Dealing With Discrimination in the Workplace

June 19, 2012 By Reed Vreeland

Should you disclose your HIV status to your coworkers? It's a question that many HIV-positive people face. It's especially challenging because the decision can affect your livelihood as well as your mental and physical health. For some, disclosing at the office can be a beneficial experience, and it can lead to a deeper relationship with coworkers. But others face egregious cases of HIV-related discrimination—and career setbacks. Here's what you, our POZ readers, had to say about the subject.

> I live in California, and I have been looking for help from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. I am HIV positive and told my manager at work. I was asked to have my doctor write a letter saying it's OK [for me to] touch things and it's OK that I work for them. After that, I was bullied for about a year. My car was vandalized, and I was assaulted in a back storage room. Local police couldn't help me.
> —**Frank L., Antioch, CA**

> I work in the medical field and was terrified of disclosing to coworkers. I finally did to a select few. I have never regretted it, and I feel that my bravery and honesty actually enhanced the relationships I have with my coworkers.
> —**B., Location Withheld**

> You don't know how people are going to react [when you disclose]. Your status is not an office topic—whether you are positive or negative. Knowing your status is different from revealing your status. Only the people you plan on sleeping with should know your status.
> —**Ma, Location Withheld**

> I am HIV positive and work in health care. I am very healthy and follow universal precautions religiously. Only my partner knows my status. To avoid the stigma associated with HIV, I have not told anyone else.
> —**Carol, Indiana**

> I believe the choice to disclose is a personal choice. Since I went public with my status, my life has been so much easier. The fear of hiding it was gone. My fears of being ostracized by everyone never happened. I did not lose my job. I was profiled on my school's webpage as a success story. I think the stigma associated with HIV still makes it tough for many to have full disclosure, but the

more we are honest about our status, the less stigma there will be. It’s a bridge that needs crossing, like coming out in the 1980s or being in an interracial relationship during the 1960s.
—**LWMIII, Boston**

I am HIV positive and was a pharmacy manager. I told my district manager that I was probably positive. Within two days, they had our store do two blood [safety training sessions] in the human resources room. When I called other local stores [within the same chain] I found out that these stores had no required [safety training sessions] at that time. Then came the harassment within the pharmacy. I finally had to leave due to the harassment and to protect my health.
—**James, Oregon**

I’ve never disclosed at the workplace but have thought of it many times, and it scares me worse than telling my grown children, which was very hard. I keep losing jobs [because] I have to take off to attend appointments [during] the first 90-day probationary period. I would never [disclose to] someone I just met [at work] if I don’t have a feel for the company and its workplace environment and values of privacy.
—**M. Snow, Location Withheld**

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http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/workplace-HIV-discrimination-22574-6721