Written by Julie Desmond
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Penny is going to get fired. She thinks so, anyway. She spent $130 to obtain the precious drug, Tamiflu, on day two of what she knew was something worse than anything she's had before. She is now on day five, barely able to drag herself off the couch, and plotting a way to hide her illness in order to keep her job. Ethically, she should stay home. Practically, she can't afford to. What to do?

First, don't get sick. Wash your hands. Clean your keyboard, bring your own coffee cup and bring it home at night to wash it, spray down your desk, your phone, the keys on the copier and the knob on the door to your office. Then wash your hands again. It might be impossible to avoid illness, but by going overboard with the hand sanitizer and the Lysol, you will at least be able to say you tried. Did I mention? You need to wash your hands. With soap.

When you meet someone, and you are forced by professional etiquette to shake hands, don't whip out the hand sanitizer and pass it around. Just avoid touching your hands to your face until you can clean up. Is your pen full of germs? Maybe, but stave off the OCD tendencies and realize, again, you can only do so much. Your pen is not your enemy, unless you put it in your mouth. Same goes for coworkers.

But when you do get sick, first, tell your manager. Hourly employees are in the worst position here. The work needs to get done, but bringing a bug to work can infect an entire staff, which is much worse than having to bring in a temp for a few days to cover your shift. Your boss reads the newspaper, sees the news and is just as worried as anyone about loss of productivity due to flu. If you have a doctor's note, share that with your manager. But if you don't, it should be okay. Most leaders won't be surprised by a sick call this week or next and a good leader will tell you to stay home.

Do not fake the flu, however. Next week you might actually have it, and you will have used up your legitimate excuse for being absent.

When you do get sick, make it your mission to get healthy again. Oranges, soup, lots and lots of water. People who die from influenza are often victims of dehydration. Keep the liquids coming in, get the sleep you require, and you should improve in a day or two.

This year's flu is said to be the worst since H1N1 hit in 2009. Tragically, it has already claimed lives in MN and nationally. Be smart. Be careful. Be healthy. Penny needs to tell her manager why she is not at her desk. She is a top performer; her boss will understand. Now, please excuse me while I go wash my hands.

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