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From her diagnosis until her surgery—more than three months—Susan needed Bill's daily help, and their 13-year-old son needed Bill's guidance and support. Unfortunately, this period coincided with a fairly stressful and busy time in the legal department at PG&E.

**Company Response:** After his wife's diagnosis, Bill shifted from being a lead attorney on a crucial case to working primarily from home in order to provide support for his wife. Fortunately, the next stage of his case involved drafting extensive pleadings. This task fit flexibly into Bill's scheduled activities with Susan at the cancer center and could be managed from a home office. The PG&E legal department has an active telecommuting policy, and Bill had just set up a home office. Department specialists helped Bill access the company network and ensured he had the necessary documents for the case. Bill was able to work steadily from home, often during nontraditional business hours, with only periodic visits to the department offices.

Because Bill was essentially working full-time during Susan's treatment he did not need to use vacation or leave time. After Susan's surgery, Bill returned to the PG&E office full-time, using vacation or leave when he needed to accompany Susan to her post-surgery chemotherapy and radiation treatments.

**The Winning Outcome:** "My superiors were very supportive during this entire crisis," says Bill. "The wife of one of my supervisors had gone through breast cancer treatment several years back, and he was a great source of information—and of emotional support."

Bill continues to work at PG&E, providing guidance in the utility's relationship with the CPUC. After recovering from her cancer treatments, Susan elected to have a prophylactic mastectomy to remove her remaining breast. Because of the support of his department, Bill was once again able to provide assistance to his wife while she recuperated from this procedure.

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● **Case Study:**  
**3Com Corporation and Applied Materials Technology**

*Jackie had been at 3Com for 11 years when she found a lump in her breast. Despite indications to the contrary, the lump proved to be early stage cancer. After extensive research, Jackie had a double mastectomy followed by reconstruction. Two years later, Jackie was ready to move to a new position at Applied Materials, but she still required one more reconstructive surgery.*

**Company Profile:** 3Com Corporation is a global provider of network, Internet access and telephony solutions.

**Employee Profile:** At the time of her diagnosis, Jackie was the Program Manager for Engineering with a staff of three. She was responsible for new product development and project management, and coordinating the activities of the engineering, marketing, and manufacturing departments to get products designed and delivered.

**The Diagnosis:** Although both a mammogram and an ultrasound indicated that Jackie's breast lump was benign; after a year of monitoring it, she decided to have the lump removed. Three days later while at a departmental off-site, Jackie picked up her voice mail. One message was from her doctor telling her that the lump had pre-invasive cancer cells.

**Treatment:** Because of the type of cancer with which she was diagnosed, Jackie was given several options:

- ◆ Do nothing and wait to see if this "precancer" would become invasive, at which point they would treat it. Her doctor told her she had a 60 percent chance over the remainder of her life that, at some point, the cancer would become invasive.
- ◆ Take the estrogen-inhibiting drug, Tamoxifen. Because certain cancers grow in the presence of estrogen, Tamoxifen can, by inhibiting estrogen production, also inhibit cancer growth.
- ◆ Have a mastectomy, therefore removing the pre-invasive cancer before it had a chance to develop. Because chances were high that both breasts had this particular type of early-stage cancer, it was suggested that she consider a bilateral mastectomy to remove both breasts.

Over the next several months, Jackie did extensive research and started counseling to help determine which option was right for her. She chose to effectively eliminate the risk of developing breast cancer in the future, opting for mastectomy with immediate reconstruction. Her doctor told her that she would be in the hospital for two days and would require six weeks to recuperate.

**Company Response:** 3Com is a large, multinational company with progressive employee policies. Jackie's recovery included short-term disability while she took a medical leave of absence, the same as when she had given birth to each of her three children. 3Com also has an EAP, which meant that Jackie could receive counseling and other aid during her crisis. Because her cancer was not an immediate threat to her life, Jackie was able to take several months to learn more about her options, get a second opinion and determine the best course of action. When she needed to be out for appointments or go online to research cancer treatments, her manager was supportive.

To deal with Jackie's workload during her absence, the company relied on the same procedures that were in place for such events as maternity leave. Jackie redistributed essential tasks to designated co-workers and let her manager know who was responsible while she was out. Nonessential tasks were left until her return.

Though Jackie worked with her manager to handle this medical crisis, they kept all discussion of her diagnosis at top-level, allowing her to maintain some privacy about her condition. Jackie's manager, his administrative assistant, and the human resources department knew of her condition—and all treated this information with confidentiality.



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The importance of this respect for Jackie's privacy became clear when the one other person she confided in at work did not respect her wishes and discussed Jackie's condition with others in their department. When Jackie returned to work after surgery, it was obvious that certain staff were aware of her cancer. Some came forward immediately, expressing support, while others distanced themselves from her.

**The Winning Outcome:** Jackie's surgery and reconstruction were successful and she did not need additional therapy, such as radiation or chemotherapy treatments. After her six-week recuperation, she returned to work full-time. Two years after her initial diagnosis, Jackie followed a colleague from 3Com to a new position at Applied Materials, supplier of products and services to the global semiconductor industry. Jackie knew when she was applying for the job that she would need one more surgery to complete her breast reconstruction. She disclosed this to the hiring manager before he offered her the job. Like 3Com, Applied Materials was supportive of her needs, and she was able to take the time she needed with no difficulty.

At both companies, Jackie's objective was to keep her cancer out of the workplace. In very traditional, male-dominated workplace environments, many women endeavor not to be stigmatized by "women-only" needs, such as pregnancy or breast cancer. Jackie was able to take the time she needed for her treatment and recovery then return to the office—without her breast cancer experience defining her in the workplace.

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