

Keep Working with Chronic Illness *Workbook*



*Strategies to achieve
career satisfaction while
living with chronic health
challenges*

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3rd Edition



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Introduction

No single factor is as important to career success as self-esteem. Yet living with chronic illness can reduce even the strongest self-esteem. Why? Because suddenly you are facing limitations, your own sense of vulnerability, and the question: *will I be able to do all that I want to do in the future?*

Confidence stems from the knowledge that you accept who you are, warts and all. The most successful people understand that everyone has limitations, and they can recognize and accept their limitations. Still, confident people have a fundamental certainty about their ability to cope with problems and adversity.

Confident people act. They recognize that although they cannot control the outcomes, they can have a strong influence on them. And while you cannot control your health, you CAN control your thoughts!

Having a chronic illness can feel very limiting. That's why this workbook begins with **Three Daily Practices for Self-observation**. No matter what stage you're at in your work life, the insights you gain will be invaluable to your success.

The Keep Working with Chronic Illness Workbook was designed to show just how many options you have available to you right now.

To deepen your awareness of these options, the following guidelines, key questions and self-coaching exercises will help you explore:

- A realistic assessment of your job skills
- How your illness impacts those skills
- How your values would be expressed in your ideal work environment
- If your current job is meeting your needs
- Job search strategies

These sections are the heart of the workbook. This is where YOU take charge, and take the actions that will help you thrive in your work life. Be gentle with yourself, get the support you need, and go at your own pace. However, please be as thorough as you can. Of course, you should feel free to complete only those exercises that are relevant to your specific situation. You can come back to them anytime you need to.

Three Daily Practices for Self-observation

A diagnosis of chronic illness most likely means that you are experiencing significant life changes. Chronic illness can affect both how you feel and your capacity to function. These, in turn, can impact your interpersonal relationships and your ability to work.

You might feel that just about everything about you has changed, and nothing is the same. Making this even more challenging, chronic illness is not a single event to which you can adapt. Rather, chronic illness tends to change frequently and unpredictably, making it difficult to hold on to a clearly defined picture of yourself.

There is something you can do about this now. You can work to develop your capacity for self-observation so that you can respond more efficiently, and be more effective. You're probably thinking, "But I'm already too self-aware. I pay too much attention to how I feel and everything I do wrong." But I am describing something different here.

For instance, do you find that when you notice a symptom, you rate or judge it, e.g., "This isn't that bad," or "I'm lazy for feeling this way"? Or, do you wonder about the cause of the symptom, and then worry about its effect? For example, when you notice that your body is very tired or you're feeling a lot of pain, you may wonder what might have sparked it, or what it means to your plans. This kind of reflection is understandable, and it can also help you see the relationship between cause and effect regarding your illness. But if you do this before you give yourself enough time to "be in the experience," you will miss significant information about the pain or fatigue. When you are able to clearly identify your experience and your capacity, you will be prepared to make better decisions.

Objective self-observation can lead to many positive rewards. This awareness allows you to avoid being blindsided, crushed, or defeated by the constant variances of your symptoms. Turning your attention inward, toward your experience in this moment, without judgement or stories, allows you to access the "warrior spirit" that I refer to in my book, **Women, Work and Autoimmune Disease: Keep Working, Girlfriend!**

The following three daily practices are designed to help you tune in, notice your symptoms, and identify your physical, mental, and emotional states. It can be tempting to judge yourself harshly when your symptoms change what you were able to do last year, last week, or even a moment ago. But that's distraction and only leads you to miss what you need to know about your body, your mind and your emotional state of being. With these exercises, you have the power to create a positive and expansive space for yourself by focusing on awareness and action. **Take charge, now!**

Take Your Pulse

The following exercise develops your capacity for neutral self-observation. Its purpose is to give you the information you need about your mind, body, and mood so you are able to respond to your environment as effectively as possible. **The Pulse** is designed to focus your attention on your experience, without extraneous stories about how or why this is the case, and without your negative judgments. These thoughts distract us from paying attention to our self.

Commit initially to doing **The Pulse** at the same time on a daily basis, so it becomes rhythmic and comes easily. You might want to use it at the start of each day to gauge how you are doing, so you can form intentions for the day ahead with clarity about your current state of being. This makes it more likely that you will end your day feeling satisfied that you fulfilled your intention.

Once you are comfortable with using **The Pulse**, you can use it *in the moment*, as you need it. Use it when you need *to regain your center, your core, or your balance*.

Instructions:

Take a cleansing breath in and out to *clear the space*. Some people like to close their eyes as they do this, and keep them closed throughout each step.

Gently guide your awareness to yourself. As you ask yourself each of the following questions, put your attention on the specific question. Avoid asking yourself additional questions or offering reasons, such as *why*, or *how* this might be so. For example: I am tired because my difficult boss made me stay at work too long, my mind is racing because my co-worker is making me so tense I can't think, or I can't stand that my mood is happy because it is sunny, and I have to rely on the weather to be happy. Remember that the purpose is to focus on noticing what is going on, rather than becoming distracted by looking for reasons, or by blaming yourself.

