



Recovery can be like hiking a mountain. It's challenging, but the payoff is huge.

# No job will drive me to drink: Recovery changed my career



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[6 articles](#)

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 Open Immersive Reader

September marks 12 years since I last drank alcohol and 23 years of sobriety overall. I'm not one for personal oversharing on social media, especially on LinkedIn. But as National Recovery Month draws to a close, I'm sharing my own story to build awareness around the connection between alcohol and the workplace and some incredibly exciting trends in recovery.

Getting sober had a huge impact on my career, though probably not in the ways you might think. I was never called out for my drinking or lost a job, but it

certainly hurt my performance. And it hurt me. A lot.

Sobriety changed my career by making me fiercely protective of my personal well-being, and this impacted every job decision I made moving forward. Though the concepts of self-care and prioritizing well-being wouldn't become trendy for decades, I knew instinctively that to stay sober, I needed to take better care of myself. And that meant reducing work time and stress.

When I started my sober journey wayyyy back in 1989, I was a high-functioning "alcoholic". (I no longer use this shame-burdened term, but that's how I identified myself as a member of Alcoholics Anonymous, the only viable long-term recovery game in town until recent years. Fortunately, so much has changed.)

## **Finding work-life balance before that was a "thing"**

Newly married and 30, I would also soon be trying to get pregnant -- another huge motivator for cleaning up my act! To prepare, I left my newspaper job of six years to build a freelance writing business that would allow me to work from home and control my schedule. I knew I didn't want to be a mom and have a demanding, high-stress career. (I never bought into the superwoman myth popularized by that ridiculous commercial about bringing home the bacon and frying it up in the pan.)





Leaving my job to freelance gave me more time to focus on my sobriety and being a mom.

My strategy worked. I was able to focus on getting and staying sober, spending more time with my baby daughter, and honing my skills as a freelance writer. Since then, I've spent about half my career working for myself or contracting and the other half working as a full-time employee. Each time I took a regular job, I enjoyed the work, but it always became a burnout situation with too much damn stress.

## **Getting crushed by an impossible workload**

My last relapse in 2011 had everything to do with my job. I'd taken the role against my better judgment to avoid being laid off when they eliminated my department. The economy was still too shaky to feel confident about going it on my own again. (The stress my team members and I all experienced makes me think of all the people I see now on LinkedIn getting affected by layoffs. If you're among them, I hope you may see something in this that helps, even if you don't struggle with alcohol.)

That new position came with a crushing workload and poor leadership that set the tone for a toxic environment. Yes, there were many people who were kind (I hope you know who you are!). But there were also bullies. And there was my own ego, which could be a big bully too.

I knew my sobriety was on thin ice when I went to NYC on a business trip. And I knew I was going to drink when I went to an optional dinner party celebrating a



big project milestone. After drinking club soda during two nights of cocktail parties, my resolve was worn down. I was so out of my mind from being hungry, tired and angry about my workload that I didn't care.

I went early, ordered a vodka martini straight up and kept up the pace until I blacked out (this was not common even during my drinking days). A partner had to help me get safely back to my room, bless that kind man.

When I came to the next morning, it was 10 minutes before a meeting with my boss to talk about a potential promotion. I called her, told her the truth and we agreed I should just focus on getting work done before my flight home.

I picked up my last white chip at an AA meeting at 6:30 a.m. the next day. The pain and humiliation I felt is still vivid 12 years later.

## Never again

On that excruciating day after, I promised myself I would never let a job become more important than my health and sobriety again. I kept working hard, but stopped killing myself to meet unreasonable expectations. I gave it another year, to see if my workload lightened after they added a senior position to my one-person marketing team (that promotion I'd blown). When it didn't get better, I kept my promise to prioritize my well-being and resigned on friendly terms.

I'm not going to pretend. That decision was scary. It meant leaving a good job for less security by working mostly part-time in contract roles or freelance. And it was so worth it.

