



National  
Multiple Sclerosis  
Society

**MS Learn Online  
Feature Presentation  
Career Crossroads: Taking Charge**

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**Vanessa**

How'd your meeting go with your boss?

**Claire**

All things considered, pretty well.

**Vanessa**

All things considered?

**Claire**

Well, I came to the realization that getting things out in the open with Dave doesn't tie everything up with a cute little bow. There's still lots to do. Decisions to be made. And this disease to live with.

But, don't get me wrong. Dave was great! He's going to have Jeff go with me to Vegas to help set up the exhibit.

**Jeff**

... so I will contact the union and make sure we can get in at 7 in the morning, bright and early.

**Claire**

Great. I will definitely be there by 9 and have plenty of time to meet with the client.

**Dave**

Good. I want you to have some good quality time with the client. And when you get back we'll get you started on your next project.

**Claire**

Then we talked about the stairs situation.

**Dave**

You know Claire, when we were moving into this building, the architect said that an elevator just wasn't feasible. I'm so glad that this office swap has worked out for you.

**Claire**

And we made arrangements to swap offices with the gal on the first floor.

**Dave**

Looks like we're getting closer here ...

**Pat**

Right! We're gonna be roommates!

**Claire**

I know, and everything looks great! I'm so excited.

**Pat**

It's gonna work well.

**Dave**

We should have the phones transferred early this week ...

**Claire**

And we talked about making arrangements for me to work from home. I've got these catalogs to go through to figure out what I'll need, and how much it'll cost. I'm not quite sure how we're gonna pay for it yet, but I know that we'll figure something out.

**Vanessa**

Well, I'd say things are working out pretty good for you!

**Claire**

For now. But, you just never know what can happen with this disease ... or when. And the decision for me to keep working, I'll have to re-visit that for years.

**Wendy Richard**

The choice to continue to work or not depends upon many factors that you'll have to consider for yourself. One – how are you able to perform on your job?

Are your symptoms impacting your ability to do well and to complete all of your required assignments and to excel on the job?

**Marion Levine**

People tend to only look to keeping their jobs when there is an emergency. They suddenly have an exacerbation and they can't continue to work and it's a real problem and then they wonder what to do.

**Phillip Rumrill**

Communication with the important people in your life, communication with employers and co-workers, not necessarily about your MS but about your job performance and ways to enhance it and communication with your health care provider, keeping yourself as informed as you possibly can be about how your MS affects you first of all and then how that might play out in your ability to do your job.

**Henry McFarland**

I think employers tend to understand the illness better. It's no longer a frightening disease for most employers. I think they have information that's not as frightening for the patients anymore. I think the disease modifying therapies has had something to do with this, but I think education probably has had an even more important role.

**Phillip Rumrill**

As a rehabilitation counselor and rehabilitation counselor educator, my bias is certainly in favor of staying employed. That's not to say that for some people the choice to disengage from the workforce isn't a good one. We really want people to be making that decision though um, on their own. People with MS who continue working are happier, healthier, they have greater social capital meaning they have a wider network of friends and associates and they're generally more satisfied with their lives than people who stop working. So our bias initially when we talk with folks is to get them to continue in employment as long as they can.

**Dr. Branche**

People have to realize that MS is a disease that has different aspects. There are good days, bad days, good weeks, bad weeks. And, the important thing with an employer is to be understanding about that. If you have an employee that's very talented in what they're doing, then you have to be willing to be flexible. And to me I don't look at it as anything different than if I have an employee who has a young child, or a sick parent at home. People have a life to live.

And, you know, as much as some people think otherwise, your job is one aspect of your life – it's not your life!

### **Vanessa**

I know that for me, I find it difficult to balance my work with my personal life. But you've got this MS thing that's adding a whole new layer of stuff that you have to deal with every day. I can't imagine how you can deal with it.

### **Claire**

Well, I look at it like I have two choices. I can either sit around, mope, complain, and say "Woe is me." As far as I'm concerned, that is not even a choice. Or I can learn and do as much as I can to deal with, and manage this disease. I've been reading a lot of the stuff you gave me last time, and while there's still no silver bullet cure yet, there are a number of approaches I can take. And some are medications and therapies, while others are things like my attitude, organization and planning both at home and at work.

### **Henry McFarland**

During the relapsing remitting phase of the illness we now have treatments, which are reasonably effective in reducing the number of acute attacks. So we have several disease modifying therapies, a couple of interferons, a couple of other medications all of which have been shown to reduce the number of acute attacks.

We also have a number of symptomatic therapies. So we have some therapies which can be used for fatigue, which are partially effective and can help in that symptom. We have treatments for spasticity or muscle tightness, which can also help with disability in the later stages of the disease. Some individuals will have some difficulties with bladder frequency and the need to urinate frequently which can also cause some difficulties at work and the need for some accommodation but we have medications that can often help to control that as well. So today between our disease modifying therapies and our symptomatic therapies we're in a much better position to help individuals continue working.

### **Kathy Campbell**

I like the fact that there is something that I can do to take control back over some part of my life and if I never ever thought that I would get used to giving myself a shot

I choose to have a life not just at work and so therefore that means I need to choose where I spend my energy. I love to cook. So therefore it was something I wanted to make comfortable. My kitchen has been totally made

into a sit down kitchen, so that you can sit in a bar stool and you can be at the sink on one side and the microwave right there. Dinner can be made without moving once I put everything out.