Ask yourself:

1. **What am I sensing in my body?** Both outside (skin, surface) and inside (going down through your mouth, to your lungs and belly)? *This question relates directly to noticing your body sensations.* When we experience pain, fatigue, or other symptoms, we are likely to ignore them or clump them all together. But when we notice individual sensations, we are giving that sensation a moment of attention that allows it to *breathe*. When a sensation is allowed to breathe, sometimes the sensation actually lessens in intensity. By noticing the lower intensity of a sensation, we are acknowledging important information. We can create action with this in mind.
2. **What is the quality of my thinking process?** *This question relates directly to the quality, rather than the content of your thoughts.* As you consider this, notice pacing, intensity, and clarity. This information is valuable because when our ability to process information changes, it can impact our performance. Recognizing this change allows you to create effective action.
3. **What is my experience of my mood?** *This question relates directly to your overall emotional state.* Mood is the backdrop for all we do. Mood sets the stage for our response to a specific stimulus. It is not momentary. It is not a response to one thing. Recognizing your mood allows you to understand, and hopefully, take better charge of your response to your environment.

Set and Fulfill Your Intention

As part of your daily practice, you will set an intention. It can be for a single event, such as a business meeting, or for the entire day.

Setting intention differs from goal setting, which is defined as: an ideal or long-term purpose. Note that the American Heritage Dictionary defines intention as:

1. *A course of action that one intends to follow, or*
2. *An aim that guides action; an objective.*

Consider how intention and goal setting might differ for you.

Why is intention important? Because chronic illness can bring frequent and unpredictable changes in your health that make it difficult to stay in the present moment. This can lead you to worry about the future, or get stuck thinking about past events rather than focusing your attention on the actions you can take right now. You can strengthen your ability to set intention with practice. Use intention to guide your actions and improve your efforts. Remember to be gentle and encouraging towards yourself.

Instructions:

Ask yourself:

What is my intention for _____? (Fill in the blank with whatever comes to mind, e.g., this day, the upcoming meeting, or another time period or event.)

Based on those answers, how do I want to “show up,” or present myself to others? (This refers to how you want to appear to others. It does not always reflect how you are actually feeling.)

Using one of yesterday's intentions, journal your answers to the following questions.

What did I do that fulfilled my intention?

What did I do that got in the way of my intention?

What might I do differently in the future that would allow me to fulfill my intention?

Focus Your Energy

Our energy often waxes and wanes with our symptoms. It can also become dispersed and unfocused, which means we are not functioning at our true capacity. This exercise is designed to help you gain clarity concerning how your energy might affect how you feel about yourself, and how others might respond to you.

The purpose of this three-step exercise is to bring your awareness to your energy so you can develop your ability to harness it, use it to your full capacity, and take charge of your life.

Instructions:

Balance: Creating a Unified Experience

Bring your attention to your body, and to the field of energy that surrounds it. Notice that we are generally only aware of the energy that is in front us, because that is where we put our attention. By noticing the energy field around us, we sense and observe, rather than stay in our thoughts.

Ask yourself:

- Is the energy field in front of me even with the energy field in back of me?
- Is the right side of my energy field even with the left side of my energy field?
- Is the energy field above my head even with the energy field below me?

Pause to feel the response to the sensation. You are not trying to direct your attention, only to notice and feel. Can you imagine the difference it would make if your energy fields were more balanced?

Gravity: Sensing our weight to intensify our experience of grounding.

Ask yourself:

- Do I feel the sensation of gravity (weight) in my body?
- Can I feel the weight of my arms, my internal organs, my body?

Sense the quality of these feelings.

Inquiry:

Here, we are letting ourselves imagine potential. Why is this important? Because living with chronic illness can make it more difficult to feel hopeful, and hope is the lynchpin for change.

Ask yourself:

- What would it be like if I could have 5% more of ____ (*fill in the blank with whatever comes up for you*) in my life?
- What would it be like if I could have 75% of ____ (*fill in the blank with whatever you said above*) in my life?

Self-assessment

Part One: What are my skills?

The Purpose: To identify your core strengths as a worker. When chronic health problems force you to notice what you cannot do, or cannot do in the way that you used to, it is very empowering to concretely identify what you can still do well.

Instructions:

An effective way to approach this exercise is to refer to your most current and complete resume. This reminds you of the kinds of tasks, skills, and competencies that you have acquired. Below are some examples to help you get started. They are intended to spark your thinking. Feel free to cross out and replace them with your own list. Once you have created your lists, review this and put an asterisk * next to the specific items that you want to keep doing. Be as thorough as possible, because this will be a foundational element in the next steps.

You might want to include notes, comments, or examples, (e.g., if you used a skill in different settings, competencies you are particularly proud of, etc.). Remember, this is your tool.

