

Beyond the Horizons Consulting

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Alcoholism — the Bare Facts

Alcohol problems are common in the United States. So common that 14 million Americans suffer from alcohol abuse or alcoholism. **100,000 die from alcohol-related diseases or accidents.**

One-third of all adults engage in risky drinking behaviors, most notably drinking and driving. Patterns of alcohol consumption have changed remarkably over the last few generations:

- People are starting to drink at earlier ages.
- A higher percentage of persons are alcohol-dependent.
- Women are drinking more alcohol and more



frequently, so that their patterns of dependence are now similar to men's.

Here are some alarming statistics:

- In developed countries, alcohol use is the leading cause of male disability and the 10th leading

cause of female disability.

- Problem drinkers spend four times the amount of time in the hospital as nondrinkers as a result of drinking-related car accidents.
- Almost half of all trauma cases seen in hospital emergency room are alcohol-related.
- In a company employing 200 workers, employees and their families are likely to have 40 alcohol related hospital visits per year.

What does this mean for your business? Beyond the statistics, it means that you as employer or manager need to recognize the signs of alcoholism. You need to be informed about the disease. You need to be aware of — *and not in denial of* — the disease in its many manifestations.

Why Alcoholism Hurts the Bottom Line — a Story

There was once a company — let's call it Stainless Steel Company — which handled alcoholism in a seemingly logical way. When a supervisor would talk to his boss about a "problem employee," that employee's behavior would be scrutinized for the next three months. One of the patterns that would often emerge with "problem employees" was that they would get paid on Friday and then not show up for work until Monday or Tuesday. Their wife would call in, saying that they had had car trouble or that they were ill with the flu. When they did eventually show up for work, their production was usually exemplary. Outside of company functions, where they could be observed to swagger a bit or have "loose tongues," they were never directly observed drinking.

However, with the help of Employee Assistance Professionals

Several authors, including Kiersey and Bates, have

Professionals, these employees were confronted by management about their continual pattern of missing Mondays. The professionals just mentioned the facts. Then they asked the CAGE questions (to be discussed in February's Newsletter). The employees had to admit that they were having a problem "keeping their drinking down."

The EAP professionals suggested that these employees attend a 12-step program, specifically Alcoholics Anonymous. Not only that, they offered a private conference room for after-hours AA meetings, as well as offering a complete listing of other local meetings.

These employees really valued their jobs, and so — skeptical at first — they began attending AA meetings. The EAP professionals and managers noticed over six months' time that the previous problems had abated. **In fact, those very same "problem employees" had become model employees, taking responsibility for their part in not meeting production goals and seeking to improve their performance at every opportunity!**

These now exemplary employees were in fact instrumental in working with EAP professionals in identifying other troubled employees and bringing many to AA meetings.

Beyond Denial

In the next series of Newsletters, we will give you the tools to use to help your managers and your employees deal with an addiction that has life-threatening consequences. We begin with *just the bare facts*.

We as a people use alcohol in so many public and private daily rituals, from the nightcap to the martinis over a business lunch. We use it to celebrate the holidays, to toast at weddings, to get mellow with friends, to chase away the blues, and to avoid some of the harsh realities of everyday life. **Because alcohol is so socially accepted, we often forget that it is a dangerous drug — one that people use to medicate their anxieties, fears, or sadness.**

Let's take a leap from the vagueness — or denial — with which we usually speak about alcohol consumption. We begin by talking about what is a standard drink.

What is a Standard Drink?

A standard drink contains 14 grams — or about 0.6 fluid ounces — of pure alcohol. Practically this equates to

- 12 oz. of beer

- 8 - 9 oz. of malt liquor
- 5 oz. of table wine
- 3 - 4 oz. of port or sherry
- 2 - 3 oz. of cordial, liqueur, or aperitif
- 1.5 oz. of brandy or spirits.

Drinking Patterns: Rates and Risks

The rates and risks are specific to each sex, since women's bodies have proportionally less water and are thus less able to dilute alcohol than men's bodies. In general, persons who drink *12 or fewer drinks per year* are considered to be abstaining.

Men who drink no more than *14 drinks per week* or no more than *4 per day* are considered to be within the screening limits used by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. *For women these figures are no more than 7 per week or no more than 3 per day.* Exceeding these limits puts a person at risk for alcohol abuse or alcohol dependence.

The Criteria for Alcohol Abuse

Alcohol abuse puts a person at risk for alcohol dependence. It often results in one or more of the following behaviors:

- Failure to fulfill major role obligations at work, home, or school because of recurrent drinking.
- Recurrent drinking in hazardous situations, such as driving a car, operating machinery, swimming, or walking in a high-traffic area.
- Recurrent legal problems related to alcohol, such as being arrested for disorderly conduct or domestic abuse.
- Continued use despite recurrent interpersonal or social problems, such as verbal or physical bouts with family, friends, or coworkers.

The Criteria for Alcohol Dependence

The behaviors associated with alcohol dependence are usually look at over a 12-month period. **It is extremely difficult for someone who is alcohol-dependent to self-assess their behavior.** All addictive diseases are partially defined by the inability of

In addition, if CEOs and managers are aware of what motivates their personnel, they can be creative with benefits and rewards. When employees demonstrate a

the patient/addict to self-assess. That is, there is no way that they can be objective about any of their behaviors, most especially their addictive behavior itself. We say that **the person is in denial**.

Nonetheless, here are the significant symptoms of dependence. Note that all questions should be preceded by “during the last 12 months.”

- **Tolerance:** “Have you found that you have to drink much more than you once did to get the effect you want?”
- **Withdrawal syndrome:** “When the effects of alcohol are wearing off, have you had trouble sleeping? Found yourself shaking? Nervous? Nauseous? Restless? Sweating, or with your heart beating fast?”
- **Impaired control:** “Have you wanted to or actually tried to stop drinking and found you couldn’t?”
- **Drank more or longer than you intended:** “Have you had times when you ‘went unconscious’ and drank more and/or longer than you intended?”
- **Neglect of activities:** “Have you given up or neglected activities that you once found pleasurable in order to drink?”
- **Time spent drinking or getting over the aftereffects:** “Have you had a period of time when drinking was your main activity?” “Have you spent a considerable amount of time getting over the aftereffects of drinking?”
- **Continued used despite physical or emotional problems:** “Have you been aware that drinking was causing you some physical or emotional problems — for example, depression or increased anxiety — and continued nevertheless?”

In our next issue, we will talk more about using the CAGE screening instrument and about the role of your Employee Assistance Program.

Professional business consultants and coaches bring a wealth of information about employee behavior, mind-sets, and issue such as alcoholism. This knowledge — put into action — can not only help make your business run more smoothly — it can actually **improve the bottom line!**

Call Jean Eva at Beyond the Horizons Consulting for an appointment to discuss your needs. She will be able to recommend what tools might best help and whether an individual coaching format or a team development or vi-

a deeper look at “problem employees” might be a good first step for your business! We are available through the Contact Page on this website or by telephone {(505) 466-4990}. We will be happy to meet with you at *your* convenience!