

- ◆ Providing of personal use items (prosthetic devices, eyeglasses, hearing aids, wigs)
- ◆ Excusing a violation of a uniformly applied conduct rule (e.g., violence, threats, stealing, property destruction)

▶ **Practical Point:** There are many ways for a supportive employer to help an employee who has breast cancer without spending a lot of money or making significant changes in the workplace. For example, an employer can allow an employee to work a flexible schedule so that she may attend medical appointments (employees can then work at off-hours, take shorter lunches or make other adjustments to make up for lost time). Employers can also allow for unpaid leave beyond the legally required 12 weeks after paid leave has been used up. This may set precedents for other leaves. Additionally, employers can allow telecommuting for some time period or for certain job functions on an as-needed basis and can provide computer and telephone support to make this possible.

● CASE STUDY: Cypress Semiconductor

Karol, a sales and manufacturing coordinator, had been at Cypress Semiconductor for eight years when she found a lump in her breast. Karol ultimately had two lumpectomies, followed by chemotherapy and radiation.

Company Profile: Cypress Semiconductor is a global manufacturer and supplier of semiconductors and employs several thousand workers.

Employee Profile: At the time of her diagnosis, Karol was a coordinator in sales and manufacturing. She was responsible for booking and shipping orders, as well as maintaining her department's web site.

The Diagnosis: Once Karol found the lump, her doctor ordered its immediate removal. After her initial surgery, lab tests indicated that there was still cancer in the breast.

Treatment: After consulting with her oncologist, Karol opted for a second surgery to remove the remaining cancer and save the breast. This procedure was an outpatient surgery followed by several days of recovery. Karol also needed chemotherapy over a period of six months, followed by six weeks of radiation. Karol learned from her doctor that she would also probably need to take off four days a month during the chemotherapy treatment and that she might experience fatigue during both the chemotherapy and radiation therapy.

Company Response: As a large, high-tech company, Cypress offered options such as flextime and telecommuting. Although not appropriate for all employees in Cypress's manufacturing environment, many workers like Karol can take advantage of these alternatives when the need arises.

Critical to a successful outcome was the Cypress policy regarding workload backup. For all critical tasks, employees must designate a "backup," someone who can cover for them during emergencies, vacation or other time away from the office. Since this was a standard company practice, Karol did not have to train a co-worker to cover for her or make any other special arrangements during cancer-related absences.



There are many ways for a supportive employer to help an employee who has breast cancer without spending a lot of money or making significant changes in the workplace.

As time went by and Karol progressed from chemotherapy to radiation, she discussed her situation with more co-workers, all of whom were supportive. But until she felt comfortable talking about her cancer, her colleagues respected her privacy.

While Karol was still considering her treatment options (lumpectomy, mastectomy, chemotherapy, and radiation), she consulted with her human resources department. Karol and the HR contact went through each option, determining the best way to handle the consequences of each treatment. They mapped out sick-time, disability and pay issues so that Karol had a clear idea of how the company could support her through this crisis, irrespective of the treatment she chose.

During this time, Karol limited the number of people in the workplace who knew her diagnosis. She told her immediate manager and a few other co-workers. Karol's boyfriend also worked for Cypress. He too received the support of his manager, enabling him to accompany her to consultation appointments and support her during her surgery.

The Winning Outcome: Karol's second lumpectomy coincided with the winter holidays. Because she had already scheduled time off for Christmas, Karol's surgery and recovery did not impact the company. Once back in the office, Karol commenced chemotherapy. Her manager remained flexible about her time off, allowing Karol to work from home when needed. Because Karol often made up for lost time when she was feeling well, her manager did not dock her sick leave or personal time.

As time went by and Karol progressed from chemotherapy to radiation, she discussed her situation with more co-workers, all of whom were supportive. But until she felt comfortable talking about her cancer, her colleagues respected her privacy.

Four years later, Karol still works for Cypress, although in a different capacity, and she still reports to the same manager. As Karol sees it, her manager stuck with her when she was going through cancer treatment then turned around and helped her grow into the position she has now. The result? "Everyday I make sure I give her my best—a full 200 percent!" exclaims Karol.

By helping Karol through this crisis, Cypress not only retained the skills of an experienced, long-term employee, but it has benefited from her growth and development.

● **CASE STUDY: Expression Therapeutic Practice**

Elizabeth is the owner and executive director of Expression Therapeutic Practice (Expression), a speech therapy practice. When she was diagnosed with breast cancer her prognosis was excellent because she had detected the cancer early. As the leader of the company, however, Elizabeth needed to make certain that the business could function successfully while she was undergoing treatment.

Company Profile: Expression, which employs 10 speech pathologists and 10 assistants, works primarily with adults who have developmental disabilities and adolescents who have emotional disabilities. The group serves nine counties in Northern and Central California. While the team gathers for regular training and meetings in the company's central office, individual therapists generally work in the field, overseeing their own caseloads.

Employee Profile: As the owner/operator, Elizabeth's job includes facilitating training and staff meetings, coordinating therapists, reviewing cases, and serving as a resource for her staff.

Diagnosis & Treatment: Elizabeth's treatment consisted primarily of a double mastectomy (a surgery to remove both breasts); she did not require chemotherapy or radiation treatments. Although she would be able to return to work part-time within three to four weeks, Elizabeth's doctor warned her that she would probably not be able to return to her previous levels of activity for at least two months.

