

“Healing the Cancer Journey: Tools for Emotional Wellness” (Savio P. Clemente) [#87]

Brad Power
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“This (mental emotional part of cancer) has been harder for me than the physical part. And the physical part is significant... Because of that, I have put a lot of effort into my emotional and mental health.” – Eric Hall

“I want to spearhead this idea that we can go deeper within ourselves and cultivate a more meaningful relationship with not only the people around us, but dealing with this aspect of what cancer does to our lives, and how we can shake it up a bit to find meaning in it.” – Savio P. Clemente

Meeting Summary

Cancer throws everything at you – chemo, scans, uncertainty. But what about the hidden battle within? Studies by the CDC show that 20-46% of survivors struggle with emotional and mental health issues every month. This isn't just your body under attack, it's your soul.

But here's the good news: You don't have to weather this storm alone, and there are tips and practices for dealing with the mental and emotional challenges of cancer.

Savio P. Clemente is uniquely qualified to provide guidance on how to navigate through the mental and emotional issues related to cancer. He is a stage 3 cancer survivor who's not just conquered the physical battle, but emerged as a beacon of emotional resilience, spreading the message on how to "love your inner stranger." He is a TEDx speaker, board-certified wellness coach, journalist, and bestselling author. He has interviewed 200 cancer survivors from all different walks of life with different types of cancers. He chose 35 individuals from that interview series, told his own story, and wrote a book, [I Survived Cancer and Here Is How I Did It: 35 Cancer Survivors Share Their Journey](#).

What are the mental and emotional challenges that cancer patients face?

- **Fear and anxiety:** Will I die? What should I do? Will I be cured? Who am I going to be? Cancer is always going to be part of your story.
- **Shame:** How could my lifestyle have contributed to my fate? You may believe your cancer was self-inflicted, such as saying to yourself: “Why couldn't I stop smoking?”
- **Betrayal:** I didn't do anything to you. Why are you hurting me? Why are you trying to kill me?
- **Negative self image:** For many people (mostly men), cancer goes against the grain of what you think that your life is, or your power in the world, and how you want to express it. You compare who you are today to who you were a year ago. A year ago you could run marathons. Today, you are physically incapable of doing that.
- **Loss of friends:** When you come out to your friends that you have cancer, certain ones that you thought you were very close to may not be able to handle it. They may not

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identify you as a person with cancer. They will pull away from the relationship and withdraw from very long-standing friendships, which can be hurtful, a loss, and a surprise. Maybe they don't know how to relate to someone with cancer. Maybe they're not mature enough emotionally to create a space for someone to have a life-threatening disease.

What are tips and practices for dealing with the mental and emotional challenges cancer patients face?

- **Acceptance:** Cancer is here in your life to show you some bit of wisdom. It doesn't have to be a pleasant wisdom. It could be a painful wisdom. Cancer is your teacher. You need to control what you can control, but the flip side of that is you have to accept the things that you cannot control.
- **Thrive, gratitude, and positivity:** Cancer clearly identifies what's important and what's bullshit. You can look at your situation and see the good in it, that the glass is half full, rather than seeing it as half empty. You can do a daily exercise of listing things you are grateful for in your life today. You can also “live in the present”, which means you're not having the anxiety about what's going to happen tomorrow, and you're not regretting what happened yesterday. You can choose to look at how to use cancer to improve your life and to address things that you haven't addressed in the past. You eat a different diet. You live your life and think differently. You find new friends. You get an immediacy and a sense of focus.
- **Legacy:** It's about what you want to leave behind, so it's more outward facing. It takes the focus away from you. You're thinking about how to be of service to other people, even though you're going through a painful time. It's not just at the end of your cycle of life, rather it is what you are creating in the world. Future generations will learn from your experiences, mistakes, growth, or successes.
- **Self image:** How do you want to be? How do you want others to feel and be around you? How do you want your energy to come across to other people? Ask yourself if there is someone whom you admire. Try to embody those qualities that you admire. It could be a friend, or it could be someone from history.
- **New friends:** Draw to you those people who support your idealized version of yourself. Connect with others who understand your journey and lift each other up.
- **Let go:** Instead of making a “To Do” list of what you want to accomplish, as your capacities diminish, identify what you don't want to spend your time and attention on any more, the “To Stop” list.
- **Journaling:** Journaling is a private way to reflect on what you go through and process ups and downs. You can also post some of your deep thoughts to a blog, Facebook group, or Caringbridge site. You benefit from processing issues and putting your thoughts out there, and even more inspiration to hear back that other people are getting value from it.
- **Meditation:** Focusing your mind on a particular object, thought, or activity can train your attention and awareness to achieve mental clarity and emotional calmness and stability.
- **Therapy:** Psychological methods based on regular personal interaction can help you change behavior, increase happiness, and overcome problems.

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Meeting Notes

KEYWORDS

cancer, idea, people, talk, life, patients, savio, years, wanted, journey, disease, blessing, question, cancer patient, legacy, work, fact, living, couple, interviews

SPEAKERS

Savio P. Clemente (35%), Eric Hall (25%), Brian McCloskey (24%), Amit Gattani (9%), Paul van Camp (6%), David Plunkett (1%)

OUTLINE

1. Cancer survivor's journey and insights. (0:00)
2. Cancer survivors' emotional journeys and best practices for patients. (2:17)
3. Cancer patients' power, legacy, and storytelling. (11:19)
4. Cancer diagnosis and relationships. (17:40)
5. Cancer journey, self-discovery, and personal growth. (23:29)
6. Cancer journey, lifestyle changes, and acceptance. (29:42)
7. Coping with cancer's impact on young, accomplished individuals. (39:11)
8. Legacy, service, and living with purpose despite cancer diagnosis. (41:35)
9. Cancer diagnosis and its impact on mental and emotional well-being. (44:45)
10. Cancer diagnosis and acceptance. (48:10)
11. Cancer diagnosis and mental attitude. (51:58)
12. Personal growth, cancer diagnosis, and legacy. (53:18)
13. Self-discovery and purpose during cancer journey. (58:51)

SUMMARY

Cancer survivor's journey and insights.

