

## 7 Big Ideas for Regaining Power in the Workplace with Chronic Illness

- 1. Focus On What You Can Control.** You may not be able to control the course of your illness, but you can control the direction you take and the choices you make regarding that illness in the workplace. *View your chronic illness as a challenge to meet, not an obstacle in the way.*
- 2. Ignore The Nay Sayers.** People will tell you that since work is stressful, that rest is the solution for chronic illness. Not true. Unpleasant work, too much work or work that is too physically demanding can be bad for anyone's health. Not working can be stressful, too. Your chronic illness presents you with more challenges than before, but throwing in the towel is not the only option. *Shape your work environment to meet your needs and you'll help yourself.*
- 3. Come Out Of The Closet.** Chronic illness is nothing to be ashamed of. If your illness impacts your work, keeping it a secret depletes your precious energy and gets in your way. Know your rights under the ADA and FMLA. Maintain your right to privacy. And be judicious with your information. But don't take on the burden of pretending that you don't have a chronic illness. *Be as public as you need to be and as private as you want to be.*
- 4. Don't Just Survive - Thrive.** It's easy to feel that survival is enough. And most people won't expect more from you. But chronic illness or not, you weren't born for mediocrity. Raising the bar doesn't mean doing more than you can; it means aim high and seek what you need to thrive. *Reach beyond relief; go for the satisfaction.*
- 5. Control The Message.** Other people on the job expect you to set the tone, and you can influence the way they respond to your illness. Design and control your message: What and how much do you want to say? To whom do you want or need to say it? When and where do you want to talk? *Get out in front of the conversation.*
- 6. Don't Let Your Illness Define Who You Are.** Some people might try to paint you as a martyr; others may consider you less worthy of recognition or promotion. Neither extreme works to your advantage; each gets in your way. The message you want to convey is that your chronic illness is simply one of several cards in your deck, just like anyone. *A chronic illness is neither a source of shame nor a source of pride.*
- 7. Look for the silver lining.** Although you may not believe it now, workplace success in the face of illness can be transforming. Many of us have found new strength and confidence, qualities we never knew we had, as a result of our illnesses. We use this new found power to face other life challenges. *It need not all be about the bad news.*