Company Response: Elizabeth had built her business with the idea of providing herself with backup. She did not want to follow the path of many small business owners who never learn to delegate responsibility or share authority and, as a consequence, are completely tethered to their business. In contrast, Elizabeth quickly identified individuals who could be developed to assume higher levels of responsibility. She actively cultivated these staff members, teaching them management and problem-solving skills. Having these individuals in place allowed Elizabeth to take time off for vacations and professional sabbaticals. It also enabled Elizabeth to focus on the larger issues of running the business, instead of the day-to-day details.

The inherently flexible nature of the company was also a key factor in successfully dealing with Elizabeth's cancer. As a small company, Expression cannot always offer the same level of compensation or benefits as larger employers, but it can offer employees a great deal of flexibility and a team environment. As a result, many Expression therapists stay with the practice five to ten years, whereas the industry standard is three years. Expression employees enjoy the flexibility of setting their own hours and client appointments, and they rely on others in the practice to help them during times of crisis.

One additional concern for Elizabeth, as the employer, was how, when and how much to tell her employees about her condition. While she felt that it was important to be honest with her staff, she generally kept discussion of her condition to the clinical aspects, emphasizing the findings and the treatment in a matter-of-fact way.

The Winning Outcome: After her bilateral mastectomy, Elizabeth underwent immediate breast reconstruction. She was off work for three weeks, slowly easing herself back by degrees. Initially, she was available by voice mail and e-mail, and later she came into the office for short sessions. After two months, she was back to work full-time.

In the years since her breast cancer experience, Elizabeth had another medical crisis which required major surgery and medical followup. The practices she put in place to support staff absences, including her own, have allowed her company to flourish amidst her absences.





More than two years after her diagnosis, Deborah is a vice president at Netzel. Her own cancer is behind her, and her company is willing to share what it has learned from the experience.

● **CASE STUDY: Netzel Associates**

A fundraising professional, Deborah had only been with Netzel Associates for six months when she found a lump in her breast. After her lumpectomy, she needed follow-up chemotherapy and radiation treatment.

Company Profile: Netzel Associates is a full-service, fundraising firm that works with nonprofit organizations, helping them with capital campaigns and long-range strategic planning. The firm, headquartered in Culver City, employs 30 professionals in satellite locations such as San Jose, Seattle and Phoenix. All executives work from home offices, traveling to satellite offices when necessary, as well as to client sites throughout their service area.

Employee Profile: Assigned to the Northern California area, Deborah oversaw a team of four, which generally handled ongoing projects with three or four nonprofit clients. At the time of her diagnosis, Deborah was the leader on one client project and provided support for three others. Her clients were located throughout the northern part of the state, and Deborah traveled frequently to visit them.

The Diagnosis: Deborah, who had previously had breast lumps, found a new one several months before starting with Netzel. When a mammogram revealed nothing, her doctor flagged the lump for routine followup. At Deborah's physical six months later, her doctor recommended another mammogram and an ultrasound. Differences in the mammogram resulted in a biopsy which revealed that Deborah had cancer.

Treatment: Deborah elected to have a lumpectomy, but because of the size of the lump, her doctor recommended that she have chemotherapy in addition to radiation treatment. He also put her on a five-year course of Tamoxifen.

Deborah's response to chemotherapy was hair loss and a noticeable increase in fatigue. To add to her stress during treatment, she had a series of family emergencies. The combination of chemotherapy and stress produced an unusual but not uncommon reaction of memory loss.

Company Response: Once she was diagnosed, Deborah told her immediate supervisor and agreed that he should inform Netzel's owner. Later, with Deborah's agreement, her supervisor also discussed her situation with her team and ultimately the rest of the company. Finally, Deborah and her supervisor informed her primary client of the diagnosis. This client organization, staffed primarily by women, proved to be very supportive.

Though she knew she would need to lighten her schedule while in treatment, Deborah felt it was important to her recovery that she continue to work. Netzel's team approach made it easy to do so; working with Deborah's group, her supervisor helped restructure her workload. Team members temporarily took over redistributed work, allowing Deborah to continue to contribute as much as she could while undergoing her treatment.

Because all Netzel executives work out of their homes, Deborah enjoyed a great deal of flexibility about when and how she worked. As she focused on her client's capital campaign, Deborah became the point person for grant writing, a task she could easily perform from her home office. This meant that she could rest when she needed and work when she had the energy. Her flexible schedule and the company's use of electronic workplace options meant she rarely needed to take sick leave during treatment. She could communicate with clients and vendors via e-mail and phone.

As an organization that works exclusively with nonprofit clients, Netzel has a strong belief in helping others do well. For Deborah, this commitment to her recovery was typified by the company's efforts to find a new health insurance provider at the same time as she was undergoing cancer treatment. When Deborah expressed concern about whether a new provider might refuse to cover her, Netzel assured her it would only choose a provider that would.

The Winning Outcome: More than two years after her diagnosis, Deborah is a vice president at Netzel. Her own cancer is behind her and her company is willing to share what it has learned from the experience. Learning that an employee of a Netzel client had been diagnosed with breast cancer, her supervisor asked Deborah if she would be willing to share her experiences with the woman. He has also asked Deborah to assemble a list of breast cancer resources to share with others.