Tasks that I have done in jobs

Project management

Writing and/or editing

Training others

Customer service

Fundraising

Supervising and/or managing people

Lifting and carrying heavy boxes

Operating machinery

Leading meetings

Personal Characteristics that I bring to a job

Meeting deadlines

Coping with interruptions

Relating well to those around me

Working well with others

Maintaining a positive attitude

Managing time effectively

Responding positively to conflict and managing it well

Enjoying juggling multiple projects

Self-starter

Highly motivated

Skills

MS Office

MS PowerPoint

Dragon NaturallySpeaking

Office intranet

Desktop publishing

Internet and email

Highly detailed project management

A/R Accounting procedures

Coding

Self-assessment

Part Two: What tasks do I want to continue to do?

The Purpose: To increase your preparation by knowing what you want to do, and what you don't want to do, based on your actual experience.

Instructions:

On this page, copy and paste the task list that you created in Part One. Or, mark the list above. Focus your attention on the tasks that you enjoy, the tasks that you are willing to do but do not desire to do, and the tasks you do not want to do again. Create a marking system that works for you.

What follows is an example.

Using this rating system: *Y= want to do* *N= do not want to do* *M= will do*

Tasks that I have done in jobs

Project management **Y**

Writing and/or editing **Y**

Training others **N**

Customer service **M**

Fundraising **N**

Supervising and/or managing people **Y**

Self-assessment

Part Four: How do my symptoms impact my skills?

The Purpose: To know how your skills as a worker are influenced by your symptoms, so you can make knowledgeable decisions.

Instructions:

Ask yourself these questions and write down your answers:

1. Which of the tasks from Part One do you need to restrict *all* of the time because of continuous symptoms?

2. Which of the tasks from Part One do you need to restrict *some* of the time because of periodic symptoms?

3. Which tasks are inherently *harmful* to your health? Harmful means something that actually makes your condition worse, not just feels difficult in the moment. It is important to distinguish between the two for an honest evaluation.

4. What *work-arounds* are *necessary* for you to get the job done without harming your health? You might substitute the term *work-arounds* with *adaptations, modifications, or accommodations*.

5. What *work-arounds* could help you do your job better, but are *not absolutely necessary*?

Self-assessment

Part Five: What do I value most about a good working environment?

The Purpose: To know what matters to you within your work environment, so you can make effective decisions.

Instructions:

Imagine your ideal work environment. Consider everything about it: when you arrive and when you go home, the kind of people with whom you would work, the kind of work that you would be doing, the tools, skills, and competencies you would use, how you would feel about yourself, your work, your co-workers, and the organization for which you work.

1. Make a list of what you would ideally like to have in your job. Here are some examples to help you get started:

- *Achievement (e.g., I'm proud of my contribution to the work of the organization.)*
- *Independence (e.g., I have the autonomy to carry out my tasks as I see fit.)*
- *Recognition (e.g., My boss regularly praises my work.)*
- *Relationships (e.g., I work on a team and I have friends at work.)*
- *Support (e.g., My boss is responsive to my needs.)*
- *Working Conditions (e.g., I have a short commute and I like the organizational "culture.")*
- *Life Balance (e.g., I have reasonable hours and my schedule is flexible.)*
- *Financial (e.g., I'm paid well for my work and I have good benefits.)*

2. Now assign a number to each item, based on how important it is to you in comparison to the others. What is your number one value? Which ones are less important?

Note: consider that these numbers have changed or may change over time. For example, a certain salary may play a big role in a job decision now, but might be less of a concern in the future.

3. Use this space for anything else you can think of that would matter to you.

Self-assessment

Part Six: Setting Priorities

The Purpose: To have an easy-to-use tool for considering options and making decisions about your career path and job opportunities.

Instructions:

Rather than relying on gut feeling, this self-assessment will be the resource you turn to when making choices about career path or specific jobs. It is a snapshot of the self-identified set of wants, needs, and must-have items that you believe contribute to your well-being.

1. **WANTS** include realistic reach criteria as well as needs and must haves. Example of realistic reach: salary of \$100K plus health benefits and opportunities for yearly increase.
2. **NEEDS** include criteria that are critical to your well-being. You might find that a *need* (no commute) is not a *want* (to work from home). Or that the same items are wants but only one is a need (WANT a \$100K salary and flexible schedule versus NEED a flexible schedule). When wants are pitted against each other, needs make the choice clear.
3. **MUST HAVES** include non-negotiable criteria. These can be tough to name, particularly if they satisfy a health need and make some of your wants more difficult to attain. Example of must have: flexibility to work virtually when necessary.

The following are *suggested* categories for criteria. Add or change to fit your own profile.

Physical Requirements (e.g., workspace environment, commute, limits due to health, etc.)

Organizational Culture (e.g., supportive, entrepreneurial, mission driven, etc.)

Financial (e.g., salary, other forms of compensation, benefits, etc.)

Social (e.g., team driven, solo work, close managerial supervision, etc.)

Training (e.g., Do you need more training or certification? Or will you utilize what you already have?)

