



Regret

Throughout her many years working in palliative care, Bronnie Ware (2012) learnt numerous life lessons and witnessed tremendous growth in people facing their own mortality. Seemingly, and sadly, many people needed to wait until they were dying to work out important things in life; for many, it was then too late or impossible to act on these new understandings because opportunities were lost by the passing of time and poor choices or denied by the constraints of illness.

Whilst dealing with strong emotions of anger, fear, denial and eventually, acceptance of their own life and pending death, patients expressed common themes or lessons regarding regrets about their own lives. The most common five Regrets, listed below, go beyond the material realm of the trinkets of success or the accolades of achievements, and instead focus on the importance of belonging, connection, meaning, priorities, and truth.

The aim of this sheet is to help increase awareness of mistakes made and/or to prevent mistakes occurring or continuing. The italics below are from B. Ware (2012) and additional questions and pointers (Kennedy, 2020) are added to help broaden awareness and explorations of themes.

1. *"I wish I'd had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me"*: Lots of people who are terminally ill look back on their lives and realise that many dreams have gone unfulfilled; and that their own choices curtailed their fulfilling their own dreams. They come to realise that they lived to fulfil the needs, demands, or expectations of others at the cost of themselves.

1. In what ways can you try to honour at least some of your own dreams?
2. In what ways can you be more true to yourself?
3. In what ways, if any, do you behave to avoid the harsh judgment of others?
4. In what ways, if any, do you behave to gain the approval of others?
5. In what ways could you give compassion to yourself?
6. Whose opinion is important to you? And are you appropriately influenced by them?
7. Can you identify some of the trappings of "success"?

2. *"I wish I hadn't worked so hard"*: A very common regret among men but perhaps will increase in women too as their number is increasing in the workforce and in demanding careers. Many people missed out on experiencing nice times and milestones with their children, companionship with their partner, or other goals in life due to giving excessive time to work. Try to simplify your lifestyle and choices in spending time and money and consider own priorities in life, e.g., family, wealth, power, achievement, belonging, love.

1. Why do you work in the job that you do?
2. Why do you spend the time that you do in work?
3. What do you enjoy about your work?
4. Do you live to work or work to live?
5. What is important to you in life and does work help or hinder fulfilling it?
6. Do you give time to what is truly important to you? Why/why not?
7. Is there room to change work, parts of it, or your approach to it in order to harness fulfilment in the job and/or outside of the job?



3. "I wish I'd had the courage to express my feelings": Many people regularly conceal and suppress their feelings to maintain harmony and/or to avoid risking emotional vulnerability. However, this can come with a cost of not being authentic to oneself, living a life of mediocrity, and being uneasy, distressed, or anxious in own self due to unexpressed feelings and emotions. Consider that the responses of others is beyond your control; speaking your truth can show a self-respect, self-love, and self-truth that can eventually harness and improve a healthy relationship...or end an unhealthy relationship.

1. What feelings do you commonly suppress? And why?
2. What factors would help you to express your truer, deeper feelings?
3. In what ways could conflict and expressing more love and warmth help your relationships?
4. What risks and benefits exist in your expressing yourself?
5. What costs exist in your not expressing yourself?
6. Are the risks and costs acceptable and/or changeable? How so?
7. Does your expressions of feelings limit or harness others getting to know the real you?

4. "I wish I had stayed in touch with my friends": Numerous people fail to realise the importance of old friends; friends they've lost along the way, let slip by getting caught up in own lives. Friendships require attention, investment, sacrifice, and commitment to reap the deserved rewards. Consider the importance of friends that provide understanding and acceptance which keeps loneliness at bay, and encouragement, confidence, and assurance which helps attain authenticity.

1. Are there any friends that you've needlessly "let slip away"? If so, why?
 2. Do you have friends that are merely associates (e.g., people with whom you only drink, work, play sports)?
 3. Do you do enough for your friends? And vice versa?
 4. Who gave/gives you strength, forgiveness, and compassion? And how so?
 5. Who gave/gives you understanding, acceptance, and encouragement? And how so?
 6. Who gave/gives you help to be your true self? And how so?
 7. Who gave/gives you trust? And how so?
- (Q. 4-7. Consider reciprocation. Did/do you give to friends?)

5. "I wish that I had let myself be happier": A hard point for some people to accept or believe is that happiness is a choice. Old patterns and habits are good to maintain if they work, but can they be altered if they don't work? Change can be frightful and familiarity (although unpleasant) can be comforting. Try to not filter your choices by what others think and consider your own beliefs that are helpful or hindering.

1. Are there ways in which you hinder your own happiness?
2. Are there ways in which you sabotage your own happiness?
3. What patterns of behaviour or thoughts can change to help you be happier?
4. For whom are your major choices in life made?
5. When you reflect honestly in what makes you happy, what do you consider?
6. What stops you being and doing what you truly want?
7. What is your immediate response (i.e., emotion, thought, action, body feeling) when you read the point "happiness is a choice"? Does this response help or hinder your achieving happiness?

Further considerations:

1. Can you give yourself permission to be happy?
2. Can you care less what others think?
3. Can you worry less?
4. Can you self-care, self-trust, self-accept more?
5. Can you take more risks?
6. Can you live in the now?
7. What gives you purpose?
8. Does the passing of time seem to increase the older you get?
9. Are you currently living in a way that eventually you will regret or will you be satisfied with your choices?
10. Imagine you are on your deathbed: what would you regret?