- Savio Clemente shares his stage 3 cancer journey and insights on navigating the physical and mental aspects of the disease.

Cancer survivors' emotional journeys and best practices for patients.

- Savio P. Clemente was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma in 2014 and sought holistic alternatives for his medical care before starting chemotherapy.
- He completed six rounds of chemotherapy and incorporated integrative modalities, leading to his remission status after nine years.
- His TEDx talk focuses on how cancer can be a catalyst for personal growth and connection with others, despite the physical toll it takes.
- A survey by the CDC found that 20-46% of cancer survivors experience anxiety or depression monthly, highlighting the need for deeper self-reflection and meaning-making.

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- Savio P. Clemente interviewed 200 cancer patients, finding that men internalize their cancer differently than women, and many struggle to share their stories.
- Coach Sarah recommends using positive psychology, self-efficacy, and self-regulation theory to help cancer patients manage anxiety and find hope, despite treatment challenges.

Cancer patients' power, legacy, and storytelling.

- Brian McCloskey and Savio P. Clemente discuss how people with cancer can regain power by controlling their emotions and relationships.
- Savio P. Clemente reflects on interviews with cancer patients, noting their desire for empathetic listening and personalized support rather than generic reassurance.
- He emphasizes the importance of storytelling and self-expression in coping with illness, encouraging listeners to have open and honest conversations with loved ones.
- He discusses the concept of legacy and how it relates to storytelling, emphasizing the importance of being seen as more than one's disease and creating a lasting impact in the world.

Cancer diagnosis and relationships.

- Paul Van Camp shares his experience with prostate cancer, including the initial diagnosis and subsequent biochemical recurrence, and how it has impacted his relationships with friends and family.
- He identifies certain friends who were unable to handle the information and withdrew from long-standing friendships, while others have shown support and care for him.
- He shares his experience with prostate cancer, including the loss of relationships due to his illness.
- He suggests cultivating qualities of admired individuals to bolster emotional and mental well-being during treatment.

Cancer journey, self-discovery, and personal growth.

- Eric Hall shares his journey of acceptance and self-discovery after being diagnosed with cancer, highlighting the emotional and mental challenges he's faced and how he's worked to overcome them.
- He expresses anxiety about his identity and who he will be after potentially going off ADT, while also acknowledging the ways in which cancer has changed him for the better.
- He shares his personal experience with cancer and how it led him to create a private Facebook group and CaringBridge site for support.
- Savio P. Clemente uses the “ALOHA” framework to encourage listeners to acknowledge, listen, open, harness, and act on their inner voice and emotions.

Cancer journey, lifestyle changes, and acceptance.

- Brian McCloskey recalls a conversation with Eric Hall from months 2-3 of Hall's cancer journey, noting Hall's fear and intentionality to figure out a way to attack the cancer.
- Eric Hall shares how he was diagnosed with stage 4 cancer, feeling scared and unsure of what to do, but determined to buy time and attack the cancer.

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- He found a game plan for his cancer treatment in Kelly Turner's book "Radical Remission," which highlighted 9 common factors among people who had achieved radical remission, including diet, supplements, spiritual connection, and emotional release.
- Reading the book helped Eric shift his focus from just cancer treatment to overall health and wellness, and he started implementing various lifestyle changes and integrative modalities to improve his health.
- He has found that focusing on positivity and acceptance has helped him cope with cancer, rather than dwelling on negative thoughts or using language that implies a battle (e.g., "fighting cancer").
- Hall has learned to reframe his mindset, seeing cancer as a healing journey rather than a negative experience, which has helped him maintain a more positive outlook and reduce anxiety and depression.

Coping with cancer's impact on young, accomplished individuals.

- Brian McCloskey reflects on the notion of blessings in the face of cancer, encouraging acceptance and improvement rather than comparison.

Legacy, service, and living with purpose despite cancer diagnosis.

- Savio P. Clemente reflects on mortality and control, suggesting writing a list of things for others to complete in the worst-case scenario.
- He discusses legacy and service as a way to look beyond personal trials and tribulations.

Cancer diagnosis and its impact on mental and emotional well-being.

- Amit Gattani reflects on his personal journey with cancer, questioning whether it's a blessing or determined by the outcome.
- He struggles to consider cancer a blessing despite enjoying activities and professionally being at a good place.

Cancer diagnosis and acceptance.

- Savio P. Clemente reflects on cancer as a message, challenging listeners to identify their own personal message.
- Amit Gattani shares his journey of battling cancer and finding acceptance through blogging and personal growth.

Cancer diagnosis and mental attitude.

- Eric Hall reflects on the ease of cancer treatment when results are positive, and how he's adopted a mindset of thriving despite potential negative results in the future.

Personal growth, cancer diagnosis, and legacy.

- Brian McCloskey and David Plunkett share their experiences with cancer diagnoses and treatment, including feelings of betrayal and anger.
- Both men found solace in practicing gratitude and living in the present, which helped them cope with their illnesses and find meaning in their lives.

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- Brian McCloskey shared a personal story about his friend Bryce Olson, who passed away from prostate cancer, and how Olson's legacy lives on through his impact on others in the industry.
- The BostonGene VP of Sales, who worked with Olson at Tempus, shared how Olson's memory inspired her to continue working in the industry and saving patient lives.

