THE ABLE DIABETIC
Able Guide No. 12

INNER CIRCLE RESOURCE

T1D at Work: How to Advocate for Yourself Professionally
From someone who did it for three decades without anyone around them knowing

Why this guide exists

After a 20+ year career, I worked as a Chief of Staff to a C-suite executive in a large global organisation. Long hours, high stakes, complex decisions, difficult people, multiple crises - and throughout all of it, I was managing type 1 diabetes invisibly. The exec and I never spoke about it at the time. Afterwards, she told me she had reflected, having subsequently learned what a challenging condition it was, and that I should somehow tell people what my approach was.

This guide provides some pointers. Not a set of rules, but a framework for thinking about work and t1d - how to manage the condition in professional settings, how to advocate for what you need, and how to build a working life that does not require you to choose between your chosen career and your health.

1. The fundamental truth worth starting with

T1d does not limit what you can achieve professionally. I am not saying this as encouragement - I am saying it as a statement of fact, grounded in my own experience and that of many others. The condition adds complexity and cognitive load to everything. It does not set a ceiling.

What it does require is a level of self-awareness, preparation and advocacy that most of your colleagues will never need to develop. That is not a disadvantage in disguise. It is a genuine skill - one that tends to make people with t1d exceptionally good at managing complexity, planning ahead, and keeping going when things are hard.

© The Able Diabetic 2026. All rights reserved.

2. Know your own patterns before anyone else does

Effective self-advocacy at work starts before any conversation with a manager. It starts with knowing your own body well enough to understand where t1d creates friction in your working day.

Is it early morning meetings before you have had the chance to stabilise your levels? Long stretches without a break? The adrenaline spike of a high-pressure presentation? Travel across time zones? Irregular eating patterns on client days?

The answers are different for everyone. But if you can identify your friction points clearly, you can make targeted, specific requests rather than vague ones - and specific requests are far more likely to be met. “A proper break at lunchtime” is more actionable than “some flexibility”. “A quiet moment before a big presentation to check my levels” is more manageable than “not too much pressure”.

3. The disclosure decision

You are not obliged to disclose your t1d to your employer. It is your information and your choice. But there are practical reasons why some level of disclosure - to the right person, in the right way - makes your working life easier rather than harder.

The minimum sensible disclosure is to your direct manager. They do not need the full picture. They need enough to understand that you may occasionally need a moment, that your CGM may alert during a meeting, that lunch matters more than it might for someone else. That is a short conversation and it changes the dynamic significantly.

Beyond your manager, consider who else genuinely can support in practical ways - a close colleague who might cover for you in a moment, someone who travels with you, someone who dictates your schedule. The goal is not transparency for its own sake. It is building a small circle of people whose awareness means you can manage your condition more effectively without having to explain yourself in the moment.

4. How to have the conversation

Most people are uncomfortable tabling this conversation because they do not want to be seen as asking for special treatment or flagging a vulnerability. The reframe that helped me was this: you are not asking for special treatment. You are giving your manager information that allows them to support you more effectively. That is a professional act, not a personal one.

Keep it factual and brief. What t1d involves in practice, what might come up in the working day, and what would make a practical difference. Most managers will respond well to this. They are relieved to understand, and they feel trusted.

© The Able Diabetic 2026. All rights reserved.

What does not work is a conversation that is either so vague it provides nothing actionable, or so detailed it becomes overwhelming. Aim for the version that takes five minutes and leaves the other person knowing exactly what they need to know.

5. Managing on difficult days

High-pressure work and t1d interact in ways that are worth anticipating rather than being surprised by. Stress raises blood glucose. Adrenaline raises blood glucose. Disrupted sleep raises blood glucose. Long travel raises blood glucose. All of these are features of demanding professional environments.

On hard days - when control is harder, when you are running higher or lower than usual, when you are snowed under - the temptation is to push through without acknowledgement. Sometimes that is the right call. But knowing when to make a small adjustment - stepping out for five minutes, eating something earlier than planned, pushing back a meeting by half an hour - is not weakness. It is the kind of decision-making under pressure that makes a good operator.

The person who manages their condition well on hard days does not ignore it - they deal with it efficiently and invisibly, and get on with the work.

6. Career success and t1d are not in opposition

I worked in many contexts while managing this condition. Others have done the same. The narrative that chronic illness and a career are in tension is one worth actively resisting.

T1d requires you to be organised, self-aware, good at managing complexity, and resilient over a very long period of time. These are valuable qualities which help you be effective.

The condition is demanding, but also compatible with a full, ambitious, satisfying professional life. Don't let anyone - including yourself - suggest otherwise.

Based on Sarah's lived experience of over 30 years managing t1d in demanding professional environments, not medical advice.

Want to understand more?

Sarah's memoir **Invisible Impacts** covers her first decade living with type 1 diabetes - including the early years of learning to manage the condition in professional settings.

Visit www.theablediabetic.com or contact Sarah at sarah@theablediabetic.com

THE ABLE DIABETIC | Share • Enjoy • Empower

© The Able Diabetic 2026. All rights reserved.