

Prologue - Why Sweat The Dragon's Flame, Running Through Cancer, 8/5/2012, 2:46pm

Dr. Collin Vu, MD at the OC Blood and Cancer Care group was standing at attention slightly off to my right. He just told me I would have had only 2 months to live if we hadn't caught the cancer. 2 MONTHS!!! My right leg and hip pains were unbearable. The growth of the cancers were pressing against my nerve fibers. The narcotics weren't working. It had been 12 long days since my cancer diagnosis without any treatment. I was patiently awaiting a room at the Orange Coast Memorial Medical Center (OCMMC), but at least 12 hours away from starting my first chemotherapy cycle. Apprehension, fear, panic, and nervousness might be normal responses. Not by me, though. Not on my watch.

Unlike most, I was not the least bit concerned. Didn't even raise an eyebrow. Was I in denial, I asked myself? Of course I was, but that ended 2 weeks later when all my hair fell out. One peek at the mirror told the whole truth. Partially, though, my reaction was typical of when I've been confronted with other stresses in my life. I simply don't sweat it.

What good would getting overly emotional or excited by a bad and potentially deadly scenario?

Wouldn't accomplish anything. I had Enlarged Diffused "B" Cell Lymphoma. It was considered highly treatable, many times with over an 80% success rate. At least that's what Wikipedia said. Still, 20% of the time it didn't work. A friendly surgeon reminded me of that. Not good. But it didn't matter to me with the way I approach life.

Same thing happened a couple of decades ago. It was during the 1992 Runner's World Trans America Footrace, a 64 stage, 3000 mile race from California to New York. It was a race patterned after the famous Tour de France. I was running in stage 36 of the race, a relatively, flat 43 mile stretch along the Kansas back roads, from Cuba to Marysville. I had been leading the race for over 3 weeks, since stage 11 in St. George, Utah. Unfortunately, I was running injured. My ankles were as large as cantaloupes, and Tom Rogosinski, "The Young Stallion," was kicking up flames. He had been hot on my heels for days. Tom flamed me that day like I was a saber toothed tiger stuck in the La Brea Tar Pits, much to the delight of the other 20+ runners. I immediately went into my "don't sweat it" mode. I didn't chase after Tom as many runners would have. I didn't sweat it and ran the pace, or minimal speed, necessary to not injure my body any worse than it was. Slowly, I saw myself falling further and further behind. But I remained patient as the new race leader kept running away from me. Why sweat the dragon's flame?

Having the resolve and confidence to stick with that attitude allowed my body to recover over a period of days. By the end of stage 42, running into Hannibal, Missouri, Mark Twain's home along the Mississippi River, I had surged back into the lead. By remaining patient, I started running more and more efficiently. I slowly started extending my lead. By the end of stage 54, which finished in Reynoldsburg, Ohio, I was leading the 12 remaining competitors by an astonishing 18:33 hours! Only 12 stages remained, and I cruised in for a comfortable win.

In my travels through life, I found that success is often a combination of physical and mental preparation

with a sprinkling of luck. Card games like Texas Holdem Poker manifest the luck factor even more vibrantly. Usually, luck is uncontrollable while complete and total preparation is. I've always thought that you only have yourself to blame if you don't take advantage of the gift of time to prepare. That's how I attacked the Trans America Footrace and that's how I attacked my cancer, with superior mental attitude and tenacity. Trans America preparation consisted of thousands upon thousands of training miles spread over 14 years. Preparation for beating cancer was done by visualizing the cancer away with the tiny, little chemotherapy "Pac-man" fighters, and by staying patient through the whole process. I married this mental approach with all the great cancer fighting drugs to run through one of the tougher challenges of my life. "It's always darkest before the dawn," as the famous proverb goes. With that in mind, and less than 5 months after completing chemotherapy and radiation, I played in the 2012 World Series of Poker (WSOP), Main Event, the largest and most famous poker tournament in the world. I placed 95th of 6,598 players, the top 1%. The dawn had arrived.

Running Through Cancer, winning the Trans America Footrace, and going deep in the WSOP all required similar efforts. And yet they are seemingly unrelated tasks. Preparation, Attitude, Resolve, Tenacity, and Smarts all contributed to my ultimate success in each scenario. Yes, working hard is even important in beating cancer, just as it is in winning a transcontinental footrace or placing high in the WSOP.

Trying too hard and sweating things too much can be counterproductive to one's ultimate success. Businessman and analysts may call it "analysis paralysis." Over processing of information and unimportant items get in the way of the ultimate results you're looking to obtain. Sometimes you try too hard to be successful. In the Trans America footrace, runner after runner pushed themselves too hard, too early in the race. This resulted in injury and dropping out of the race.

Funny thing, though, about "Preparation, Attitude, Resolve, Tenacity, and Smarts." It doesn't work just for cancer, racing across the USA, and holdem poker. They are the PARTS or skills necessary in life TO help achieve SUCCESS in most endeavors. And they're out there, free for the taking, for anyone with the desire to succeed. I've done it all my life. You can too.

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