



21/22

REFLECTIONS

Chapter 3 – Communication, Collaboration, Kindness

For today's message, I'm sharing a beautiful reflection from one of our teammates about insights she has gained as a breast cancer survivor.

I think this is the perfect note to send as we approach the end of Breast Cancer Awareness Month, observing this present moment while recognizing the importance of support and community all year round. It comes from Maria Chua, a coordinator with SHHS. Thank you, Maria!

What Cancer Taught Me about Work: A Reflection

October is Breast Cancer Awareness month. It is also the first time that I will recognize this month as a breast cancer survivor. It was a February afternoon during the height of the C19 surge in Los Angeles. I was in a Zoom work meeting when I got the call. Though my doctor's words were very clear, I had to ask her to repeat them a few times to ensure I absolutely understood what she was saying. I had breast cancer. I felt incredibly vulnerable and isolated.

I told my husband, parents and children. Then I shared with loved ones, friends and colleagues. Each conversation made it more real and I began to accept that I was diagnosed with cancer. It also gave space and resolve that I could take charge of how I wanted to share this information, what kind of support I would like, and how to be kinder to myself and others.

I learned many lessons from cancer that apply to being an administrator. The three that resonated most with me are clear communication, support and collaboration, and kindness.

Clear communication: When working with my oncology team, there was a situation where a prescription was written incorrectly, resulting in complicated side effects. I reached out to my oncologist to discuss the symptoms and read what the prescription stated. She said the prescription had not been written correctly on the label. Although I was ready to assign blame, we identified where the breakdown of communication might have started and formed an agreement on our future communications and how they would be structured over the course of my treatment. Many people defer to the medical experts and are reluctant to ask necessary questions. That poor communication can have disastrous consequences. In my work life, when given a work task that may be ambiguous in nature, I ask for clarity (sometimes several times) to ensure that I understand the expectations. As a leader, I check for understanding with my team as a group as well as individually when developing and implementing projects.

Support and Collaboration: Going through cancer treatment during the pandemic can be especially lonely. Several support organizations have been incredible in giving me a much needed sense of community. [Mommy's with Cancer](#) was cofounded by an LAUSD employee. This fall marked the start of my 23rd year in LAUSD. I have worked collaboratively with many schools, programs, divisions, and departments. Creating and sustaining relationships across different disciplines has helped me in unexpected ways during my cancer treatment. Colleagues from all parts of the district were supportive and shared their own stories and advice. Those relationships also serve me well as an administrator. When I have worked collaboratively with the clear purpose of serving students, I have gotten my best results. To our new administrators and staff in SHHS, I wholeheartedly encourage you to not stay in your lane. Seek out opportunities where you can integrate your unique expertise in

a collaborative fashion with other division departments. This helps the process of understanding where connections are in serving others and not being isolated and working in a silo (which can happen even within the same department).

Kindness: Overwhelmingly, kindness matters -- being kind to others and to oneself. Loved ones and colleagues reaching out meant the world to me. Being kind to myself meant posting an out-of-office message and not checking email during my treatments or medical leave. Self-care meant keeping medical appointments. We as helping professionals mustn't compromise our self-care while working and caring for others. We discuss self-care a lot in SHHS. I try to model that by checking in with others and allowing myself space to reflect on what is most important. Reflection provides a deeper understanding of each other and our respective needs. It helps us respond in a positive and constructive way vs. reacting out of fear and negative presumption. Kindness means encouraging others to maintain their regular health check-ups and regimen. In the spirit of Breast Cancer Awareness month, I encourage each of us to reach out to the women in our lives to get diagnostic tests such as mammograms and to schedule our annual regular wellness visits. Please visit www.cancer.org for more info. If this reflection is personal for you, we're here for you. Come find community with [Mommy's with Cancer](#) and www.livingbeauty.org.

Sincerely,

Pia and Maria

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