SAMPLE WORKSHEET

WANTS:

Physical

Organizational Culture

NEEDS:

Physical

Organizational culture

(Fill in your own)

MUST HAVE:

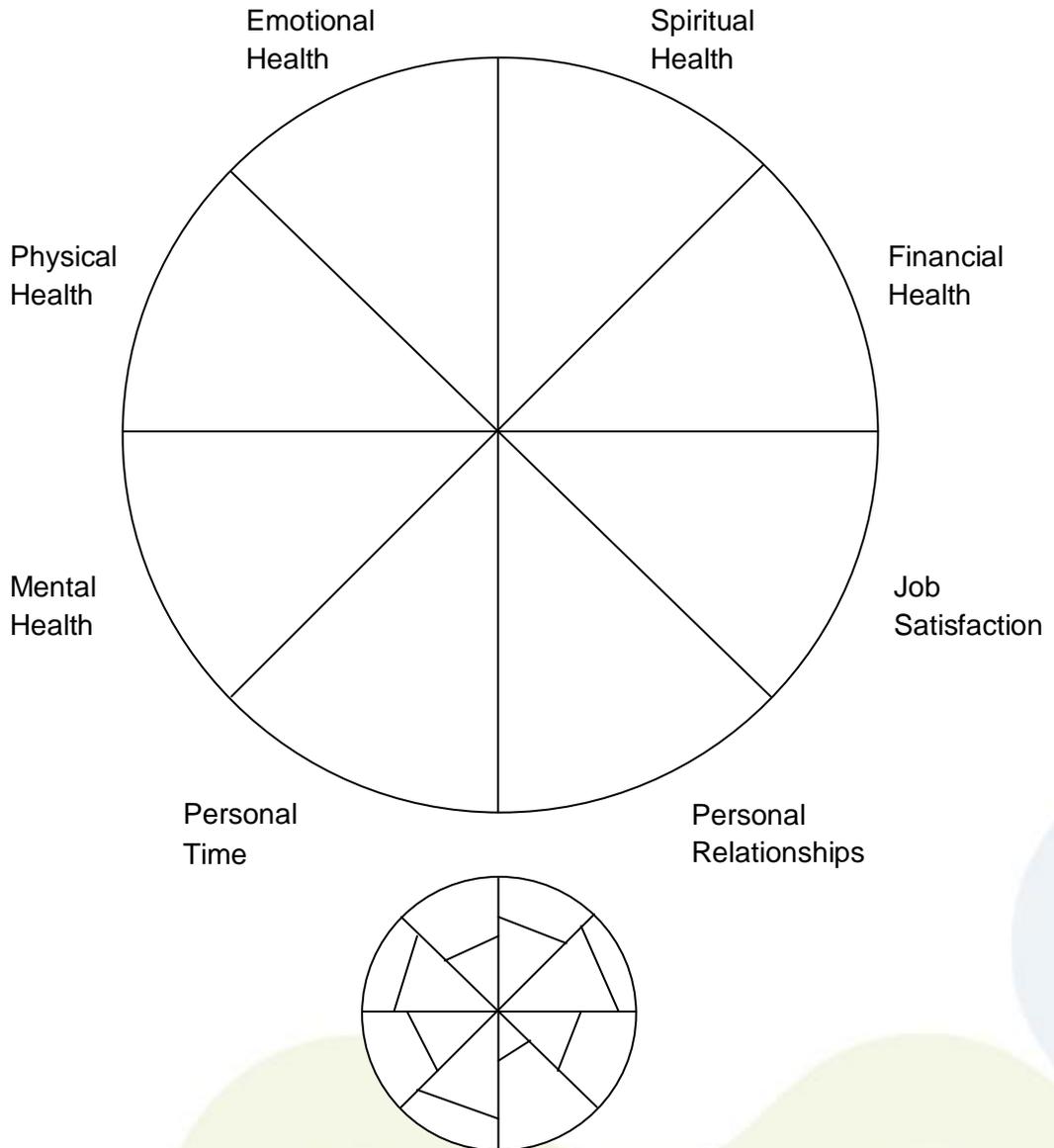
Physical

Organizational culture

(Fill in your own)

Self-coaching Exercise: Wheel of Work Life

The eight sections in the Wheel of Work Life represent optimal health and balance at work. Regarding the center of the wheel as 0, and the outer edge as 10, rank your CURRENT level of satisfaction with each area by drawing a straight or curved line to create a new outer edge. The new perimeter of the circle represents your current work life experience. Ask yourself: *How bumpy would the ride be if this were a real wheel?*



Job Search Strategies

Part One: Setting long term goals and mapping your plan

Considering a major change, such as a finding a new job or a new career, can be overwhelming. Perhaps you are putting this off because you don't know where to start. Use this blueprint to set goals and map out your plan.

Notice this exercise starts at the end point. When you want to reach a destination, it often helps to start with your destination, and work back from there. This is just a template. Fill in the specifics according to your individual needs.