Self-discovery and purpose during cancer journey.

- Savio P. Clemente emphasizes the importance of self-reflection and personal growth during cancer treatment, encouraging listeners to "figure out for yourself" their legacy, emotions, and fears.
- He shares his experience as a journalist interviewing notable figures like Venus Williams, highlighting the importance of being kind to oneself and not comparing one's journey to others.

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TRANSCRIPT

Brian McCloskey

Welcome everybody to the Cancer Patient Lab. We are thrilled to have Savio P. Clemente speak with us today. Savio is a stage three cancer survivor. He's here to talk to us about his journey, and how he's gone through the process and come out the other side, and what he's learned about his journey, both from a physical sense, but also from a mental sense. The hope here is that everyone will be able to get some tools, some insights, that can help them to navigate their journey.

He said a few things yesterday in our little introduction about how he has dealt with his cancer. One of the things that struck me, which I think will resonate with a lot of the patients, and anyone who is affiliated with this disease that we have, part of the Cancer Patient Lab, whether it's medical professionals or life sciences, industry experts, etc., is this notion of understanding what our mission is.

He is a TEDx speaker. He's got his full podcast microphone set up and everything is adding a professional element.

Savio P. Clemente 2:17

Thank you for having me. Hello, everyone.

Brian mentioned that I'm a TEDx speaker.

Let me go back to how cancer has affected my life.

I was diagnosed in 2014 with non-Hodgkins lymphoma, diffuse large B cell lymphoma. It was fast and furious. My stomach started becoming distended. I started getting extreme night sweats. I was away in Paris and Amsterdam. I was like, “Okay. This is strange. Let's see.” I came back. At that time, in 2014, I really sought out only holistic alternatives for my medical care. My naturopath at that time said to me, “Something's wrong.” He told me to go see mainstream medicine, which I did. I ended up getting a sonogram. They would not let me leave the office for about an hour and a half. They asked me to get a family member to come pick me up. I did. They took me to the hospital. Literally within an hour I was admitted to the fifth floor. Later that night, I heard nurses talking about transferring me to what they call “the seventh floor”, which is the cancer floor. So I had an idea that night that I had cancer. I was bedridden for a week. I was in the hospital for a total of 15 days. Three days before I was released, I was told by the medical director that I needed to start my first round of chemo. I'm all for medical intervention and medical therapies. I wasn't against it. I just didn't have time to process it all because it was just thrust upon me. She made it very clear that if I did not start my first round, I might not live. That's what she basically said to me. So I started it. I did successive six rounds every three weeks of R-CHOP therapy. In addition to that I did a whole bunch of integrative modalities, because I just believed for myself that the best course of action for my healing would be a combination of both. Later, within about four-and-a-half months after receiving R-CHOP

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and integrative therapies, I was given my remission status. This past December, it's been nine years since I hit my nine year remission.

With that I knew after five years I was called to have a mission of doing something in this field. I ended up getting my board certification in health and wellness coaching.

At the time I was writing. I'm a media journalist, and so I pitched an idea to my editor for a series called “I survived cancer. Here's how he did it.” At this point I've interviewed 200 cancer survivors from all different walks of life, different types of cancers. One of the most pressing questions I asked them in that piece was if cancer had a message for you, what would that message be? A lot of them were, “What are you talking about? Cancer is the Big Bad Wolf. I want to get rid of it.” But I really truly believe on some level, that cancer is here in our lives to show us some bit of wisdom. It doesn't have to be a pleasant wisdom. It could be a painful wisdom. But there's wisdom in that.

Since then, I also ended up choosing 35 individuals from that interview series, told my own story, and launched a book about a year-and-a-half ago. It became a best seller in several categories, which to me means that the story of hope survives, which is really the main reason why I even did the book.

Since then, I also gave my TEDx talk on the topic of “Seven minutes to wellness – how to love your inner stranger.” I use that stranger very vaguely, because I wanted people to resonate with this idea of a stranger. For me, the stranger was shame. I felt a lot of shame about my cancer. I felt like I was disappointing not only myself, but other people. I also felt that cancer is a physical thing. I knew that I was very hopeful. I knew that my emotions were alive. I knew that I wanted to cultivate more connection with other people and create more things in the world. A stranger for me was that aspect of myself that I needed to pull out from the physical part of me that was dying in the hospital. I made it a mission to do that.

Today, I'm here to talk about a main crux of my TEDx talk, which is this idea from the CDC, or the survey from the enhanced survey, that 20 to 46% of cancer survivors experience some level of anxiety or depression at least once a month. I really want to spearhead this idea that we can go deeper within ourselves and cultivate a more meaningful relationship with not only the people around us, but dealing with this aspect of what cancer does to our lives, and how we can shake it up a bit to find meaning in it. That was a lot. But that's it in a nutshell.

Brian McCloskey 7:24

The Cancer Patient Lab services prostate cancer, brain cancer, and pancreatic cancer. Prostate cancer, which is what I have, afflicts men, of course. We hear a lot that men internalize their cancer differently than women. I'm just curious, as you've gone through interviewing 200 cancer patients, diverse cancer patients, what have you learned about how men and women handle this disease? Are there best practices for our patients that they can take away from this conversation?

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Savio P. Clemente 8:36

I would say about 70% of my interviews were mostly females. They were ready and wanting and willing to talk about their journey and what cancer has done to upend their lives, and what cancer has shown them over the course of their treatment. **It was very hard for me to get males to talk about it, because it really goes against the grain of what they think that their life is, or their power in the world, and how they want to express it.**

Even more compelling was the fact that I couldn't find males of color to speak about their cancer journey. You would think that they would be featured in a large publication, that their story would be out there. But they felt to a large degree that their story was something that they wanted to keep hidden, which I respect. But that was actually very difficult.

