

## **Cancer Is a C - The Tool That's Helping Me Deal With My Cancer Diagnosis and Treatment**

My name is Dawn Goldberg, and I've been a CPA for over 30 years, a life coach for accountants, and the author of *The Smarter Accountant*. In May 2024, I was diagnosed with stage 4 endometrial cancer—a shock, especially after years of living a pretty healthy, mindful life.

It all started with a “suspicious” ovarian cyst on a sonogram, which led to surgery. When I woke up, I learned that an extensive hysterectomy had been performed, and cancer had been discovered.

Wait—what? I thought my clean living and even my 23andMe genetic test, which showed a very low risk of cancer, had me covered. But tests don't know everything.

Even my initial bloodwork for tumor markers came back negative, giving me a false sense of relief. It turns out the type of cancer I have wouldn't have been detected by those markers.

Each doctor's visit left me feeling like the rug was pulled out from under me. And every time I had to update my family, my throat would tighten with anxiety. I started saying, “I'll find out what the next six months of my life will look like at my oncology appointment.”

But one morning, something clicked. I woke up and thought, *Why am I acting like the doctor gets to decide what the next six months of my life are like?* I remembered what I teach my coaching clients: *I know how to manage my brain. I get to decide how I experience this.*

That moment was a turning point. I stopped letting cancer dictate my emotional experience and took my power back. Cancer became just a “C” in the framework I'm about to share with you.

But what do I mean by “just a C”? It's part of a tool I've taught to my clients for years, called The Model. At the time of my diagnosis, I thought I understood how powerful it was—but this journey has shown me its full potential.

### **The Tool That Changed Everything**

As a coach, I've taught my clients about The Model, a tool created by Brooke Castillo of The Life Coach School. I've always called it the “secret to the universe,” but it wasn't until my diagnosis that I truly grasped its power.

The Model is a simple, five-part framework:

1. Circumstance – The neutral facts of the situation.

2. Thought – What you're thinking about the circumstance.
3. Feeling – The emotion created by your thoughts.
4. Action – What you do (or don't do) because of that feeling.
5. Result – The outcome you create from your actions.

It sounds simple, but don't underestimate its power. The Model helps you understand what's really happening in your brain, why you feel the way you do, and how to change your experience—even in the most challenging situations.

## **Breaking It Down**

Here's how I've used The Model to face cancer with more peace and control:

### **1. Circumstance**

Circumstances are simply the facts—things outside our control, like my diagnosis of stage 4 endometrial cancer. It's "unfair" or "devastating" are thoughts, not facts. When I focused on this neutrality, I could separate the diagnosis from the story I was telling myself about it.

### **2. Thought**

Thoughts are the sentences in your mind about your circumstances. Initially, my brain went to, "This is the end of my life." But I chose to replace it with, "I get to decide how I experience the next six months of my life." That single shift changed everything. It gave me a sense of control over how I showed up for myself and my family.

### **3. Feeling**

Feelings come from thoughts, not circumstances. When I thought, "I'm powerless," I felt fear. When I thought, "I get to decide," I felt empowered. Empowerment helped me feel calm, grateful, and strong—feelings that fueled my ability to face treatment head-on.

### **4. Action**

Actions stem from our feelings. Feeling empowered not only helped me face chemo but also allowed me to keep my life moving—showing up for my accounting work, continuing to support my coaching clients, and balancing everything with more intention than I thought possible.

### **5. Result**

Results come from our actions, and those actions are driven by our thoughts. By choosing my thoughts intentionally, I created peace and clarity in what could have been

chaos. Instead of cancer being something that happened *to me*, I turned it into something I worked through with intention and grace.

## **Why The Model Works**

The Model doesn't deny the reality of hard situations. It acknowledges them while showing you how much power you have over your experience. Cancer, for me, is a "C"—a neutral circumstance. What matters is the story I tell myself about it and the actions I take because of that story.

In other words, everything below the Circumstance line of The Model is optional. Yes, your thoughts, feelings, actions, and results are optional.

If you're facing a difficult situation, whether it's cancer or another challenge, I want you to know that you have more power than you think. The Model is a way to take that power back and live intentionally, no matter what life throws your way.

## **Epilogue: The Best News**

I couldn't end this without sharing the most hopeful part of my story. My latest PET scan shows I'm now cancer-free.

It's a moment I'm profoundly grateful for, but I know it didn't happen by chance. The Model helped me stay grounded, positive, and intentional during every step of this journey.

Looking back, I realize how much this tool helped me not just survive cancer, but thrive through it emotionally and mentally.

And no matter what happens in the future, I know that The Model will be my go-to tool because when I can manage my mind, I can manage everything else.

If you're going through something difficult, please know that tools like this can make a world of difference. You've got this. And you're so worth it.