1. Setting your long term goal. Write down your responses.

- a. Ask yourself: *What do I seek for myself or what do I want to achieve?* (e.g., I need a job where my disabilities are not a problem, and I can use my skills. Or, I need a career that I love and that allows me to work the way I need to, etc.) This is your "long term" goal.
- b. Ask yourself: *When do I want to achieve this?* (e.g., one year, three years, five years)
- c. Ask yourself: *What concrete measurements will tell me that I have achieved this?* (e.g., I am earning a good salary, I can work without worrying about being fired, I am developing new skills, etc.)

2. Breaking your long-term goal into measurable, achievable tasks.

- a. List everything you must do to achieve your long term goal, including the details, big and small (e.g., get more training in using social media and Excel, update my resume, contact all the people with whom I've worked in the past five years, etc.).
- b. Put these in order of what needs to happen first to last.

3. Creating short-term goals for your tasks and identifying roadblocks.

- a. Put realistic start and due dates (or set expected time frames) for each task in the order in which it must get done.
- b. Looking at each task, ask yourself: *What roadblocks might get in my way?* Noting potential bumps or impediments you might encounter will mean that you are less likely to get derailed by the unexpected.

Job Search Strategies

Part Two: Where to apply

Now that you have concrete ideas in writing, about your skills and values, you're ready to think about potential employers and jobs that would be a good fit for you.

One of the best ways to explore a new career or organization is to schedule an informational interview with someone who is already there, or someone already working in the same field. Here are some questions to get you started:

1. What do you do on a daily basis?
2. How did you get started in the field?
3. What training or certification is required or recommended?
4. Is there anything you would do differently if you were starting over again in this company, or in this career?

An informational interview is usually much more relaxed than a job interview, for people on both sides of the desk. Most people are glad to help, and enjoy talking about their career experiences.

Sometimes job shadowing is also helpful. You might want to contact an individual doing the job, and ask if it would be possible to visit onsite for a day or two to get greater insights into what the job experience is like.

Job Search Strategies

Part Three: Resumes

When making a first impression on a potential employer, your resume is a key tool. Presentation is often just as important as content. A resume with errors will be immediately thrown in the delete folder. Your resume must be neat, well-organized, concise, and above all: proofread!

The next challenge for you, most likely, is how to address the fact that debilitating symptoms impact your performance at work, and have impacted your work history. Since you are taking into account any limitations you might have due to chronic illness, there are most likely going to be fewer jobs that fit your needs. To maximize your options, spread your net as widely as possible. Identify several broad career options, rather than specific jobs (e.g., regional sales manager for health care products, staff attorney in a small organization with 500-1000 employees, or a physician's assistant in a mid-sized practice).

The following is a basic template for the categories that most resumes include. If you have an unusual work history, such as gaps of unemployment or a job that doesn't fit into a "neat" category, you might consider hiring a resume writer. A resume writer knows how to position your strengths to maximize your value.

The resume example below includes "sample career objective." It's best to include this only if you have very specific career goals in mind. Be as specific as possible. Even if you are not the right fit for this job, the good impression you make can lead to a referral or another opportunity.

Explain how the experience that you do have will benefit the company, and how you'll apply your existing skills to this new career path.

Sample Career Objective: To use my strong teamwork and leadership skills and experience with Six Sigma process to manage a graphics design department in a multi national manufacturing setting.

Skills

Employers want candidates with a specific set of abilities and experiences, and a good job posting won't keep this a secret. It's usually written right into the listing. Customize this section according to the job you're applying for. Hiring managers and other gatekeepers will be

scanning resumes for these keywords (e.g., management tasks such as “teamwork” and “motivate,” or specific computer software programs you can use).

You can use the self-assessment you completed earlier, and refer to older versions of your resume. This is just a quick run-through for the interviewer to assess if you have all the skills you need to do this job. NOTE: If you are purposely applying for jobs that aren’t as challenging or “high level” as you’ve done previously, then don’t include those skills here. For example, if you’re applying for a job as an administrative assistant, don’t mention that you supervised a department of fifty. And if you believe that you will look too over-qualified for them to even interview you, or if you don’t have any of the required skills, simply leave this section out.

Professional Experience

Customize this section as well, including more details about the jobs that are most relevant to the one you’re applying for.

List your past experiences and positions in chronological order, beginning with the most recent. If you have a gap of several months or years, during which you have been unemployed, fill that in with some activity that maintains your credibility (e.g., volunteer work, personal discovery activities, or any part-time work or one-of projects). Hiring managers do tend to notice gaps, so you may need to answer questions about that. We’ll discuss this scenario later in the “Interviewing” section.

Education

List the details of all your formal education.

Professional Development

Describe how you have continued to develop your skills, including volunteer work.

