

Case Study

Amanda's challenge around returning to work

Amanda contacted me 6 months out of treatment as she had just returned to work and was struggling. Amanda worked in an office as a HR manager, a job she said she found interesting and rewarding before breast cancer.

Although going back on a phased return, she was feeling overwhelmed by her workload, disconnected from her colleagues and ended each day feeling thoroughly exhausted.

Our first session started with a deep-dive questionnaire. The Wheel of Life quickly revealed the gaps in her confidence and professional identity. Lynn wasn't just dealing with physical recovery; she was now in cancer induced menopause from Tamoxifen and was navigating a whole new version of herself. She felt that her manager was judging her for not being the same as she was before; she felt so tired she was not being as productive as she used to be and she had been reduced to tears a few times in meetings, something she felt ashamed about.

Exploration

First, we talked through the impacts of menopause on how we think and feel, both physically and mentally. I encouraged her to view her situation with more kindness and self-compassion, how would she feel if a friend was going through the same situation? We are often so much harder on ourselves than we would be on a loved one. When I asked "What does success look like for you now?" her eyes welled up. She wanted to work, but was terrified of not measuring up to her previous standards. The menopause, the reduced stress tolerance – it all felt overwhelming.

Getting clear on what you want

We looked at what her current reality is, what is she actually capable of right now. What is realistic for her based on how her mind and body are feeling and the fact she is only 6 months out of treatment. Did she even want this career path anymore? Amanda knew she wanted to stay in HR and we talked through the pros and cons of where she is working and her job to really solidify this.

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Moving forward...

When she was clear on what she wanted, we practiced conversations with her employer, asking to extend her phased return. Half-days first, strategic breaks and clear communication about her needs. I helped her understand her rights and build confidence in advocating for herself. Amanda needed a gentle approach that honoured what she had been through. Stress management techniques were crucial. We went through mindfulness techniques, breathing exercises and recognising her body's new rhythms.

Celebrating wins

Every small step was a victory. Her first successful meeting, her first moment of feeling like herself again – we celebrated them all. By the end of our sessions, Lynn had rebuilt her professional life in a way that suited where she was in her recovery. She was working reduced hours and had regular breaks woven into her work day. Her colleagues now had a much better understanding of how she was feeling and how to recognise if she was feeling overwhelmed. But more importantly, she'd reconnected with her own strength and resilience.

“When we first started our sessions, I honestly thought I was going to have to quit my job! I couldn't see how this was going to work, when I was just not the same bright, energetic, organised person I was before. It turned out my boss had no idea of how I was feeling and after using the conversation prompts, we made, he came up with a new plan for me and was super understanding which shocked me! I honestly feel so much better about it all.”