

CASE STUDY: JANE

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Jane might want to ask herself if she's ready to take a good look at herself in the midst of this crisis. Learning that you have breast cancer is a huge piece of information to adjust to and there are no road maps to doing so. But additionally there's the fact that this will alter the way she will be able to function for an unknown period of time. She might want to ask herself if she wants to take charge of the situation – where it's possible -- or would it be easier to let things happen to her?

If Jane decides yes, it's the latter, a good place to start would be creating a simple but effective long term plan for herself. This includes careful consideration of the following and steps needed to achieve them:

1. What do you want? Although this can change, having a starting point allows you to plan.
2. What do you think you need? These are the basics that allow you to thrive.
3. What are your intentions for how you want to go through this experience? This is about mental attitude and your behavior.
4. What do I need for my career support team to help me through this? Your career track has taken a big turn, at least in the short term, and you need to reach out to stay in place.

Jane has many options. They range from full disclosure about the situation, including what she knows and doesn't know about her medical needs to her employer, her direct supervisor and human resources; the other end of the spectrum which would be to take a leave of absence for the surgery without telling anyone why. There are many variations in between but much depends on Jane's own personality, her communication skills, the culture within her office and any history of others who have gone through similar medical problems, and her own determination to keep her job.

ROSALIND JOFFE, CAREER COACH

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Because the law firm is large, there is absolutely someone working in an HR role even if it is an administrator or a lawyer. Find out who that person is and have a conversation with them as soon as possible. Before having this meeting, Jane should know precisely how many vacation and personal days she has remaining in the event that she may need to use them. And she should also check with Cancer and Careers to understand her legal rights.

There certainly is a chance that Jane will be unable to work the many hours she has been working prior to her cancer diagnosis. There are two issues related to this: the first is whether or not Jane can physically work as hard, and the second is the expectation that most law firms have young associates work a million hours in order to prove themselves. It's understandable that Jane is fearful about losing or jeopardizing her job but her health is the priority. I wouldn't recommend that she make any decisions about what she is going to do after the three weeks she is out but just to focus on getting better and crossing that bridge when she comes to it.

Lawyers are very risk averse and usually do everything to avoid litigation. This said, Jane should find out what kind of policy the law firm has in place and also if there have been any situations where someone was ill, took time off and then came back to work. If Jane's firm simply doesn't support Jane in the way that she needs, at her level she is a highly marketable lawyer and will find a job at another law firm or even as in-house counsel.

JULIE JANSEN, CAREER COACH

WEB RESOURCES

- Cancer and Careers - www.cancerandcareers.org
- Cancer Legal Resource Center - www.cancerlegalresourcecenter.org
- Equal Employment Opportunity Commission - www.eeoc.gov/facts/cancer.html
- Fertile Hope - www.fertilehope.org
- Imerman Angels - www.imermanangels.org
- I'm Too Young For This! - www.i2y.com
- Job Accommodation Network - www.jan.wvu.edu
- Patient Advocate - www.patientadvocate.org
- Planet Cancer - www.planetcancer.org
- Workplace Fairness - www.workplacefairness.org

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This document was put together to provide guidance on common work and cancer related issues. For personalized career coaching assistance please contact Cancer and Careers. For personalized legal advice please contact the Cancer Legal Resource Center.