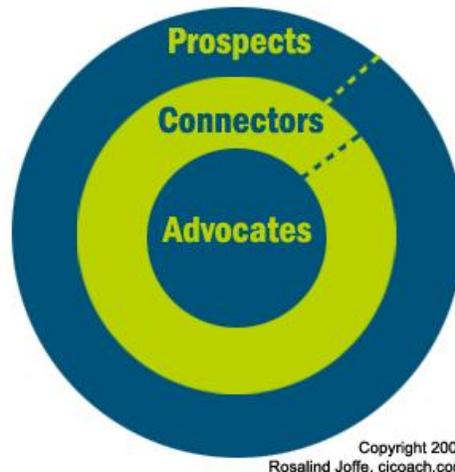
References

Include your current or past manager or supervisor, as well as personal references. Provide their title, phone number and email address.

Make sure your references are aware that you have given their name. If your references know about your chronic illness, you might want to request that he/she not say anything about this if they’re called. By law, this is confidential information.

Job Search Strategies

Part Four: Networking



Overview

The 3 Circles Networking Process® enables you to find a workplace where you will thrive. It is based on three assumptions:

1. You need a job where your health will not be a limiting factor.
2. Your existing network is limited to your current employment world, so you have to expand this network to think creatively and explore the unknown.
3. You need to stay positive about this job search, even though it was the unfortunate result of your chronic illness.

That is why this process starts with your *Advocates* (the inner circle), people whom you know well and trust. Your *Advocates* will help you brainstorm unfamiliar opportunities, and build your network of *Connectors*. You'll ask each *Advocate* to refer you to *Connectors*.

Connectors (the center circle) are people who know about the industry, job market, or organization that you want to get into. *Connectors* might be in a position to hire you, but that isn't a necessary criteria. Your purpose in meeting with *Connectors* is to gather pertinent information, and to make a good impression, so the *Connector* wants to help you by introducing you to *Prospects*.

Some of the best jobs, in fact, never make it to a public job posting. But your *Prospects* (the outer circle) know all about them, because they're the hiring managers, business owners and other people who will interview you for the job.

The 3 Circles Networking Process® offers an amazing opportunity for you to learn about new job marketplaces. But it can be tiresome, and more than you want to tackle on your own. In that case, get the support of a coach, action partner, or a business support group, so you can keep focused and motivated.

The Process

To form your inner circle of *Advocates*, contact 3-5 people who meet the criteria below.

Criteria for an *Advocate*:

- Knows you well and respects you for who you are
- Can think creatively about career/job opportunities for you
- Knows that you live with a chronic illness and you can talk openly about it together
- Knows about several sectors of the work world and has connections there
- Is willing to help you

Purpose of the meeting:

- Let your *Advocate* know the scope of your current job transition.
- Enlist your *Advocate* to help you brainstorm job possibilities.
- Create a strong motive for your *Advocate* to call others on your behalf.

Steps for contacting and meeting your *Advocates*:

1. **Schedule a meeting.** Make the first contact (call or email) to set a meeting to discuss your "employment situation." This could be over coffee, or even a phone call if the advocate isn't local. Make it clear from the outset that you are not asking if he/she knows of jobs for you, but rather for help in brainstorming new possibilities. *Note: I don't like meeting during a meal. Ordering and eating food is too distracting and doesn't allow you to focus as you should.*
2. **Prepare for the meeting.** Expect to hear some questions, such as:
 - Why you are doing this now? (e.g., you're working with a coach, you can't do your job any longer, you're ready to re-enter the workplace, etc.)
 - Why did you choose to speak with him/her? (e.g., he knows you well, she knows your skill set, etc.)
 - Bring a paper and pen to take notes.

3. **The meeting**

- Briefly explain the 3 Circles Networking Process® so it's clear that you are serious.
- Re-establish the purpose of the meeting – not to discuss job openings, but to brainstorm about potential jobs and career choices.
- Clarify how your chronic illness impacts your ability to do your job, and be prepared to answer any questions about this. This is very important because your *Advocate* can only be effective when you have put “your cards on the table.”
 - Briefly recap your job history. (A resume is useful.)
 - Share what you've learned from your self-assessment process, and what ideal factors you're looking for in your next job.
 - Begin brainstorming, accepting, and exploring all possible suggestions without censorship.
 - Take notes. This will help you remember the suggestions, and will show the *Advocate* that you respect his/her ideas.
 - Explain that you want to talk with people who know about the industries or jobs that you've discussed (*Connectors*). Ask for 2-3 names of such people, and ask the *Advocate* to call them on your behalf.
 - Offer suggestions for what your *Advocate* might say to a *Connector* about you.
 - Determine when he/she will make the calls, so that you can follow up with the *Connector* accordingly.
 - If the *Advocate* can't think of names at the time, schedule a time to speak again.

4. **Follow up.** Send a thank you note immediately, and then follow up again within two weeks with an update of your progress.

To form your center circle of *Connectors*, contact 6-15 people who meet the following criteria. They may be referred by your *Advocates*, or you may know them already.

Criteria for a *Connector*:

1. Knows people within the job sphere or industries you are exploring
2. Is willing to speak with you
3. Is not currently in a position to offer you the job

Purpose of the meeting:

- Gather information about an industry or business.
- Learn about other networking opportunities in the field you are exploring.
- Increase the depth and breadth of your knowledge about specific jobs in an industry.
- Make a positive contact with the *Connector* so he/she wants to help you find a job.

