defiant. Children are extremely resilient and, as adults, we lose this enviable

quality. Throughout our career we proverbially fall down, get bruised and even skin our knees. We might even literally shed a few tears. But, perseverance and tenacity, honed with hindsight-based perspective so as to not repeat the same mistakes, are key to staying the course up the ladder of achievement.

7. **Forecast regrets to reorganize.** When someone is on their death bed, they never say “I wish I had worked more”. They regret not spending more time on the things that matter the most. That said, not all regrets would be related to your personal life. If, hypothetically, you had two less working hours every day, what would you cut out? You’d cut out the least important tasks and focus more energy on the endeavors you are confident would impact the bottom line or your career trajectory the most. **Don’t wait for a major adverse event or unforeseen time crunch to reorganize your work life.** Project your thoughts into a problematic “what if” scenario to prioritize, downsize, re-allocate, offset, delegate and downright omit whatever you can to expedite your climb up the ladder of success.

**They say cancer has a way of changing people. This is true, but there’s no need for an threatening medical diagnosis to be the catalyst for needed change.**

An emotional “reboot” can pay dividends at any time and in anyone’s life, to most certainly include business matters. The key is to tap into, and harness, a mindset of emotional vulnerability for a new-found perspective that can help you recalibrate and generally fine tune your approach to achievement so that you can not only get there faster—but in a more meaningful and fulfilling way. As far as I am concerned, *that* is the true measure of success.

#### About author



***Scott Petinga is Chairman and CEO of The Scott Petinga Group. He is a pioneer in developing businesses with lasting impact in the fields of communications, sustainable real estate, business acceleration and philanthropy. Through his flagship company AKQURACY—a full-service, data-fueled communications agency – he earned a spot on the prestigious 2012 Inc. magazine list of fastest-growing private companies. He may be reached online at [www.ScottPetinga.com](http://www.ScottPetinga.com)***