

The Power of RESILIENCE in the Face of Cancer

by Ann Webster, PhD

As upsetting as cancer and its treatments can be, it is possible to find some good among the bad. Things that once looked important no longer do, and other things now take on a looming importance. You have been presented with an opportunity to create a “new now.” A chance to change your priorities and find new meaning in your life.

This idea is based upon the concept of *resiliency*, which is a component of

your surroundings. To foster commitment, set new goals and attempt to meet them.

♦ **CONTROL:** People who feel they are in control believe they can influence events and surroundings; they believe they can make things happen. They have a strong sense of self-efficacy and an internal locus of control, rather than feelings of powerlessness and helplessness. They avoid feeling like a victim of circumstances. To gain more control

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positive psychology. People who cope well with stress, who rise to the challenges of life, who have resiliency have specific characteristics. Let's look at how these can apply to you as a cancer survivor.

♦ **COMMITMENT:** People with high levels of commitment are fully involved in what they are doing, and they give everything their best shot. They have a curiosity about whatever is happening to them, they have passions, and they live their lives with zest and gusto. The opposite is feeling alienated from people and

over your life, resolve to take charge of your behavior and your actions.

♦ **CHALLENGE:** People who take on life as a challenge tend to welcome new situations as opportunities to learn, to grow, to develop on a personal level, and to bounce back, rather than looking at everything new with pessimism or seeing the unfamiliar as a threat. Learn to believe in yourself and what you can do. Find the “bless in the mess.”

♦ **COMMUNITY:** To be resilient, you must have social supports – someone or a group with whom you can share the stress of coping with cancer, a confidante who is willing to be there when times are tough. So, welcome friends into your life and be a friend.

♦ **CALMNESS:** People who are resilient practice relaxation techniques, managing to stay calm when the pressure is on.

Ask yourself these questions:

1. What is important in my life right now?
2. What am I passionate about?
3. Why am I here?
4. What are the gifts I have to give?
5. What is the larger plan (or God's will) for my life?

Now, close your eyes, take a few deep breaths, and reflect upon your answers. Then open your eyes and write down the goals, plans, and dreams you have for your life today. You are creating a “new now.”



It's now up to you to begin to take baby steps toward attaining these goals, plans, and dreams. When you divide them up into baby steps, they don't seem so overwhelming. When you come up against a roadblock in attaining your goals, plans, and dreams, look for creative ways to make things work. Ask others to help you, tell yourself it's OK to want things to work well, to be successful, and to have things improve. Pause occasionally to quiet your mind



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and to use your intuition. But remember, the most important thing is to enjoy the entire experience.

It is my hope that by practicing these resilience techniques, you

will feel more peaceful, optimistic, and hopeful about the future. Optimists are seldom surprised by troubles and think of themselves as problem solvers. They use their imaginations to rehearse success. They also know how to accept what cannot be changed.

Dr. Ann Webster is a scientist and a health psychologist who, for the past 28 years, has been lecturing on mind/body health and conducting healthy lifestyles workshops at corporations, hospitals, and universities around the world. She is the author of Aging Without an Expiration Date and creator of the documentary Everything Matters, which is based on the lives of five of her patients who all survived life-threatening illness. To learn more about Dr. Webster, visit annwebsterphd.com.