In my coaching clients, I coach them on this aspect of, “This horrible thing happened to you. Now, what do you want to do with your life? How do you want to create amplification and tell your story and have that be spread as a vehicle and a mechanism for hope?” I go back to my training. This idea of positive psychology. This idea of not only bouncing back and having resilience, but seeing the vision of how you want to feel. It's not a goal, but it's a vision of how you want to feel, and where you want to see your life going from there. Because, as you mentioned, most of your audience are stage four, or some of them are. It's this idea of, “Well, I have no more hope.” But there's always some level of understanding and some level of overcoming and some level of wisdom that you can glean from that. It's really this idea of flourishing, seeing yourself as growing, despite the treatments that you're going through, seeking social support with your friends and family.

This idea of self-efficacy and self-regulation theory, this idea of managing that anxiety, using tools like breathwork, or meditation, or even **journaling is a really great tool, because it's a very private thing that we all go through. Journaling really helps a lot of my clients process those ups and downs.**

This idea of “what is wellness?” and “what is illness?” – is illness the absence of wellness? What is all this? A lot of people get confused. They say, “I'm in remission, or I'm out of treatment, but I don't feel well. I don't see life the way I used to see it.” It's also coming to terms with the new normal.

Brian McCloskey 11:19

Cancer is this cloud that weighs on top of everybody.

How do patients resume some level of normalcy in their lives, so that they're not completely consumed by this disease?

It's a very hard thing to do, quite honestly. Because as patients, we're constantly reminded that we have the disease, simply by the fact that we're going through treatment. You have to wake up; you have to take a medication. Or you've got to go to the hospital because you've got to have surgery, or you've got to have labs. There are all of these reminders.

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Honestly, for people that are family members, friends, after years, that can be really tiresome to be around somebody who's constantly burdened by this disease. Talking about cancer every day is not a fun thing to do. I'd rather talk about sports or whatever.

How do people navigate the normalcy from managing the disease?

Savio P. Clemente 12:47

I often say to people, and clients and patients who know someone who's going through cancer, or is going through cancer themselves, is that a lot of your power is given to something that's beyond your control. Literally, you are going through therapy. You're going through chemo. You go to radiation. Whatever those treatment modalities are, they're all physical. They're all things that you can't control. Your doctors are informed. I love my doctors, but they don't really know the end result, right? They're just hoping as well.

The onus is to take your power back to some degree. How can you do that? Well, you can do that by regulating how you see the world and how you control your emotions. What do you see your relationships being? Your conversations with your friends and family don't always have to revolve around your cancer. A lot of the interviews that I did, a lot of people were talking to me about their cancer. I want to talk about Taylor Swift, or I want to talk about something silly, because I don't really need that from you right now. A large portion of the interviews I also did, they mentioned this idea that a lot of their friends and family said, “What can I do for you?” And they were like, “Why don't you come with me to the doctor's office? That way, I don't have to take in all this information. You can be my scribe. You could do something worthwhile for me, rather than having to say, ‘You'll be fine. You'll be okay. Everything will be fine.’” That's great. But it doesn't mean a lot because you're battling and wrestling through your own demons. That's really the key.

I found, and what I do best is, no one can take away your story. Your story is your own. How you want to tell it, and how you want people to feel from it, is up to you. I encourage people that your story doesn't have to be this lofty work, or this lofty podcast. It could be something as simple as just having that deep conversation with your loved one or family member or friend. And just say, “Listen. I don't feel well. I don't feel well at all. I don't know how this is going to end up. But I do know one thing: I do appreciate the fact that you did XYZ for me, or I would rather you do this or have these difficult conversations.”

I lost an uncle last Monday. He had pancreatic cancer, but stage one. He had complications with heart disease as well. His daughter kept saying over and over again, “My dad didn't say anything.” Literally, not only about his disease that he was battling, but other things in his life. I found it very poignant. Because, for me, that's the work that I do. I do the work on the back end, to help people not only survive, but how people see themselves as greater than just living, but seeing themselves as thriving. That's hard with this audience that I'm talking to, because it looks like hope is very dire at this point.

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This idea of legacy is also another part of the story. How do you want to tell that legacy of yours? So they're all mixed into one, but hopefully that lands for people.

Brian McCloskey 15:54

On this notion of legacy: can you just talk a little bit more about that? What have you learned about how patients think about their legacy? Just curious to get the perspectives that you've learned.

Savio P. Clemente 16:13

One of the individuals in my book has stage four pancreatic cancer. He was given a 2% chance to live. He was a finance guy, a numbers guy, and he's like, “Why can't I be part of the 2%? Why do I have to be 98% of the ones who don't survive this?” For him, it was really not only telling his story, but allowing people to see him as more than his disease, allowing people to see him as someone who did the best that he could in this world and contributed and brought as much good as he could possibly give.

Legacy is also this idea that future generations would learn from your experiences, or learn from your mistakes, or learn from your growth or learn from your successes. This idea of legacy is often only thought about when it's at the end of our cycles of life, rather than what we are creating in the world.

A good friend once mentioned to me that at the end of the year, instead of creating a wish list of what he wants to create in the next year, he writes down what he created, even the small wins of what he created in the year that just went by, because for him, he could then say that he did something to move the needle in his life.

Paul Van Camp 17:40

That last comment reminds me that instead of doing a “To Do” list, my list of what I want to accomplish, my monuments to my life moving forward, as my capacities diminish over the years, even though I'm handling my stage four prostate cancer rather well, there's a trimming process that is very valuable to identify what you don't want to spend your time and attention on any more, what is not serving you. We call that the “To Stop” list. I find that that also is of service.