Steps for contacting and meeting your *Connectors*:

1. **Contact the *Connector*.** Once the *Advocate* has made a successful contact, follow it up (ask the *Advocate* for the best way to contact this person.) If you're communicating in writing, proofread! Briefly explain:
 - The *Advocate* suggested you contact him/her (put the *Advocate's* name right in the subject line of an email.)
 - Why you are asking for a meeting (e.g., you are in a career/job transition, or you are doing some fact finding, networking, researching, etc.)
 - You would like a face-to-face meeting, rather than a phone call.

2. **Prepare for the meeting**
 - Summarize what you've learned from your self assessment (e.g., the top three values that are important to you for your next job). The more specific you are, the easier it will be for others to help you.
 - Identify the highlights of the brainstorming session with your *Advocate* discussions.
 - Prepare a "script" of points to cover in the meeting, including your personal goals and your expectation of this meeting (e.g., new ideas for jobs you could do, industries to explore, how and what you want to say about your chronic illness).
 - Decide in advance if and how you want to discuss your symptoms. They will likely be a factor in any employment situation, so you might want to let the *Connector* know about them.
 - Learn what you can about the person with whom you are meeting, so you can build a stronger connection.
 - Bring a copy of your resume with you (even if you sent one in advance).
 - Bring a paper and pen to take notes.

3. **The meeting**
 - Refer to your script, especially if you're feeling nervous.
 - Be specific and detailed, so the person truly understands your strengths and needs.
 - Take notes.
 - Ask for the names of other potential *Connectors*.
 - As for the names of 2-3 *Prospects* who are actually in a position to hire you.
 - Ask the *Connector* to call them on your behalf.
 - Offer suggestions for what your *Connector* might say to a *Prospect* about you.
 - Determine when he/she will make the calls so that you can follow up with the *Prospect* accordingly.
 - If the *Connector* can't think of names at the time, schedule a time to speak again.

4. **Follow up.** Send a thank you note immediately, and then keep this person updated as to your progress and find ways to stay in touch.

To form your outer circle of *Prospects*, contact 12-30 people who meet the criteria below. Many will be referred by your *Advocates* and *Connectors*, but may come from other sources as well.

Criteria for a *Prospect*:

1. You have been referred to this person by a *Connector*, or another credible source.
2. This person is in a position to hire you in the job/industry you want.

Purpose of the meeting:

1. Sell yourself. No matter what happens in this first meeting, this person could also help you in the future, or connect you to others.
2. Learn about this job, the organization, and the organizational culture. You are always trying to assess the job fit while selling yourself. Remember that seeking employment does not have to put you in a passive position.

Steps for contacting and meeting your *Prospects*:

1. **Initial contact**
 - Find out from the *Connector* the best way to contact a *Prospect* (phone, email or note).
 - Note: I like email for the first contact because it allows you to ask what he/she prefers as a next step—a brief phone conversation or an interview. There is nothing worse than making your first contact when the other person is in a rush to get off the phone.
 - If you call, be prepared with exactly what you want to say, including what you'll say in a voicemail message, and include your contact information.
2. **Prep for interview** (see "Interviewing" section for more details)
 - Once you have an interview, contact the *Connector* with your appreciation.
 - Ask your *Connector* for suggestions on how to prepare.
 - Learn as much as possible about the organization so you can ask valuable questions.
 - Write down your strengths, particularly how they would apply to this job.
 - Write down your limitations (they may ask!), but put a positive spin on them.
 - Prepare to answer questions about why you are making this career transition now.
 - Decide whether you will disclose your chronic illness and your symptoms.
3. **The interview**
 - Sell yourself to get a job offer, regardless of whether you decide to take it.
 - Learn as much as you can by asking good questions.
 - Present your strengths, and how they apply to this job.
 - Note: I suggest you not discuss your chronic illness or any disabilities in this meeting.
4. **Follow up** immediately with a written thank you note. If you don't get the job, follow up and find out why (if possible). Include a note that expresses your hope that you will be considered in the future.

Job Search Strategies

Part Five: Interviewing

In interviews, make selling yourself the top priority. After all, the workplace culture won't matter if you're shown the door. That being said, this is also your opportunity to interview them, so be alert to nonverbal signals such as whether the interviewer is respectful, and seems happy to be there. Does he or she answer your questions warmly and in detail?

Should you disclose about your chronic illness? Well, the truth is that no matter how impressive you are in the interview, if you can't do the job because of your illness, you won't hold on to it. At some point during the process, it will make sense to disclose. That may be during the interview phase, in the negotiation phase, or once you've been hired and have started working.

Although you might think this is private, remember that the interviewer doesn't know you and is charged with exploring all potential hiring problems. There is no law that says you have to disclose a chronic illness, and Federal guidelines prohibit interviewers from asking personal questions (if the company is subject to these guidelines).