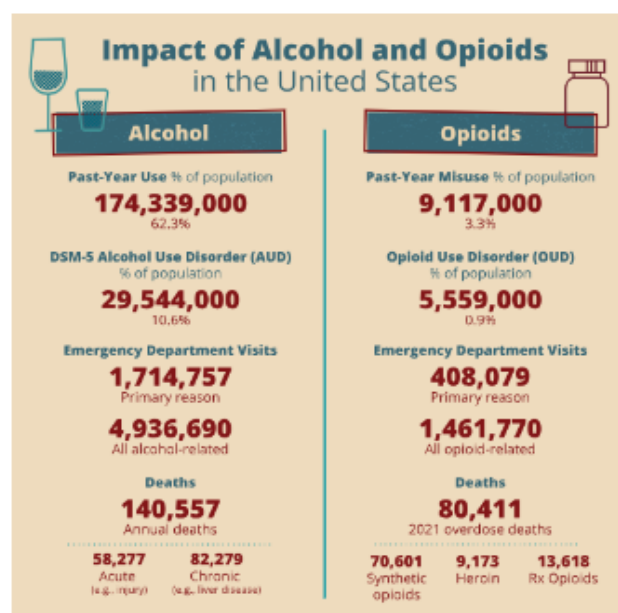
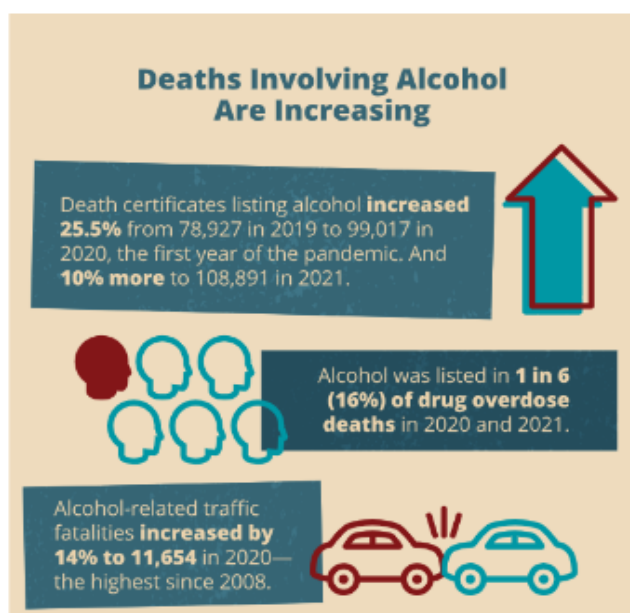


## Changing perceptions, movements and markets

Now in 2023, I'm thrilled to see perceptions changing about alcohol in our culture and the workplace. As with remote work and the growing emphasis on well-being and mental health, the pandemic accelerated emerging trends in alcohol awareness and online treatment options. At the same time, the global market for no- and low-alcohol beverages is exploding, surpassing \$11 billion in 2022.

The **sober curious** movement, Dry January, a multitude of new sobriety support communities, and better access to professional addiction treatment and mental health therapy through telehealth are making it easier for people to get help early. Before they suffer tragic consequences.

All this positive change isn't a moment too soon. Deaths involving alcohol are increasing at a shocking rate. **Death certificates listing alcohol increased 25.5%** from nearly 79,000 in 2019 to 99,017 in 2020, and 10% more to nearly 109,000 in 2021.



Source: National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism

The pandemic played at least some role in these increased mortality rates. But now the problem is that everyone who developed heavy drinking habits as a way to cope can't just snap their fingers and cut back. Some people can, but for many it's just not that easy. Alcohol is an addictive substance. And we live in an alcohol-saturated culture where it's impossible to escape advertising and social media messages that push alcohol as the perfect way to relax after work, celebrate with friends, or cheer on the home team.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not suggesting that we need prohibition or alcohol bans. I'm not an officer in the no-fun police. Yet we do need a more mindful approach to alcohol in the workplace.

Here are some ideas and resources for individuals, managers and employers who are interested in learning more about supporting alcohol recovery for yourself, your team members and organizations.



The screenshot shows the top portion of the 'Rethinking Drinking' website. The header has a dark teal background with the title 'RETHINKING DRINKING' in white and light blue, followed by the subtitle 'Alcohol & your health' in a script font. Navigation links for 'Print', 'Shareable Images', and 'Bookmark & Share' are on the right, along with a search bar. Below the header is a teal navigation bar with links: 'HOME', 'HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH?', 'THINKING ABOUT A CHANGE?', 'TOOLS', 'Q&A'S', and 'HELP LINKS'. The hero section features a photograph of a woman with her hand to her face, looking distressed. Overlaid text reads: 'DO YOU KNOW: THE SIGNS THAT ALCOHOL IS CAUSING HARM?'. A small image of a glass of alcohol is visible in the bottom right corner of the hero image.

