



The Top 5 Regrets of People Who Are Dying: Five Reasons You Need to Change and Live Your Life Now

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

When a friend and mentor of mine was diagnosed with a terminal illness not long ago, he kept a blog called the Caring Bridge. The blog chronicled his treatment and descent into death after his diagnosis of terminal cancer. I noticed that the sicker he got, the more profound his observations became about life, what he had contributed to the world and what he believed. Reading this, I often became teary-eyed, and would sit at my desk in deep contemplation of his life, the lives of other friends and people I did not know well that have passed away.

I met a 33-year old doctor a few years ago at a party who had gone to Stanford and then Yale Medical School. After completing his residency, he was diagnosed with a fatal brain tumor. He was good looking and in high school had been the student council president, an athlete and even learned to speak fluent Latin. As I was speaking with him at a party, he told me he had less than a year to live. He found out that he had brain cancer a few days before starting his first "real job" as a surgeon. "You should stop working," I told him.

"I have nothing else to do," he told me. "It is all I've ever done."

He died about three or four months later. When he did, the funeral was very small. He had never had time for friends, a significant other or anything other than work. This taught me how important it is to live the lives we have today. Life is a gift and we need to make the most of it now. What does hard work and success mean if we never enjoy our lives?

Another thing that really upsets me is when we let others hold us back. On a trip to Hawaii a few months ago, [my leg became infected](#) with a flesh-eating bacteria that has a 25% mortality rate. I survived (with my leg scarred but intact!). After several days in a hospital bed, I stumbled outside on crutches and sat down in an outdoor courtyard for patients. As I relaxed, I saw a girl not too far away from me whose wrists were all bandaged up from what appeared to have been a failed suicide attempt. She looked anorexic and did not appear to be very healthy. The worst thing about her, though, was the extreme pain and sadness I saw in her face.

"You just need to realize you are not as good as other people. That is why you keep harming yourself. There is stuff wrong with you and, until you come to terms with that, you are never going to be happy," a man who appeared to be her father said to her.

"I know," she whispered. Her head was down. She looked completely broken.

"You are not that attractive and that is ok. You will find someone. I know most men you have been with have used you. Stop worrying about it."

"I'm not," she said.

"And I am sorry your mother could not be here. You know how she feels about you. She thinks you are doing all this to get attention and does not want to support your behavior by being here. I'm doing my best to support you."

As I listened to all this, my heart sank. I wanted to hit the father. I wanted to stand up and tell the girl how beautiful she was and hug her. I wanted to tell her the problem was not her. I wanted to take her home with me and have my family give her the respect, care and love that she deserved. I was so upset. I went back to my room and cried. I felt guilty and an emptiness inside of me and profound sadness for this girl.

It was her family that was hurting and holding her back. They needed to be stopped.

I thought that must be the reason that God made me sick and put me in that courtyard. Maybe I could communicate to others that it is crazy not to live your life with happiness and for all it is worth. It is crazy to allow others to push you down and make you feel bad about yourself. It is crazy to believe bad, negative messages about yourself. You should do everything you can to be happy, surround yourself with positive messages and live life fully.

What was so sad about this girl was that she truly was beautiful. I could see it deep in her face and soul. She had been CRUSHED by someone and not supported. I wished that her father could see her value.

We are all going to die, of course. The problem is that when we die, we are no longer around to enjoy our friends, families and the world around us. Life will go on for others without us being around.

It hurts me and makes me so sad when I think about the people who never had families and never did anything but work. It hurts me when people are sad and do not enjoy life.

Several years ago, an Australian hospice worker, Bronnie Ware, wrote this short article (below) about the regrets people have when they are dying. The article shows the growth and maturity people experience when faced with their own mortality. It is a wonderful article and one I hope you enjoy.

This short article also went on to be a book, [The Top Five Regrets of the Dying – A Life Transformed by the Dearly Departing](#) that I encourage you to read.

Here is the article that I hope you read and study.

The Top Five Regrets of the Dying

For many years I worked in palliative care. My patients were those who had gone home to die. Some incredibly special times were shared. I was with them for the last three to twelve weeks of their lives.

People grow a lot when they are faced with their own mortality. I learned never to underestimate someone's capacity for

growth. Some changes were phenomenal. Each experienced a variety of emotions, as expected, denial, fear, anger, remorse, more denial and eventually acceptance. Every single patient found their peace before they departed though, every one of them.

When questioned about any regrets they had or anything they would do differently, common themes surfaced again and again. Here are the most common five:

1. I wish I'd had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me.

This was the most common regret of all. When people realize that their life is almost over and look back clearly on it, it is easy to see how many dreams have gone unfulfilled. Most people have had not honoured even a half of their dreams and had to die knowing that it was due to choices they had made, or not made.

It is very important to try and honour at least some of your dreams along the way. From the moment that you lose your health, it is too late. Health brings a freedom very few realise, until they no longer have it.

2. I wish I didn't work so hard.

This came from every male patient that I nursed. They missed their children's youth and their partner's companionship. Women also spoke of this regret. But as most were from an older generation, many of the female patients had not been breadwinners. All of the men I nursed deeply regretted spending so much of their lives on the treadmill of a work existence.

By simplifying your lifestyle and making conscious choices along the way, it is possible to not need the income that you think you do. And by creating more space in your life, you become happier and more open to new opportunities, ones more suited to your new lifestyle.

3. I wish I'd had the courage to express my feelings.

Many people suppressed their feelings in order to keep peace with others. As a result, they settled for a mediocre existence and never became who they were truly capable of becoming. Many developed illnesses relating to the bitterness and resentment they carried as a result.

We cannot control the reactions of others. However, although people may initially react when you change the way you are by speaking honestly, in the end it raises the relationship to a whole new and healthier level. Either that or it releases the unhealthy relationship from your life. Either way, you win.

4. I wish I had stayed in touch with my friends.

Often they would not truly realise the full benefits of old friends until their dying weeks and it was not always possible to track them down. Many had become so caught up in their own lives that they had let golden friendships slip by over the years. There were many deep regrets about not giving friendships the time and effort that they deserved. Everyone misses their friends when they are dying.

It is common for anyone in a busy lifestyle to let friendships slip. But when you are faced with your approaching death, the physical details of life fall away. People do want to get their financial affairs in order if possible. But it is not money or status that holds the true importance for them. They want to get things in order more for the benefit of those they love. Usually though, they are too ill and weary to ever manage this task. It is all comes down to love and relationships in the end. That is all that remains in the final weeks, love and relationships.

5. I wish that I had let myself be happier.

This is a surprisingly common one. Many did not realise until the end that happiness is a choice. They had stayed stuck in old patterns and habits. The so-called 'comfort' of familiarity overflowed into their emotions, as well as their physical lives. Fear of change had them pretending to others, and to their selves, that they were content. When deep within, they longed to laugh properly and have silliness in their life again.

When you are on your deathbed, what others think of you is a long way from your mind. How wonderful to be able to let go and smile again, long before you are dying.

Life is a choice. It is YOUR life. Choose consciously, choose wisely, choose honestly. Choose happiness.