Claire Pedersen

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Talent Development Manager, Ford Middle East & Africa

[Intro]

The last 12 months have been a good transformation for Talent Development Manager, Claire Pedersen. She was given the all clear from her specialist in November 2017 having undergone treatment for Stage 2 breast cancer, and has taken life by the horns. She has learned to let trivial matters slide and focus on the important things: family, friends, and ticking off plans on her ever growing list of must-do things.

[The Story]

Both my grandmother and mother had breast cancer, so I was strict about keeping to the dates of my yearly checkups. Life and work got busy and I missed my checkup date by a few months in 2016 – and felt a lump on my left breast - I knew something was wrong immediately.

I went for my check and yes the mammogram, ultrasound and biopsy confirmed breast cancer (Invasive Ductal Carcinoma), and the medical team suggested I start chemotherapy immediately before conducting surgery and radiotherapy due to its aggressive nature.

2017 was a ‘big blur’ for me - the year’s treatment consisted of chemotherapy, a double mastectomy and radiation. But I’m feeling amazing now. I’ve been through the worst and I’m in my first year of actual recovery, – it’s been about 10 months now. I’m feeling very, very good!

Last November upon receiving my first clearance check, I celebrated; bought chocolate coated strawberries for the office and came home and celebrated with my husband. It was a lovely, lovely, feeling. I feel, I’ve been given some more time to be with the people I love, and time to appreciate everything we’ve worked for.

I find I’m more purposeful in what I do and how I go about planning things. Holidays don’t just happen, we are focused, and my recent 12-day trip with my husband and another couple to Italy; Venice and Amalfi Coast was on the bucket list. It’s an amazing area; and the hike along The Path of the Gods was breath taking.

The trip was quite hard for me as I didn’t expect that level of difficulty, I’m not sure I would do it again. For others like my husband who enjoys hiking and has climbed many mountains, including Everest Base Camp it was less of a challenge. Even though it was a huge challenge it felt great to have ticked something off my bucket list – and I can’t wait for the next adventure.

The hikes were beautiful as they meandered through the lemon and olive orchid farms. This was complemented by the amazing food, organic and straight from the farmers in the area. The quaint little towns are stunning and old. Farming in Italy is all about the family – all working on the family farm. Little children serving the guests cold drinks upon arrival, and the 89 year old grandfather milking the cow. It’s all about family and closeness, and natural organic produce.

I think we need to look at the foods we’re eating. Food has become very important for me; vitamins and natural organic foods. I’m not vegan but I’ve cut out meat, and dairy.

Having had cancer definitely changes ones outlook on life. Personally, I don’t take things too seriously anymore, this includes career stress, or argument with the kids or husband. It’s just an argument, it’s just something that has happened at work, there’s nothing to it. Where previously I used to make a mountain out of a molehill, I now find myself letting things blow over and think that whatever is going to be is going to be.

I also think I’ve mellowed a bit. I am more tolerant and more forgiving. However on the other hand, when I feel things are really not what they should be, I do tend to speak up; when previously I tended to be silent. I feel now, what’s the harm in voicing my opinion.

My advice to women is simple. Ladies need to be screened every year - even if they don’t feel it’s necessary. Statistics now indicate Cancer is not discriminatory – age is not a factor - young women are now at risk too. If you are able to catch the cancer before it gets to stage two or three, it’s a lot easier to deal with. Conduct Self-examinations - You know your own body, and you’re able to notice changes in your body before anyone else.

I still have my ups and downs however, I’m mindful of my thoughts and take each day as it comes.