

7 HABITS

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. You can, however, control the direction you take and the choices you make regarding that illness in the workplace. *View your chronic illness as a challenge to be met, not an obstacle in the way.*
- 2. Ignore The Nay Sayers.** Many people will tell you that work is stressful and that rest is best for people with chronic illness. Ignore them. Unpleasant work or too much work can be bad for anyone's health but stress or lack of rest does not cause chronic illness. Yes, you have more challenges now than you did before, but throwing in the towel is not the only option. *Shape your work environment to meet your needs and you can't harm yourself.*
- 3. Come Out Of The Closet.** Chronic illness is nothing to be ashamed of. Keeping it a secret depletes your precious energy and gets in your way. Maintain your right to privacy and be judicious with your information, but don't take on the added 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 with chronic illness, and most of the people who love you won't expect any more than that. But chronic illness or not, you weren't born for mediocrity. Raising the bar doesn't have to mean doing more than you can, it simply means aim high and seek out the resources you need to thrive. *Reach beyond relief; go for the satisfaction.*
- 5. Control The Message.** Other people on the job will be looking to 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? Who do you want or need to say it to? 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 everybody else. *Having 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 is transforming. Many of us have found new strength and confidence – qualities we never knew we had – as a result of our illnesses. We have used this new found power to face other life challenges. *It need not all be about the bad news.*

Your fellow traveler,
Rosalind Joffe