# Disclosure- Part One/Workplace

February 14, 2012 By Aundaray Guess

This will be the first of four articles that will look at HIV disclosure and my personal struggles with it in four areas of my life, work, romantic relationship, family and disclosure to self.

My first journey begins with how disclosure affected my job.

It began with me sitting across from supervisor who wanted some answers as to why I seemed to called in sick or every several months I put in half a day as I had to leave the office for one reason or the other.

It was tricky as I was running out of excuses of telling my boss why I was late for work. How many times could I use the 'I didn't hear the alarm clock excuse' or that the half days I put in was for a family emergency when it would have been so much easier to tell her that in actuality I had an appointment with my HIV doctor.

But to do that would have meant I had to do the one thing that I was so fearful of and that was to disclose my status at the workplace as well as to come out of the closet. I was always a person who kept work separate from my personal life, like one would keep the corn on their plate from touching their mash potatoes. i just didn't want them to merge.

For me at that time it was worth getting written up than to disclose my secret.

I'm sure that I'm not the only one who has struggled with this issue. It's hard enough to disclose your status at work but when it involves your livelihood then you wonder if it's worth the risk.

Although there's laws on the book stating the illegality of discrimination in the workplace it can still make for a passive/aggressive hostile environment especially when you're dealing with people who have bypassed the chapter on discrimination. Plus the stigma can be so intense that a hostile work environment is created and you wonder is it worth it. Not to mention the stress it places on your health.

The doctors were not so helpful either as the particular clinic I was seen at the time only had one HIV doctor who had limited hours. And if you weren't quick enough you were stuck with afternoon times. So the art of negotiating with him was limited and it almost seemed my other choice was to simply not go which for me wasn't a road I wanted to take.

Frankly at the time of my former employment I just didn't want my business being the latest office gossip. I didn't want to deal with people ignorance on a daily basis or to have everyone surround me with chicken soup as I let a cough escape.

In my case i eventually told my status as I was alerted to the fact that my job was now on the line.

Although they were sympathetic, they stuck to the employee manual and let me have the, “If I do it for one then I have to do it for others” speech.

I eventually moved on.

Now that I’m in a different place both job-wise and mentally I’m able to mesh the two together. It was easy as at my new job I wasn’t the only one who had this disease so they had a sense of understanding. it makes a difference when you see your doctor or any other specialist you have to go to. But I know that I won’t be here forever and will have to go through the experience again.

But I’ll worry about that when I get to that fork in the road. Luckily I’m at a place where I feel comfortable making my status known, but for others it remains difficult. It’s just like a new relationship. People who have HIV may ask themselves, do I tell them at the interview or do I wait until I’m hired or better yet wait until I’m passed my probation period. Or do i keep it to myself and put in my 9 to 5, knowing my virus doesn’t take time off.

I wish I had an easy answer as my story is different from others. It’s a hard balance when you’re dealing with your health and income. A puzzle, similar to what comes first, the chicken or the egg and in many people case, my health or my finance?

It’s just one of the aspect of disclosure that makes having HIV so difficult. It’s not just about the pill.

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