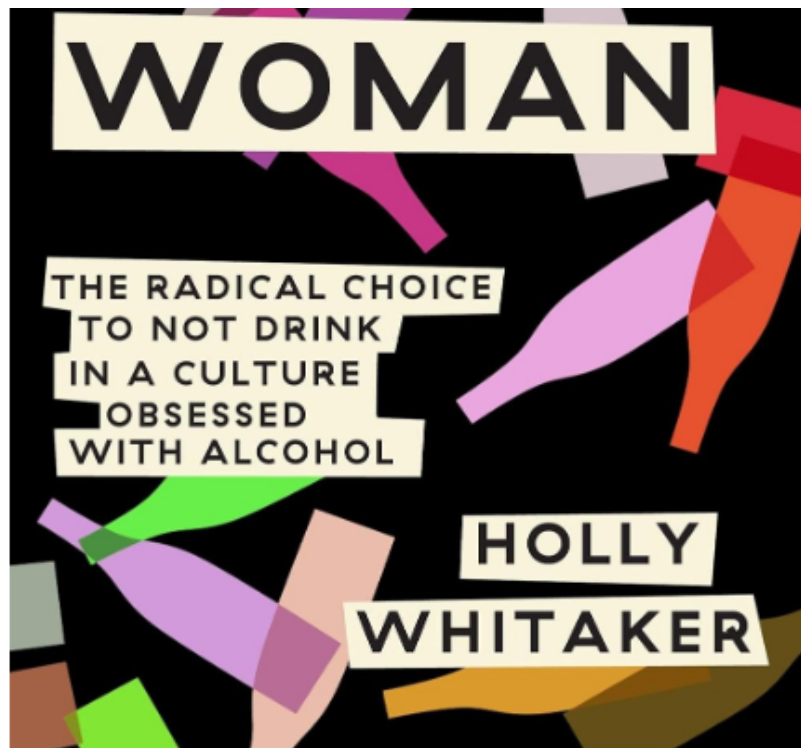
This government guide gives you the facts and interactive tools to help you assess alcohol's impact on your life.

## Resources for individuals – the sober curious, friends and family

- **Facts and tools:** The [Rethinking Drinking](#) guide from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) provides evidence-based information and interactive tools to help you evaluate your alcohol use, understand the health risks, create a plan to cut down or quit, and determine whether you may need professional help. The resource “empowers people to be mindful of – and to take charge of – their drinking patterns,” said NIAAA Director George Koob in a press release.
- **Mutual-support groups and sober communities:** Like so many activities, the pandemic sparked a virtual recovery support boom that’s going strong. While AA has helped millions with its 12-step based program and continues to have the largest network of in-person meetings, there are now an ever-increasing number of options. Google “online sobriety support” to start exploring. Keep an open mind. It may take a while to find the right fit for you. After years in AA where I never quite fit, I’ve found my sober home in [The Luckiest Club \(TLC\)](#), a self-described “dogma-free, compassionate place to recover from alcohol addiction and thrive in life.” Based on my experience, this is an accurate description. (Full disclosure: I’m a volunteer steward for TLC’s Florida subgroup, where we’re building both IRL and online connections.)







- **Quit Lit books:** This is where a lot of sober curious folks start, and there's no shortage of inspiration. It's become such a hot genre that the New York Times recently published a list of "[8 Books to Help You Drink Less, or Quit Altogether](#)." My personal favorite is "[Quit Like A Woman: The Radical Choice To Not Drink In A Culture Obsessed With Alcohol](#)" by Holly Whitaker. Besides being controversial, irreverent and funny, Whitaker offers one of my favorite quotes about recovery: "To properly heal from addiction, we need a holistic approach. We need to create a life we don't need to escape." For most people, that includes having work where you feel valued, respected and not constantly overwhelmed. This is where employers and managers come into the picture.

