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How a personal challenge can lead to professional success

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We hosted our firm's [Aspire to Lead](#) event Friday at the University of Georgia with a roomful of students. We discussed "What would you do if you weren't afraid?" Here's what I told them.

At 25, I was diagnosed with Hodgkin's disease. At that time, my doctors gave me a 50 percent chance of making it to 30. More than two decades later, I believe that diagnosis changed me in a very critical way.

My illness provided a very real call to action and made me realize nothing in your personal or professional life is guaranteed – not even if you choose the "right" major or attend the most prestigious schools. I emerged from a year's worth of chemotherapy and radiation treatments impatient to make some changes.

I began viewing my personal life and my career with an incredible sense of urgency. Instead of just assuming good things would come my way, I started making decisions to increase the odds. After battling cancer, I understood that to get where I wanted to go, I had to take some risks, especially in my career.

This was not an easy shift for me. My very practical parents didn't raise me or my three siblings to be risk takers. We were expected to major in something that would secure us gainful employment immediately following college graduation. But then what?

Before cancer, I assumed I'd climb the career ladder in a very measured way by working hard. Surely, my managers would notice and reward me. I know many women – great women, qualified women and potential leaders – who think this way and it pains me. Sheryl Sandberg, Facebook's Chief Operating Officer, reported the same observation in, "Lean In."

Adopting a healthy sense of urgency and summoning the confidence to ask for what I want has helped me succeed.

So when those students at the University of Georgia asked me for career advice, I told them what I tell most young people: Take an active role in managing your career right from the start. Take calculated risks - view them as opportunities. Most organizations will be tolerant of mistakes, as long as the risk taken was a measured one, you learn from your mistakes and

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one to take.

Just imagine what you could do if you weren't afraid. And then go do it.

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Amazing story! Thanks for sharing. Your inspiration is contagious!

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Inspiring story, Carol. Thank you for sharing and boosting the confidence quotient for m

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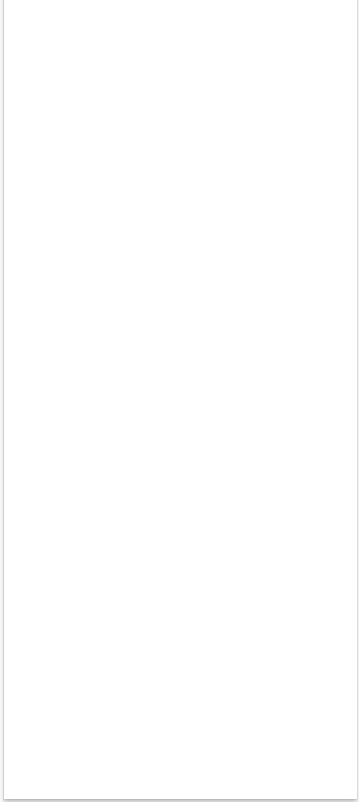
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