My question relates more to relationships. I remember when I was diagnosed, it's almost 18 years ago now, with advanced prostate cancer. It was terrifying to me. I found that I kept it private for a while, but finally broke out of that, and told people I have this cancer and especially when I had biochemical recurrence, and I knew I was not going to be cured, that this was going to be with me, and it was going to be part of my story for the rest of my life. I did identify it as my teacher. In this phase, I've got this other thing, which gives me an immediacy and a sense of focus and identifying what's important and what's bullshit, and in a really clear way.

As I came out to my friends that I have cancer, certain ones that I thought I was very close to could not handle the information. They could not identify me as a person with cancer. That does

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not compute. They just immediately pulled away from the relationship and withdrew from very long-standing friendships, which was hurtful. It was a loss, and it was a surprise. I couldn't have identified who those would be and who others would be that would come forward, and say, “Hey. How are you doing?” Whenever anyone does that, it opens my heart, and I say, “Well, thank you for asking. Actually, I'm doing really good, or not so good, or challenging.” But to be able to have the conversation and identify the people that you can't have that with. But there's a loss, and the ones that just don't have the ability. Maybe they're not mature enough emotionally to create a space for someone to have a life-threatening disease.

I'd like you to address that. Also the fact that in our prostate cancer forums, not just this one, but in very, very large forums, I think over 50% of advanced prostate cancer patients, the one participating on the forum is not the patient, but it's a wife, or daughter, or grandchild or the mother. But a female that's close cares about the ones that go on the forum and participate and try to find a way forward and how to deal with things.

Savio P. Clemente 21:27
A few things come to mind.

One is the idea of acceptance. That is a hard pill to swallow. I tell people all the time that my cancer is an invisible cancer. It's a blood cancer. I don't have scars. I didn't even have a port. My veins were so good. Now they're shot, but I didn't have a port. I have empathy for individuals who have literally lost physical things. They can't pretend. It's this idea of accepting what really is and staying present in that.

It's sad to see that those relationships have withered away. But that's a common story in the people that I've interviewed, where people just can't handle that. They can't confront it in themselves. They see you as a reflection of that. The only thing to do at that moment is an exercise that I like to do is you say to yourself, “Okay. This has happened to me. Who in the world do I admire?” Try to embody those qualities that you admire. It could be a friend. It could be someone from history, and draw to you those people who support that idealized version of yourself. Because, like I mentioned before, we can't control the physical aspects as they are happening. We have to go through the motions of treatment. But there are other aspects of self, which are the emotions, which are the mental aspects of ourselves, our relationships, even our spirituality, if you believe in some level of soul, what the sole purpose of us having this and having gone through this or going through this is.

I would ask you to cultivate for yourself who you want to draw in to bolster your ability to thrive or to just get through the day.

Eric Hall 23:29

I love today's topic. Thank you for bringing this. Every key phrase or word you have said has been something I've been working on. “Acceptance.” “We're living in the present.” “Journaling.” “Meditation.” “Therapy.” “Thrifer.” I was going to try to show you; I don't know if you can see: I got a homemade bracelet that says “thrifer” right there, because that's what I did.

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In my opinion, this has been harder for me than the physical part. And the physical part is significant. A lot of times people ask me, “How are you doing?” They tend to see cancer as a physical disease, like you said. I'm like, “The mental emotional part is 100 times more challenging.” Because of that, I have put a lot of effort into my emotional and mental health. I'm not negative about my cancer now. I see my cancer as a trigger for me to get healthy in every other way. I'm hoping that that leads to healthy in a cancer way also.

It's weird because I totally feel the part about friends not talking. My own brother, I hardly talk to him now. He's literally never once asked me, “How am I doing with my cancer?” I have to walk away from that because I can't worry about it every damn day. That's the acceptance part.

I don't know if I have a question. But I just wanted to reinforce that all of this is the biggest benefit for me doing this. It's helped my mind. It's helped my journey. Right now my results are really good. I'm hopeful that I might get to go off ADT here later this summer, and give that a try. As I inch towards that I'm having all these thoughts of like, “Okay. Who is the new Eric?” I already know a bunch of that. But then there's a whole bunch more questions I have around that. I mean, certainly I have new friends. I eat a different diet. I live my life and I think differently about stuff. But there's parts of it out there. I'm like, “I don't want to go back to all the old stuff I used to be doing. I don't want all that stress and busyness and lifestyle.”

Now I have this anxiety around “Who am I going to be?” I'm working through that. Whether that's cured of cancer, or I have a recurrence, like Paul just said, cancer is always going to be part of my story, no matter what. It doesn't always have to be the leading piece. But it's always going to be there. It has changed me in virtually every aspect of my life.

I'm not shy to tell anyone about it. In fact, I have a private Facebook group and Caringbridge site. It started out as status updates. But honestly, I have put some deep stuff out there for people. I get a lot of people that comment back and say, “This is just so inspiring to actually see your experience of going through this.” It's not just, “Oh, yeah. I see that scar, or I see that weight you gained, or something like that.” I get a ton of benefit out of processing and putting it out there. And then even more inspiration to hear back that other people are getting value from that.

I want to check out your book. I haven't heard of it before today.

Savio P. Clemente 27:58

Eric, thank you for sharing. I know that wasn't easy. It points to the main reason why I did a TEDx talk. It wasn't really for the fact of doing it. I wanted to tell a cancer journey story. I wanted to tell a story that allows people to have some type of call to action.

