

## Life After Treatment: What Now?

As someone who has gone through a cancer diagnosis, I know that once treatment is finished, you may find yourself at loose ends. Family and friends, relieved that “it’s over,” are usually more than ready to get back to whatever normal was before your diagnosis. But like all heroines who are forced to fight battles in unknown lands, you have returned from your journey changed. While the physical geography of your outside world hasn’t changed, your interior landscape has.

Because of your cancer experience, you now know as never before how precious life is. And it begs the question: How do you want to spend the rest of your life? A cancer diagnosis, or any life threatening illness, is often re-orienting and can bring about a significant change in priorities. It raises questions about what really matters to survivors, which may or may not be different from what they were B.C. (before cancer). A cancer diagnosis, or any life threatening illness can:

- Raise questions about the meaning of life;
- Test the bonds of relationships;
- Bring an end to a phase of life;
- Provide an opportunity to learn what really matters;
- Serve as a wake-up call to examine what has been resisted; and
- Give permission to shift priorities.

Having asked these questions, what can survivors do to enhance their quality of life and to live it more authentically, on their terms? The first place to start is with their level of satisfaction.

A coaching tool called the wheel of life is the place to begin. Divide a circle into eight pie-shaped segments: friends and family; significant other/romance; fun and

recreation; health; money; personal growth; physical environment; and career. Rank your satisfaction score in each area on a scale of 1-10. Now with a snapshot of where you are today, and using a “realistic magic wand,” write down where you’d like to be in each of the areas you’d like to improve. The more detail, the better.

Now write down all the things that cause you stress in that area: your job, friends, family, physical environment or even yourself. By writing them down, you increase your awareness about what’s irritating you. There are two ways to tackle irritations, and both will make you feel more empowered. First, you can determine the actions and requests needed to eliminate these irritants from your life. This can be as simple as telling the truth. Second, you can accept the reality of the situation, let go of trying to control it (or them), and focus on something more rewarding.

How strong are your boundaries in the area where you’d like to see improvement? If you’re spending too much time doing things you don’t want to do, it’s probably time to drop “the disease to please,” and raise some personal boundaries. If your boundaries are poorly defined, it’s more likely that you’ll attract people who think it’s OK to expect or demand something from you. Remember, we teach people how to treat us. By being clear about your boundaries, you’ll regain control of your life and show others how much you value yourself.

In my coaching practice, I’ve seen time and time again how making these simple changes can create a life that looks and feels different and most importantly, suits *you* better.

*Kathy Santini is a breast cancer survivor who was diagnosed in 1999. She is also a life and business coach whose practice ([www.arbutuscoaching.com](http://www.arbutuscoaching.com)) contains a number of breast cancer survivors who are rebuilding their lives after treatment. She lives in Victoria, B.C., Canada. ♪*