

A Dame for All Seasons

As Vice President of PDQ Careers and President of the professional organization, Women in Business, a zesty Janet Ault was at the top of her game when we met. She had enrolled in a public speaking course and her classmates, after getting a dose of Janet's verbal acumen and easy confidence, were asking "Why the heck is she here?" The answer to their question alludes to a powerful inner force that would eventually bring Janet back from a devastating illness. This month's tip is dedicated to Janet Ault, a "Dame for All Seasons."

Janet was one of several of you who responded to my November request for stories about life-changing experiences. All your stories were moving and I thank you. But Janet's vivid account of how she dealt with her illness and reclaimed her life stirred my thinking for days. I remembered our first meeting and wondered what inner gifts and learned skills had propelled Janet up ambition's ladder. She would certainly have some great advice for you young'uns on the road to making it! Then, as VP and later as President of her company and of a professional organization, I felt Janet would have another set of tips for you who are already on or approaching the summit of your careers. Finally, as Janet engaged in the grueling work of coming back from a gravely disabled state, she would have a third set of powerful tools to share with us.

The Early Lessons and Rewards

In interviewing her, I discovered that - yes, Janet has tips, but they are the principles and teachings that have guided her throughout all the seasons of her life, since she was a little girl. Growing up with three siblings and a hard-working Mom who demanded the best of her children, Janet learned to juggle family schedules and chores while making straight A's in school. This early training in working within a team and always doing her best is a dominant theme throughout her career. If Janet perceived that something would add to her credibility, she would apply for it. She sharpened her speaking and writing talents, became President of the Speech and Debate Team in High School, received a full scholarship to Purdue University and attended Grad School (in Poly Sci) at George Washington University in D.C. Later, when Janet landed a job at The Pottery Barn in Los Angeles, she helped it grow, as Director of Store Operations, from 3 to 10 stores. Then, when she moved on to PDQ Careers, an innovative and successful job placement company, Janet quickly moved into the Vice President's and then the President's seat. With her commitment to results and doing her best, her speaking and writing skills and her love of team, Janet fit right in. She loved the mentoring and excelled at writing proposals. Because Janet focused on the clients' needs and what they were emphasizing, she had an 80-90% success rate, adding to PDQ's reputation for producing great results on unusual requests in large numbers and very quickly!

Coming Back from the UnDead

But then, after a successful stretch of 15 years at PDQ, Janet, whose tremendous energy and focus had never failed her, contracted encephalitis. She spent 8 months in a hospital, sometimes in a coma, where she had to learn to feed herself before she could move in with her sister and brother-in-law.

Here are Janet's words. "The encephalitis took away all my cognitive abilities, including my most prized speaking and writing. So I kept a notebook with me to record words I used to know. I would look them up and use them in sentences. I took Creative Writing classes and worked religiously on the Times' Sunday crossword puzzles. Now I'm studying Spanish. I also volunteered to speak at universities and local organizations, on resume writing, interviewing and other topics in the world of employment. Not only did I start getting my skills back, but I learned to take the focus off myself and put it on others. It's surprising how often the lessons we learn from bad situations end up doing us the most good."

Today, Janet's zest is back, as well as her wit. She's on the Dean's Advisory Board of Purdue University and looks forward to completing her autobiography and being interviewed by Oprah! Whether she's up or down, Janet's life remains a testimonial to her mother's early teachings about always doing her best. The sky's the limit for Janet Ault - a dame, not for just one season of life, but for all seasons!

Merry Holidays to you all!