I used a framework called ALOHA. We all know that in Hawaiian it means “Hello.” It's a “hello” to your inner self. The acronym is really simple. It's Acknowledgement, Listening, Opening, Harnessing, and Acting. The idea is acknowledging where you are, listening to that inner voice,

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opening yourself up to self compassion and self forgiveness, which is huge in my clients that I serve. It's huge for the people that I interviewed. This idea of letting go and releasing because what you can't pour in, you have to release out. You cannot pour more than what is available to you or what capacity you have. “H” is for harnessing those ideas within yourself. Then “A” is for acting with that purpose.

I just love the fact you circled back to that premise that I really wanted people to take away: that these things happen to us. We might not know the cause of the effect or why they do. But we are living, and at some point, we have to find a way through the maze. Like you, I would never say that my cancer was a blessing. But it did open a path to do this work that I would never have ever seen myself doing or speaking to. I knew only a couple of people who had cancer before I had my own diagnosis. Since then, I've lost many, many people to it. And since then I know a lot of people who survived it as well.

Brian McCloskey 29:41

Eric, the first time you and I chatted, I remember it vividly.

Eric Hall 29:52

That was about month two or three of my journey. I'm about 20 months in right now.

Brian McCloskey 29:59

I remember it distinctly. I had just gotten to the dry cleaner, and I was talking to you in my car. Our dear friend Bryce Olson had gotten us together. It seemed to me that you were almost scared, like **you didn't know what to do**. You were very intentional. I could tell right away that you had to figure this out and to attack it. But there was this sense of fear that came through.

I'm just curious. That was the starting point. And hearing you speak now is not the same person. You've evolved

Eric Hall 31:13

Very much.

Brian McCloskey 31:16

Maybe talk a little bit about that.

Eric Hall 31:19

As I just mentioned, it was month two or three when I first connected with you. Maybe even one or two. I don't know. It was early. No doubt, I was scared out of my mind at that moment. I was diagnosed with stage four with one met. I lost my dad to pancreatic cancer a couple of years prior. That was his second cancer journey. The way it started for me was when I had a high PSA test of 146. I didn't even know what that meant to be quite honest. Then they sent me to a urologist, and they did the DRE test (Digital Rectal Examination of the prostate). He doesn't even say the word “cancer” to me. But he says, “We can buy you some time.” And that's the exact same words, they told my dad in February of 2020, and he passed two months later, in

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April. Those first couple months, that was the mindset that I was in. I was, honestly, I was just so scared. This is the end, right?

But to your point about, “We’re going to attack this.” It’s not just me. It’s my wife, Stephanie. She’s been on some of these calls, and she is a research hound. She has done so much digging. My motto since the first week was “control when I could control”, and that meant lifestyle and supplements. I went vegan. I went plant-based. I ramped up my exercise. I started therapy week one, because I had a previous relationship with therapy. It’s grown. You mentioned other integrative modalities. I have probably done over 50 other things outside of the Western medicine treatments. All of that has been good from a cancer perspective to get me here, but it’s also been good from just an overall health perspective.

I will tell you what the turning point for me was, Brian, and this is shortly after I talked to you, I think it was in month four or something of my journey. I read the book [“Radical Remission”](#) by an author named Kelly Turner. I’m not sure if anybody’s familiar with that book. There’s some similarities here with your book, in that she was a PhD student, and she went out to interview people who had had a radical remission, meaning they had a case that was so far gone that doctors didn’t give them any chance or so advanced, I should say. People that maybe wanted to forgo any conventional medicine, etc., etc. She asked her questions just like, “What did you do to get here?” She came back with hundreds and hundreds of items. It boiled down to in the book that there are nine common items that every one of those people had done. Only two of them are physical: take care of your diet and have supplements to help balance your body. Other things are: have a strong sense for living, develop a deeper spiritual connection, and release suppressed emotions. There are a couple more that I don’t remember off the top of my head. But that was the book that I said, “Okay. I can do this.” It gave me a game plan to say, “I can work on all these other things.” Starting to read that gave me a sense. **It started with gratitude and positivity.** Once you start doing that for a little while, you start to forget about the negative things because you just start seeing the positive side. That may sound weird to people who haven’t done it. But when you start to think one way it becomes commonplace in your life. And it’s not just cancer. It is everything in my life.

It evolved into me being very vulnerable, and sharing what I’m going through. I’m not scared to talk about any piece of my journey. A big one for me has been acceptance. I heard that term thrown out here. That came after a little while of working through these things, but if I go back to **my motto of “control what you can control”, that is crucial. But the flip side of that is, you have to have acceptance of the things that you cannot control.** Working on that has given me the ability to accept that I can’t control those, and those outcomes are there. I’m okay with them. I’ve gotten to the point where I can accept death for myself. I have a harder time accepting that for my family. But for myself, “Yes.” I can tell myself, “I lived a great life, and I got to do all these good things. And yes, it could end earlier than I wanted. But I can accept that.”

This is why I said earlier that working on all this mental and emotional stuff has really changed the game for me. I am at peace most days. I’m not having a ton of anxiety and depression. I won’t say none. It comes up from time to time. I’ve learned much better how to deal with that

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because I do a lot of meditation and journaling and still see a professional therapist and other stuff. I am very different.

Brian, it's interesting to hear you pick up on that. We don't interact a ton. For the most part, I like it. I like who I am right now. That's why I'm like, “Cancer has been a good thing for me in that regard”. It has triggered me to change everything.

I'll say one last thing about positivity. You just said we would never call cancer a blessing. Right? Savio, that's what you just said. I don't know that I would call it a blessing. But I also do not use negative language towards it. I do not say that I'm a fighter or a warrior in a battle. I say that I'm on a healing journey. I don't complain that I got cancer. I did in the early days. That just goes back to my mindset of trying to be positive. In a way in my head, if I say that I'm in this battle, it just conjures up all this negative energy in my body. I don't want that.

