

DATE: June 03, 2017

PLAN - Develop Hypothesis:

THE PROBLEM:

In February 2017, I was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin Lymphoma. In order to continue working at least part-time during a six-month treatment, I needed to find the most efficient way to be both an asset to the marketing team and take optimal care of myself between the once every three week infusion treatments.

CURRENT CONDITION:

During the first two months of the treatment/recovery cycle (March and April), I was getting used to my new hospital and home schedule and logging into the network as my energy levels allowed. As my system was becoming accustomed to the treatments and the days passed, my energy increased but the work flow was at times choppy. I knew I could be a better team member, but if the work wasn't flowing to me at an even pace how could I be the most help to the team at their peak deadline times?

TARGET CONDITION:

I targeted a mix of deadline assistance (proposals, award submittals) and support work (web updates, new project sheets, keeping Vision current) where I didn't need to wait for an assignment. This would allow me to work at my own schedule part of the time (early mornings are ideal for me) and be available for assignments (afternoons are busy, especially after twice weekly Proposal Go/No Go meetings where new deadlines are discussed and assigned). I also needed to relay to the team I was strong enough for them to trust that I'd be able to perform, especially on a deadline. This schedule allowed me to be productive and accessible as well as take needed breaks throughout the day to rest.

ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS:

I had to ask myself, 'Why were the work assignments not coming at a consistent pace?' Since I was the person typically doling out the assignments before I became sick, others stepped in to meet deadlines. Before my illness, I had complete control over *my* deadlines. Now I had to communicate my available hours to the team so they could decide which assignments I would receive. But it wasn't the internal team who didn't have a consistent pace to assigning me work. I dug deeper and realized the choppy work assignments were a by-product of RFPs arriving from clients on the clients' schedule. The deadlines were also on the clients' schedules, so I had to find other work to complete between assignments/deadlines since they were not controllable.

Digging deeper, I also realized that the team was stepping up their pace, and didn't always need a third proposal coordinator to handle the workload. That brought me back to finding the non-deadline work which would keep me busy as well as be helpful for the team, especially if I could work on some of the great ideas that would help on future proposals but that we never got around to with all the revolving deadlines.

At this point, the root cause became evident. I had grown out of the habit of finding useful work, which entails tracking down the best staff member to collect project information from for a new project sheet and web profile. With my energy levels building back, I felt I could be successful in collaborating with staff to promote their projects. This led me to *planning* my day so I could both conquer collecting this project nuggets (written and illustrative) as well as work on deadline assignments as they came.

DO- Conduct Experiment:

COUNTERMEASURES:

I had to be the one to seek out meaningful work if I was going to be a contributor to the department while I wasn't there in person. So I communicated with the team when my treatments would be, so they'd know I may not be able to pitch in very much during the first week after treatment. As I felt stronger, I would reach out and request an assignment. That worked better than waiting and hoping for an RFP assignment.

I would also get back to basics and find projects far enough along to have graphics and something meaningful to write about. This a two-fold benefit as we can create both project sheets (used in proposals) and web profiles. Additionally, I would focus in researching upcoming awards and brainstorming with project leaders on what to submit. Being at home in a quiet environment also allows me the time to dedicate to social media updates - managing 20+ LinkedIn and Twitter accounts for management staff as well as the firm's Pinterest account. Beyond simply updating profiles with blog posts, I could read each person's feed once or twice a week and 'like' or 'share' what I feel would resonate with each leader. These activities would raise our website's and leaders' profiles while providing additional ideas for future blogs, etc.

IMPLEMENTATION:

I saw an opportunity to become more accountable to myself for my contributions. Each evening Monday-Friday, I would decide what project I could really dig into the next morning. I found this kept my mind from wandering in the middle of the night because I had a set task to wake up to and get started on by 7am. This also allowed me to have something reviewable back in someone's inbox by the time they arrived for the day. Be it a blog, a website challenge/solution/result or a proposal draft - by 9am I had moved the chains for the team.

At whatever point I was in my treatment cycle, if I needed a nap or a walk or had an appointment at the hospital - I could walk away from the computer with confidence that I had advanced something beneficial. Whether I logged back in within the hour or not until afternoon, I also knew there would be something else meaningful to work on due to my consistent communication with the marketing team and others in the firm. I was building trust that I was reliable, and since I openly communicated 'hospital' days, the team was able to predict when they would hear from me. Knowing whether I'd be around or not allowed them to send me proposal drafts for review and web update assignments that needed to be done by a set deadline.

STUDY - Evaluate Results:

MEASURE PERFORMANCE:

I now typically have a proposal in progress, with a back-up coordinator informed of my progress in case I need to take a few days away from working. This same coordinator is also my printer/binder/shipper for those proposals that need hard copies. We organize this ahead of time, and document in Asana so I have confirmation that the office-based coordinator is not only in on deadline day, but also has time blocked out appropriately.

I have also had ample time to work on our blog backlog. We are very good at noting blog ideas in Asana so there is a solid list to share with potential bloggers. This helps them develop or refine their idea and understand that they need only outline their idea and the marketing team will provide them a filled out draft for their review. During the drafting time, I also coordinate with the Graphics Department on what photos and/or illustrations will work best. This not only takes the weight of blogging off staff members, but has increased the number of blogs we have closer to being ready to schedule.

ADJUST - Refine, Standardize, Sustain:

REFINE & SUSTAIN:

As much as talking on the phone is my last resort, I realized that if I was going to be an asset I occasionally needed to discuss an assignment beyond what an email can easily convey. This was particularly helpful when updating the new Advisors site with updated case studies. Via phone and Skype screen sharing, a team member led me through the multi-step process of updating the case studies. I practiced while she observed and corrected any missteps. She followed up with written instructions that not only helped as I did the remaining updates on my own, but will also refresh my memory as we complete new case studies.

