

Tricia's Story

As a teenager, I worked part time in the summer and sometimes in the school year at the company where my mother was employed as a billing manager. This is where I learned many secretarial and billing skills.

A few years later, I was diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder. After my first episode, I was weary to return to work. I lacked the confidence that I would be able to work at my best ability. But despite the fact that I was diagnosed with a mental illness, I did not lose the skills and experience I had previously gained. The skills that I gained working part time in an office as a teenager gave me the skills and the confidence to be employed in an office today. I have always had the expectation for myself that if I was well I should be working. Working helps me to stay stable because it is a structured environment and when I work, I feel productive. My family has shown their support by embracing the good times when I am able to work and helping me when I am not well enough to work. I have never felt that work itself would make me relapse as long as I was taking care of my stress level, which is a trigger for me.

I went to college for a year and a half but was unable to complete my studies. I worked on and off at different offices but I was not sure what I wanted. It was when I saw a job for a Billing Supervisor at a mental health facility that I knew this was the office position I wanted. Although I had minimal experience in the psychology field, I had obtained valuable billing experience through the years. I am grateful for this position. It has allowed me to branch out and also do Intake Coordinating which involves talking with clients who I can relate to. Doing the Intake Coordinating has been challenging but beneficial. It is challenging and difficult for me to hear and see people in a position that I was once in and I find myself wanting to "fix" them.

Recently, I was having a difficult time and ended up being hospitalized and took some time off from work. My boss has been amazingly supportive. I started back working part-time and then to full-time. My boss and a couple of close co-workers were aware of my hospitalization and everyone was very accommodating as I transitioned back to working full-time. My work was also very helpful and flexible regarding follow up appointments with my doctors.

When I started this job, I was unaware that the company offered tuition assistance for college. I began my degree when I was younger and I never thought I would finish. Upon learning of the tuition assistance, I decided I would continue pursuing my degree at my own pace. I recently graduated Magna Cum Laude at Southern NH University with a BA in Psychology. My degree gives me more of an advantage at my job. Not only do I understand clients from a personal standpoint, but from a biological basis as well.

Working in the mental health field and working with clients who I can relate to has made a huge impact on my life. I feel that I am making a difference. The instabilities I see in new clients motivates me to work on my own recovery and exercise appropriate ways to keep stable. I can then use these skills to help others who need help. Through my work, I have gained self esteem and confidence in my general mental health. It makes me feel better to help other people. The company that I work for benefits from my personal experience with bipolar disorder as it enables me to be more empathetic and sympathetic to clients. What is important to me is that Bipolar does not define me. I am not Bipolar, I have Bipolar disorder and it does not control who or what I am.