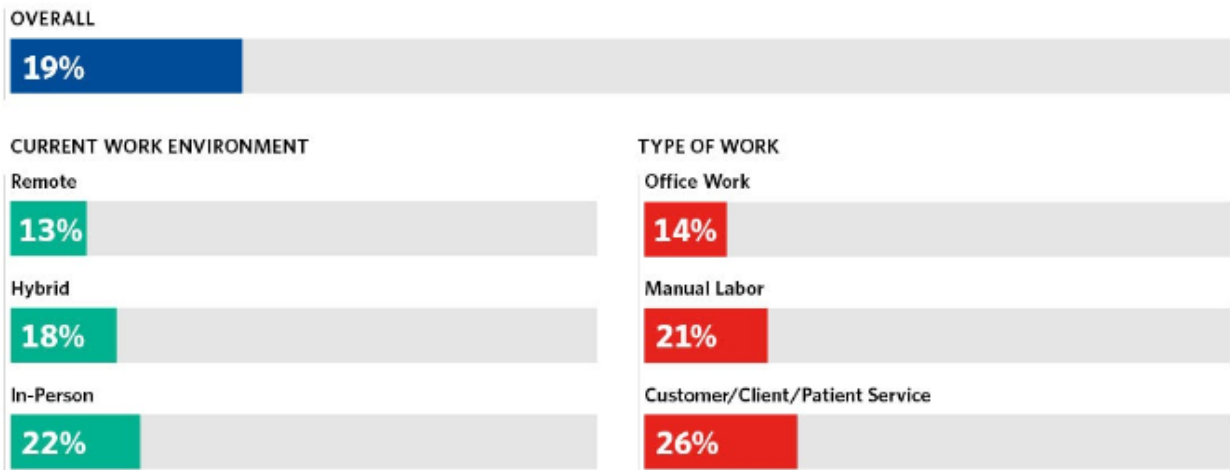
## Resources for employers – what you can do to help

**Create a safe and positive work environment:** The best way employers and managers can help reduce alcohol and substance abuse problems among their workers is to provide a workplace where people feel safe, valued, respected and not constantly burned out. We hear a lot about these values in today's so-called



“purpose-driven organizations,” but how many employers really go beyond lip service? Employee surveys suggest the reality is there’s still a lot of harmful toxicity in the workplace. In other words, are you driving some employees to drink as a way to cope?

PERCENTAGE OF WORKERS DESCRIBING WORKPLACE AS TOXIC  
BY CURRENT WORK ENVIRONMENT AND TYPE OF WORK



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For example, a 2023 survey from the American Psychological Association revealed that **19% of workers say their workplace is very or somewhat toxic**. More than 1 in 5 workers (22%) said they have experienced harm to their mental health at work, and 22% of workers said they experienced harassment at work in the past 12 months—compared with 14% in 2022.

Some employers are getting serious about building a safer and more supportive environment for all their employees, and particularly managers, by offering easy access to professional coaching through platforms such as [Growthspace](#) and [Betterup](#). Besides creating a more positive work environment and supporting better employee mental well being, these types of programs are proven to increase productivity and retention.

- **Update benefit packages to include alternative treatment:** HR managers

can become game changers by ensuring your employer's health insurance plans offer a range of options for alcohol use disorder, addiction and overall mental health. In addition to traditional in-patient and out-patient alcohol treatment, do your employees have easy access to treatment via telehealth? Can they use health savings accounts (HSAs) or other rewards to pay membership fees for online sobriety support communities like they can for gyms?

- **Become a Recovery Supportive Workplace:** According to the CDC, a [Workplace Supported Recovery Program](#) aims to prevent workplace factors that could cause or prolong a substance use disorder and lower barriers to seeking and receiving care, and maintaining recovery. The program also teaches managers and workers about substance use disorders to reduce stigma. Another way to help foster inclusivity and fight stigma is by [supporting an Employee Resource Group \(ERG\) like Soberforce](#), a community for sober, sober curious and sober allies for Salesforce employees.
- **Be more mindful about employee events:** When planning events, it's important to remember that many people don't drink for religious, health, or personal reasons. Generally, employers are getting more creative with employee events. Fortunately, we've come a long way since the Mad Men days, but alcohol still features prominently at many work events. You can be more inclusive by offering plenty of other beverage options, and this means thinking beyond soft drinks and club soda. You will brighten a sober employee's day by making sure there are some quality alcohol-free beers, wines and mocktails. You may be surprised at how many people choose these options, as more folks are cutting back for all kinds of reasons. And be sure there's more to do than drink. That gets mighty boring fast when you're not drinking alcohol.

*These are just a few suggestions for how to make a difference in your life and in*

*others. What innovative approaches to normalizing recovery in the workplace have you noticed? Please let us all know in the comments.*

#selfcare #addictionrecovery #wellbeing #mentalhealth



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