I don't know, maybe got a little rambling there, Brian, to your question, but I'm trying to just cover the journey a little bit.

Brian McCloskey 39:11

The notion of blessing is an interesting one. I tell people that it's a blessing for me. Now, maybe that's an overstatement. **But at least the notion that you can look at the situation and see the good in it, rather than seeing it's half empty versus half full. Either you can address it or you can just suffer by it. I choose to look at how to use it to improve my life and to address things maybe that I haven't addressed in the past.**

There's a question that came in anonymously that I'm going to try to paraphrase and see if I can get some insight from you, Savio. We talked a little bit about it just now, Eric. We have some patients that are young, prime of life, that are highly accomplished people, very active physically, really at the top of their game, and their cancer has impacted their ability to pursue things that they could in the past. Emotionally it can be incredibly draining because there's this challenge of always **comparing who you are today versus who you were a year ago. A year ago I could run marathons and could compete in all sorts of different things. Today, I'm just physically incapable of doing that.**

The question is, “How does somebody accept that new reality and enjoy the future, instead of constantly putting oneself through this comparison?”

Savio P. Clemente 41:35

I love movie quotes, so here are two movie quotes.

One of them is from “Shawshank Redemption”, which is “get busy living or get busy dying”. The other one that comes to mind is from “Titanic”, where “we were waiting to live or waiting to die.”

It's a difficult question because no one wants your time cut short. No one wants to not fulfill their wants and needs. It harkens back to what we just discussed a few minutes ago about control

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the controllables, control what you can control, do what you can to move the needle forward in any which way that you can. An idea is to write a list of things that, let's say, worst case scenario doesn't go well for you, that someone can take the baton forward for you, that someone can actually advocate on your behalf, or do some of the things on your list that you would like to have accomplished, not because they're doing it for you, but really, they're doing it as a way to have your memory and your spirit live on. I know now we're getting into the realm of “what ifs”. But this is reality for us cancer individuals who are facing something as awful and terrible as cancer itself.

Maybe the third option is to go back to this idea of vision. I keep mentioning it because it's very important. It's not a goal. **The vision is how you want to feel. How do you want to be? How do you want others to feel and be around you? How do you want your energy to come across to other people? How do you want your energy to be infused in the world?**

Those three things are a good starting point.

Brian McCloskey 43:24

The notion of legacy is really important because it takes the focus away from you. It's about what you want to leave behind, so it's more outward facing, than inward facing. Of course, to be outward facing, you have to be inward facing, you have to figure out what it is that you want to do. But it's the focus. The focus changes to what you want to leave behind. That process of thinking beyond yourself is a way to look beyond the trials and tribulations that you may have on a daily basis. I love the idea of legacy.

Savio P. Clemente 44:15

It's also one of the tenets of most belief systems. This idea of service. You're not thinking about yourself, **you're thinking about how you want to be of service to other people, even though you're going through a painful time.** Even though things look bleak, even though it might not turn out the way you want it to turn out. I definitely concur.

Amit Gattani 44:45

A lot of us have gone through our own thinking and how we want to deal with it. I'm generally a very positive person who accepts reality. But I struggle with saying that cancer is a blessing for me. I wonder if it's determined by the outcome, or where you are in the spectrum of outcomes. I've been dealing with my disease for five years and nine courses of treatment, a lot of integrative stuff, a lot of spiritual, mental, and other support. I have an excellent family and friends support network. But it has been downhill. My health continues to go down. Nothing has been able to put a pause to declining health.

Clearly, cancer has changed me. I was in the prime of my life, both professionally and on a personal level. It was uphill in a good way. My kids were in college. Let's start to enjoy life. Professionally, I was in a good group. I've changed and learned a lot as a person. Clearly something like this changes you as a person.

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I don't complain about the fact that I have cancer, but I still struggle to call it a blessing. Because a blessing would be when you are able to do things that you enjoy. That keeps changing, obviously. I enjoy a lot of things, and I can do a lot. Most of the things now that I enjoy to do. I wonder if it is just a matter of people who have it in control can consider it a blessing. And people who are not finding control, it doesn't matter how positive you want to be. I don't know.

In your experience, talking to patients, if you find that type of a correlation of who considers it a blessing versus who's like, “Yeah. I'm all good, but it's still not a blessing for me.”

Savio P. Clemente 48:10

I appreciate the honesty. Thank you for sharing.

It really boils down to your view of the world or your belief system. A lot of people that I talked to find pain in the purpose of cancer, and found that they themselves, found some relational aspects of how cancer has shown up in their life and what they need to do to respond to it. But I agree, it's not a universal thing, seeing it as a blessing, or seeing it even as a curse. People are just a little bit detached from it.

But I would probably challenge you a little bit to go back to that first question that I mentioned, which is: if cancer had a message for you, Amit, what would that be for you? If you think about that a little deeply and say to yourself, like write down a list, blue sky of some of the things that you think cancer had a message for you. What would that be? I think that would inform your acceptance of it, but also your day-to-day dealings with it. Because it creates this ability to have that exchange which harkens back to my TEDx talk about the stranger. Like I mentioned, I did it intentionally vague on purpose, because a stranger could be anybody, someone that's dangerous, or someone that you don't even know that could be really a great friend in the future. I might leave it at that because I know you're emotional. I know this is an emotional topic for you as well. But I probably want to leave it there.