If you've been unemployed for an unusual length of time, particularly in a reasonable job market, it is going to raise flags. That is one reason that some people choose to disclose during the interview process, making it clear that your reason for stopping work is no longer a problem. Also, if you will need special accommodations to do the job that you're being hired to do, you need to disclose early on. That includes things like a flexible schedule, specific hardware or software, or ergonomic furniture.

To address questions about a gap in employment, others choose to describe volunteer or personal discovery activities, depicting their period of unemployment as a conscious choice or a strategic career move. However you do this, just don't ignore it and let it be an "elephant in the room" that leaves you feeling vulnerable. Being prepared will allow you to address this issue from a position of strength. For more ideas, please refer to my **Career Thrive Guidebook Series, *Talking About It***.

Chronic illness is nothing to be ashamed of, nor does it mean you are incapable of being a good worker. But bias does exist, and that can make it more difficult to land the job you want. That is why it's all the more important to be very clear at the outset about whether you can do the job as it is described.

Job Search Strategies

Part Six: Making your decision

Great! You've gotten a job offer, and now it's your turn to evaluate them. Ask to talk with current employees, or seek out former employees. Employers that care about employee satisfaction and retention will respect your due diligence. Find out what a typical workweek is like. How much flexibility and autonomy do employees have? How are employee's personal problems handled? Has anyone quit recently? Why?

Ask about the department's proudest accomplishments. If you hear "war stories" about the team working around the clock to meet a deadline, that's a red flag for the expectations that may be placed on you.

Here are some other issues you can look at to evaluate if this is a good fit for you:

1. Organizational Behavior

- a. Are there mechanisms for employee input into decision making?
- b. What is the organization's hierarchical structure?
- c. Job performance/feedback
 - i. Are there job descriptions? Does this job have one?
 - ii. Are there periodic job reviews? How are they conducted, and do they tie into salary? Are job reviews integrated with job descriptions?
- d. "Employee Friendly"
 - i. Is telecommuting and other flex scheduling in place?
 - ii. Are employees given time, support, and resources for career development?
 - iii. Is there active team development?
 - iv. Is there career development and programs?
 - v. Do they hire from within?

2. Organizational Culture

- a. Are employees encouraged to socialize with each other?
- b. Are there expectations outside of work time?
- c. What is the age range, and how does it differ within departments and jobs?
- d. Is this a diverse group?
- e. How do they define themselves (e.g., friendly, high-spirited, positive, aggressive, pleasant, customer-oriented, innovative)?

3. Salary/Benefits

- a. What benefits do they offer? (When you have a chronic illness, this might be more important than salary concerns.)
- b. Do they offer incentives other than salary?
- c. When and how are salaries reviewed and increased?
- d. Is salary adjusted for inflation?

4. Organizational Mission

- a. Are people's words in line with what's written in the company's literature?
- b. What indicators support this?
- c. Does the organization place a higher priority on change or stability?
- d. Is the organization in a growth mode? How can you tell?
 - i. Do they value entrepreneurial thinking and behavior?
 - ii. Do they value employees who work 24/7, or do they respect an employee's need for balance?

5. Your Job

- a. What are the tasks?
- b. Who are you directly reporting to?
- c. Do you work on a team? What is your role?
- d. Who reports to you? Do you manage them and what does that entail?
- e. How are performance expectations set?

6. Symptoms/Illness Factors

- a. Will you have the support of a team?
- b. Will you have the flexibility to attend medical appointments during the workday?
- c. Can you get the accommodations that you need to do your job?
- d. Do you sense there will be any bias concerning your chronic illness?

With the answers to these questions in hand, you can make a confident decision about whether this job or organization is right for you.

Next Steps

Congratulations on reaching the end of this workbook! I wrote my book, **Working with Autoimmune Disease: Keep Working Girlfriend!** to give you the strategies and inspiration you need to get started on the road to a more fulfilling work life. But it's by completing this workbook that YOU put this stuff into action. And now you're good to go.

The exercises in this book are YOUR toolkit now. Use them, play with them, and own them. And then pick them up again later as things change in your work life. *Above all, keep working!*

About the Author



Rosalind Joffe, M.Ed., ACC

For more than thirty years, Rosalind has made decisions from a unique perspective: *living with chronic illness does not preclude living a full life and workplace success.*

Rosalind Joffe founded her business, ciCoach.com, based on the knowledge and experience that comes from living with several autoimmune diseases, and facing the challenges of staying in the workforce. She is dedicated to giving the guidance, support, and resources necessary to create success even while living with chronic health challenges. As a highly seasoned and well-trained coach, she has worked with hundreds of people to develop the competencies they need to stay at work and in their jobs, find new jobs, or create new careers.

As a recognized national expert on the challenges people with chronic health conditions face in the workplace, Rosalind has been quoted in *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, *The Boston Globe*, *ABC Radio*, *Fast Company*, *msnbc.com*, as well as numerous regional and national media outlets.

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To read more on the subject of working and chronic illness, visit and sign up for her blog:

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