

What Can Your Health Tell You About Your Career?
By Joan Friedlander
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Until 1992 I had been, by all accounts, healthy. I am sharing my story with you in hopes that you can use it to make a difference in your own life.

In 1992 I suddenly developed a severe gastrointestinal illness, Crohn's disease, which can be very debilitating. The cause of the disease is unknown, and there is no "cure." This is my eighth year with Crohn's and I have been completely symptom free for 7 months, without taking any medicine.

7 months is not forever, but I can tell you this wellness comes with a certain degree of confidence. (While I tell you this, I mentally knock on wood and give thanks, and probably will for the rest of my life.)

My illness has been a tremendous teacher. I have used it to learn about my values, where my integrity's been out, and to make choices more truly aligned with who I am, and what I am here for.

I had met and heard about people who were far more disabled by this disease than I ever was, and others who claimed to have gotten rid of it. When I fell ill, I vacillated between feeling lucky it wasn't worse, and feeling like a victim, not so masterful after all. I learned that we each have our own process and learn our lessons in our own time.

The first major lesson I learned was to combine the tools of traditional medicine with the process of self-inquiry. I let traditional medicine treat my disease and my body so that I could be well enough to give myself the time to learn what I had to learn from it.

This was very important because despite my wishes otherwise, I needed to integrate the values of my parents and childhood with the ones I had developed as an adult. My parents are both alive, and they were terrified for me. They firmly believe that when you are sick you go to the doctor and follow their prescription. And they are very adamant in vocalizing their opinions. I fought this for the first few months, doing it my way, and got sicker, dangerously so. When I did finally surrender to finding a gastroenterologist, I made sure I found one whose methods and approach were ones I could live with.

My resources and energy were so depleted by this time, I ended up in the hospital for 10 days. It was here, at a catholic hospital (I am Jewish), I learned my next lesson; to use everything I possibly could for healing.

I figured I could use all the help I could get, so I thought of the crucifixes on the walls of my hospital room as my good spiritual friends. I had my family bring in things from home that made me happy. I used my tarot cards on a daily basis to do self-readings and keep me centered. Friends sent in two healers who did some energy work on me

(with the hospital staff's permission). And, I got my biggest insights out of an episode of Oprah Winfrey!

I got in touch with how truly uncomfortable I was about myself in relation to others, and about my very physical existence. At the same time, I felt more connected with people and the universe, and more powerful than ever before, lying in my hospital room. All this while I was being given 4 different medicines intravenously.

I had begun to reconcile my parent's values (the ones that live inside my head) with my own adult ones.

{Often, when dealing with confusion about your career, this very basic conflict may be the first that needs to be reconciled.}

Dr. Carolyn Myss, author of "Anatomy of the Spirit," and a medical intuitive, talks about "what it means to unplug from a belief pattern that has no truth but nonetheless has "power" over you." ¹ In the process of unraveling this you can determine what provides strength and still has merit for you, and what depletes it. It's not merely about discarding the old value (outright rebellion for rebellion's sake is no better than blind surrender), but determining, for yourself, what is true for you now, today.

During the next few years I had periods of wellness and periods of illness. Every time I got sick, I looked to see where I was putting up with something that was not okay with me. The common theme seemed to be that when I was faced with something I couldn't live with, yet also couldn't get a handle on, I would get sick. It was usually people or circumstances that were both unhealthy and who I perceived as threatening to my survival. In my case, it often had to do with employers and employment situations that did not contribute to my well-being, but that I was putting up with, trying to make better.

This is not to say I was victimized by these people, and that they were responsible for my misery, but that I was not making good decisions for myself. I was letting people get to me in such a way that I became ill. I was accepting employment situations that did not provide financial sufficiency and that were dead-end in terms of fulfilling on my desire to express myself and contribute directly to others. Every time I became ill, I took another step in correcting my course. Once in a while, as soon as my symptoms started, I was able to get the lesson quickly, and move on. (It was sometimes as simple as, "this isn't worth getting sick over.")

Nonetheless, it seems my spirit did not think I was learning my lessons quickly enough. As if Crohn's disease weren't enough, in 1998 I developed an internal infection in my right foot twice during the second half of the year. Both times, medicine did not work and I had to have surgery, which then put me down and out of commission for 8 & 6 weeks, respectively. This gave me a lot of time to be still, stop completely, and get things sorted out at a much deeper level. I first read the "Anatomy of the Spirit" during the second round with this, and I finally got it. Perhaps not so coincidentally, during this time I also received a summary of all my earnings for every year since my very first job.

I saw in black and white that my yearly earnings had been heading steadily in the wrong direction for the previous 5 years. Not only was I simply making less, but also much less than the value I provided. I also realized I was, once again, working in a job and environment that was not okay with me, as much as I tried to make it so (some of us are very stubborn). Symbolically, I didn't have a leg to stand on.

In December 1998, I declared I would find a job that would pay me what I was worth, and needed, and one that would provide benefits for me and my son (those traditional values). In January 1999 I started that job. As a result of both my illnesses and those years of insufficient income I had accumulated some debt. I knew that before I started earnestly working to put my heart-felt dream to work, I needed to get my house in order. You can't build a castle without a good, solid foundation. I didn't have one.

I did have one go-around with Chrohn's a few months into 1999. I had gotten so immersed in some of the challenging social dynamics at my foundation job (I found I was dealing with a social scene that very closely resembled high school), that I neglected my longer-term career goals. Once I gained perspective about some of the interpersonal issues that I was once again, getting sucked into, I got well, and got into action.

Like I said, I have been completely well, without medicine, for the seven months since. Perhaps I finally learned what I needed to learn. Only time will tell.

¹ Anatomy of the Spirit, Carolyn Myss, Ph.D., 1996, Crown Publishers, Inc.

Time did tell, and it was not the last time I dealt with the symptoms of my illness. In 2005 I "surrendered" to including medicines prescribed by my doctors, and in the lowest doses possible. I also sought out an alternative treatment to compliment my healing program, Network Chiropractic care. Somehow, between the two, and who knows what else, my symptoms have been in remission for over 3 years, and I feel very strong. Some side effects are bothering me now, but they're minimal and I'll find out if my doctor is willing to lower the dosage of the last remaining medicine we're still using.

This is nothing, if not an interesting journey.

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