I choose to scuba dive and so it is where I focus much of my energy, twice a year I leave the country and I take good trips and go elsewhere and to me scuba diving forces me to keep in shape. I will not dive if I'm going to put my dive partners at risk, which means that all year long I have to stay in shape for diving.

### **Sheila Becker**

It started with, I found myself tripping. I used to wear really cute shoes and I moved away from heels to flats and then I was tripping on flats, I was finding that it was hard to hold those little skinny shoes on and so I had to get shoes with straps on them and then I had to move to a foot brace when I really started to fall more often and my neurologist said 'I think we need to do a brace.' So that meant I had to move into oxford shoes and to be honest that was one of the hardest things for me but you know I wear slacks all the time so most people don't notice. It's probably again, like telling people about it's more a problem for me then it is for other people. They don't notice.

I can't do all of the work around the house that I used to do and still have time to do the fun stuff like play with my grand daughter. So we've had the luxury of being able to hire someone to come in once every, she only comes in once every 3 weeks, but that's enough and uh keeps the board of health from coming in.

### **Mary Elizabeth McNary**

In order to maintain balance in my life, because I have a multitude of tasks for which I am responsible as a mother, as a wife and as a counselor you know in a professional setting, I need to remember to focus on the task that I'm trying to accomplish at any given moment. And not let the other multitude of tasks that I'm responsible for intrude on what I'm doing at the moment.

MS is a disease that we can manage. You'll do the same things, you'll just do them differently.

### **Vanessa**

Well, I'd say ... all things considered ... things are working out.

**Claire**

For now. But I do know that as my symptoms change, my work situation will change. And I'll be constantly reevaluating. But I do know that I need to take control of the decisions regarding not only my career... but my life.

**Henry McFarland**

I think if an individual with MS wishes to continue employment probably the most important thing for them to do is to realistically assess the ability to work and realistically assess the type of job they're in.

**Wendy Richard**

And if there comes an occasion where you feel like you cannot sustain that for very much longer than you have to look at a couple of different options. One – can you transfer to a different position that may be less taxing for you within the same company? Two do you want to go to a part-time status so you're not having to be on the job all the time but you're still able to gain some income? Or three, do you want to start moving forward to take advantage of your long term disability benefits if you foresee that you're not going to be able to sustain full-time employment for much longer.

**Marion Levine**

Everyone changes jobs, everyone is going to get older hopefully, and everyone is going to have problems that come with changing interest, changing health or just getting to the point where you're promoted to the point where you are no longer benefiting from that company.

**Brian Lamers**

When I was diagnosed with MS I didn't fully understand what MS was all about. It took me awhile to figure out what exactly it was. And at that point I started to think, you know what? This could affect my long-term outlook in terms of my future employment. And at that point I started to think, you know what? This could affect my long-term outlook in terms of my future employment. And at that point I started to think, at the time I was not that bad off, so I could continue working in the field I was working in. And then I thought, you know what? I don't think I'll always be able to run around, I was in sales at the time, and be a salesman, because you have to be very active. So I started to question what I needed to do at that point, which is very difficult when your 25 years old and you don't know what you want to do anyhow.

**Brian (on phone)**

We're not talking dot-com stocks here ...

**Brian**

But there comes a certain point in time when you say, You know what? This is what I need to do, and thank goodness that this type of career suited me very well to having a disease like I have. Because I can be sitting...I can be immobile and still do my job.

**Brian (on phone)**

These are great long-term funds, but as I told her, you can have a year or two of bad performance ...

**Sarah Keitt**

I try to keep a work-life balance as much as possible.

I spend a lot of time with my husband.

**Sarah Keitt (singing)**

Kissing you on the corner ...

**Sarah Keitt**

We are both musicians, so we love to play and write and record music. Even though it's been 2 years, we still feel like newlyweds.

**Sarah Keitt (singing)**

You're absolutely everything I need to believe ... I believe

**Sarah Keitt**

When I was having problems with my cognitive dysfunction, it got to me. It hurt me to know that I wasn't as smart as I was, or wasn't as capable as I used to be. But, instead of just sort of wallowing that, or accepting it, and maybe quitting my job or taking something a little less rigorous, I went to a neuro-psychologist who evaluated me and really helped me to put together a plan to move forward. And spoke to my employer about it. Had I not done any of that, I probably would not have been able to keep my job, would not have been able to move forward in my career. And it really has to take . . . has to do with taking personal responsibility, for where your disease is, and what you can do about it.

**Mary Elizabeth McNary (to children)**

*Shall we go to the baby playground, or the big kids playground?*

**Mary Elizabeth McNary**

I decided to work part time because of two things really, the children and wanting to be here with them at least part of the time.

**Mary Elizabeth McNary**(to son)

We have to go into that shade, because MS will fowl mommy up and make her very, very tired, and it will be hard to walk.

**Mary Elizabeth McNary**

And knowing that the MS coupled with a full time would render me less available to them emotionally, even. Physically I would be exhausted. So this is a perfect balance for me to work part time in a professional capacity and to then be a serious mom when I'm home being a serious mom. I don't think I'll ever have another full time job, 9-5, 5 days a week again. I don't wish to, this is a better deal.

**Charles Goldman**

The bottom line here Clare is you have to ask yourself one question: What's going to make yourself happy? Right now you want to be happy, ok, you're not happy at work, we're a little bit nervous. So if you're not happy at work with this employer how can we make you happy? It's all about getting to happy Clare so let's take control. Let's be proactive, let me take control of my life. So I can be happy because that's what it's all about.