Amit Gattani 49:38

Being in the tech industry and with my background and everything else, I was not a vulnerable person or an open person. But all of that changed for me. It took me a couple of years of the journey to go through the metamorphosis and change. I write a public blog about it. It's on Medium. I write a blog about my learnings and my takeaways and things that I have learned and how it has changed. I've been very open about it, and, like Eric was saying, I get huge feedback from my audience on how I'm sharing things and how I'm learning things. There are great aspects of things that have come out of it in changing me as a person. My acceptance was there from day one. I mean, I've never questioned it. It is what it is. I'm going to do everything now to battle it and fight it. I read the book “Radical Remission”, just like Eric said, also, a while back. In my very last blog I talked about this: do I consider it a blessing? No, a blessing would be when I've changed, but at least I'm able to do things in life that I enjoy doing, as opposed to being totally disabled by it.

Brian McCloskey 51:41

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Having a child is maybe more of a blessing than having cancer, maybe that's the opposite way to think about it.

Eric Hall 51:58

First off, Amit, on whether cancer is a blessing: that's got to be easier when your cancer results are going well or better or are under control. That is me to this point. I think it's easier. I have thought that there's probably a day in my future where there are going to be negative results. That will be harder. That will test me for sure in this mindset. I also now have this attitude of, “Okay. No matter what, I'm still going to try and thrive through that day, the best I can.” I just want to say I think your question is true. I think it's easier when things are good, and you're enjoying stuff.

Brian, I was going to address your question.

Brian McCloskey 53:18

How do you separate yourself from your past self, your strong self?

Eric Hall 53:24

The first piece of my journey where I started doing that was gratitude, and starting to do a daily exercise of just listing what things I am grateful for in my life today. I'm grateful that I'm alive. I'm grateful that I have my family. I'm grateful that I still have a job. These basic things. Eventually that becomes commonplace, and you start to have gratitude in other areas also.

That also then led to living in the present. Living in the present means you're not having the anxiety about what's going to happen tomorrow. You're not also regretting what happened yesterday. I'm not saying that's an easy path by any means. Just trying to throw out a couple of highlights. I started with gratitude. That's how I got there.

David Plunkett 54:36

At my cancer diagnosis I guess I was fortunate that they were very clear upfront. There was never any question or ambiguity as to what was going on.

My very strong sense at the beginning was one of betrayal. “I didn't do anything to you. Why are you hurting me? Why are you trying to kill me?” That took a lot of time to get over. It got easier once the pain management started to work. It got harder when I was nauseated. It got harder when I came up against those things that I wanted to do that I couldn't do. But getting past that initial anger at the betrayal was difficult.

Brian McCloskey 55:26

Maybe if I can bookend this just a little bit because something happened that might be able to connect a few dots here. I referenced Eric and I meeting each other through a mutual friend, Bryce Olson. Bryce Olson was a prostate cancer patient who lived for nine years with advanced disease. He was de novo metastatic. We became very close. He was the ultimate patient advocate. He used to work for Intel and used all of Intel's Health Sciences resources to support

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him on his journeys. He was one of the first to get into using precision medicine to help him through his disease. Just a couple days ago, I had lunch with the VP of Sales for BostonGene, a partner of the Cancer Patient Lab. We got talking and were like, “You must know Bryce Olson.” because she worked at Tempus, and I've done a lot of things with Tempus as well. She worked at Tempus before she worked at BostonGene. We ended up having like a three-hour lunch, and it was a really good meeting. I sent her a note, and I thanked her for everything. She bounced back just last night.

I'm just going to read a couple sentences of what she relayed to me. This is about legacy. As we think about our legacy, this is an example of how it lives on. She says, “I remember very vividly meeting Bryce and wanting to hang out with him because he was so smart. And his energy was contagious. He confirmed that I must do more for patients with cancer. After meeting him, he left such an impression that I had the ability to retrieve the memory of him, and what he spoke about. At times when I felt overwhelmed with trivial things, it was a way for me to zoom out and not lose sight of the end goal in my life and career.”

They haven't talked in a couple years. He left such an impression upon her that in times when she needed to bootstrap and get through whatever she needed to do, she remembered why she was in this industry, trying to save patients' lives. That is the legacy that he left. That's only one person. He's largely the reason why Cancer Patient Lab exists. I wanted to share that with you because I do think that the notion of legacy is just so powerful.

Any closing words?

Savio P. Clemente 58:51

A few things come to mind. How I end my TEDx talk is this idea of “to know thyself is to heal thyself.” It's always an inside job. We can allow our doctors to do their part, which is the physical stuff that we really can't control. But we need to do the work that involves us figuring out for ourselves our legacy, our impact in the world. What do you want to still create? What are our emotions? What's bubbling to the surface? What are the conversations we don't have, that we should be having with our loved ones, or with friends and family? Even detailing what our fears and hopes are because it's not the end until it's the end, so to speak. That's really important.

As a journalist, I've had the fortune of interviewing some amazing people, like Venus Williams, for example. People look at her as the epitome of physicality. She's like, “No. I'm going through my own journey with my digestive system. People think of me as one way.” It's this idea of being kind to yourself, and not comparing yourself to other peoples' journeys throughout this process.

We use this idea in coaching, which is: if I could wave a magic wand and take away your cancer, David, what are the things you would be doing with your life that you're not doing right now? The purpose of that is not to have a fantasy about it. But the purpose of that is for you to find some small ways that you can still create positivity in your life. So that's what I want to leave everyone.

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Brian McCloskey 1:00:28

Thank you. This was a very complementary session to what we normally do, where we're usually talking about science, math, and models. This is such an important element of the cancer journey. We're honored to have you share your insights with us. Maybe we can invite you back for another session some other time.

Savio P. Clemente 1:00:56

I appreciate it. Thanks, everyone.