

Questioning Protocol: How one mom dispensed equal doses of humor, humility, and corporate smarts to help her family navigate their healthcare crisis

Randi Redmond Oster

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As a guide for parents and caretakers, Oster's memoir is practical, compassionate, and focused.

Questioning Protocol, by Randi Redmond Oster, gives voice to every parent or caretaker who has ever navigated the medical jungle with a sick child. The book is organized chronologically through the family's struggle; it begins just before the diagnosis (Crohn's disease) with the fateful words of Oster's then fifteen-year-old son: "Oh, Mom? For the past 10 days of so, it really hurts when I pee." Those words and the events that transpire as a result rocket Oster's life into chaos, confusion, and conflict.

The author's engineering background and business savvy, with her accompanying appreciation of detail and structure, set this book apart from a simple "mom memoir." Oster is a tenacious problem solver. As a mother advocating for her son, she is shrewd and fierce. She is brutally honest in her openness and in the family dialogue and conflict she shares—f-word and all. Through it all is the strongest thread of familial strength: humor. Humor is a satiating gift for mothers and others who read this book; it allows them—even invites them—to have space for levity in their lives.

Oster's narrative voice is sharp and clear, balancing the immediacy of first person and thoughtful authorial reflection. The pace modulates well through each part of the story, displaying foreboding, frantic, and heartfelt moments well.

The "What Can You Do Now" sections are easy-to-find, practical lists of advice at the end of the more memoir-like chapters. The advice is simple and adaptable yet profound, containing life-giving aphorisms like "Complete one action at a time." The book isn't limited to the practical—such times of crisis go soul-deep, as Oster says, "Now, I understand why we pray together, so we are not alone. I am part of a community." Those who have faced or are facing the twisted maze of ER visits, diagnoses, and treatments, and the desperation of being passed from doctor to doctor will feel comforted and equipped with Oster alongside them.

Oster's story and its accompanying wisdom can bring comfort to parents of sick children—and compels them to action and advocacy.

MELISSA WUSKE (Fall 2014)

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