



**ANDREA
REDMOND**
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CANCER TEACHES RECRUITER SECRETS TO WORKING BETTER

By Joann S. Lublin, 2002

When most people develop a life-threatening illness, they curse their fate and fret about its impact on their careers.

But Andrea Redmond, a high-powered executive recruiter, can see her breast cancer as a gift, too. Coping with the disease has taught her powerful lessons that actually bolster her effectiveness at Russell Reynolds Associates, a big search firm. Recognition of her work commitment "was part of my healing," says Ms. Redmond, a wife, mother and horsewoman. Steps she took to maintain her career momentum offer good guideposts for all employees.

Cancer "made me stronger, tougher and better at what I do, which is part of the gift," explains the 46-year-old Ms. Redmond, whose frenetic pace used to exhaust many colleagues.

Her disease, detected in December 1999, recurred last January. She underwent three surgeries, the most serious involving a bilateral mastectomy and removal of many lymph nodes.

The ordeal made her learn how to work smarter, Ms. Redmond says. "My modus operandi before the disease always was to work harder, never smarter."

Ms. Redmond runs the large Chicago office of Russell Reynolds with Charles Tribbett, a fellow managing director. They jointly head its global board practice and are the firm's leading CEO hunters. Monday, for example, they completed their search for a new UAL chief.

She flies several hundred thousand miles a year to recruit, but eight weeks of radiation in fall 2000 slowed that. She decided to divulge her illness to key clients. "You should be honest with your clients" about likely service gaps, she says.

When Ms. Redmond alerted Safeco, the Seattle insurance and financial-services concern switched dates so she could pitch board members about a new chief without missing more than one treatment. Allie Mysliwy, senior vice president of corporate human resources, wondered whether the ailing recruiter could handle the hunt. Then he met her. "She had total confidence in her ability to do the assignment, so I didn't doubt that," Mr. Mysliwy says. He liked her candor, openness and honesty. She and Mr. Tribbett soon completed Safeco's CEO search.

In one instance, however, frankness cost Ms. Redmond a client. A company eager to find a division head became anxious about her travel limitations that fall. "They suspended their work with us," she recalls.

Fighting cancer also has sharpened Ms. Redmond's focus on her most critical tasks and most effective tactics. She increasingly delegates non-CEO assignments, and no longer fears that asking for help will be seen as a weakness. She stopped taking 6 a.m. business-trip flights seven hours after landing from the previous trip. And she gave up her six daily cups of coffee.

Minor disagreements with co-workers no longer rattle her. "Having gone through this, you have to have more empathy," Ms. Redmond observes.

She has told certain associates to remind her about her priorities if she tries to schedule too much. But a revamped work style requires constant self-discipline, advises oncologist Marisa Weiss, a breast-cancer specialist in the Philadelphia area.

With well-focused priorities, "you're a better, more effective and more efficient professional," Ms. Redmond adds. "It's another one of my cancer's many gifts."

She admits, however, that defeats bother her more. She blew up recently after Russell Reynolds lost a competitive shootout for a coveted CEO search.

Ms. Redmond credits her usually upbeat attitude for overcoming her health setbacks and retaining clients. When she learned her breast cancer had recurred, she called Mr. Tribbett from the sidewalk near the hospital, cursed and screamed, "It's back!"

That was her sole angry moment. Though the painful mastectomy and protracted recuperation loomed, Ms. Redmond assured Mr. Mysliwy that she'd be fine. "She was concerned about us as a client" because she was overseeing two Safeco searches, he says.

Moments before Ms. Redmond underwent reconstructive surgery in May, her surgeon saw a Post-it note stuck on her chest. "I realize every one is different, but please make these the same," her note read. Everyone laughed.

"The biggest lesson I have learned is that a good life is not the same as an easy life," she concludes. "Any sort of life crisis can derail a career -- whether it's a divorce or losing a child or a diagnosis of cancer," she says. "Sick or well, you should live your life like it counts, too."