

# Addiction & recovery in the workplace

## Research references:

Click on the text in grey in this article – you will be hyperlinked to the full original articles.

“Boozy businessmen on the at-risk list for alcohol time bomb,” the *Mirror* wrote of a *BMJ* report recently, with the *Daily Mail* adding that “Middle class over-50s are most likely to drink to harmful levels”. How does this affect the organisations these executives work for?

I could write that my interest in the answer is because alcohol, tobacco and other-drug use is the greatest preventable healthcare problem in business today, yet is too often expensively neglected. That is true. But what drives me to campaign for helping employers and employees is that I owe my life to the company I worked for in 1991. Its workplace policies and wonderful staff and HR department made me realise that recovery was possible – they even paid for me to go to rehab. I have been clean and sober ever since and helping others in turn repays my debt.

## The cost to companies of doing nothing.

Consumption of illicit drugs and/or alcohol can lead to the following negative effects, all of which can have severe consequences for the career of the person involved, their colleagues and the success of the employing company:

- Increased rate of absences
- Fatalities and injuries – ILO estimated that up to 40% of accidents at work involve alcohol
- Health harms including cancers, liver and heart disease, diseases of the central nervous system (stroke, dementia), risky sexual behaviors with adverse pregnancy outcomes, and infants damaged with FASD/NAS; these health issues of course also impact negatively on work
- Loss of productivity - substance-abusing employees function at about 2/3rds of their

capability, and employees who use drugs are 3 times more likely to be late for work

- Damaged customer relations
- Termination of employment – eg, illicit drug users are more than twice as likely (12.3%) than others (5.1%) to have changed employers 3 or more times in the past year
- Impaired judgment and decision-making
- Poor team morale and staff relations
- Unwanted legal complications.

These add up to startling figures, as the panel on the facing page shows: in the UK, £7.3billion a year in lost productivity from alcohol alone. No figures for illicit drugs are easily available, but Public Health England estimates that drug use costs society £15.4billion a year. In the US, lost productivity amounts to \$134billion from alcohol and \$120billion from illicit drugs every year (see panel). Research is not widely available for prescribed drugs' impact on the workplace, but the US Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration estimates that over 6.5million people used prescription drugs for non-medical reasons in 2013. That's more than cocaine (1.5 million), hallucinogens (1.3 million) and heroin (681,000) combined. In the UK, the number of long-term dependent painkiller users is estimated at over 1million.

We will discuss this, plus solutions, in depth at the Recovery Plus WARriors (Work, Addiction, Recovery) conference in October. The Countess of Sandwich will discuss prescription drugs.

There is also the cost of lost productivity from colleagues of the person with the substance-



“Look after the goose that lays golden eggs – it will be hard to find another”

*\$134-185billion a year in the US and £7.3billion in the UK is lost in productivity from alcohol alone – but investing in substance-abuse treatment can exceed costs by 12 to 1. Deirdre Boyd explains.*

abuse problem: for example, 14% of employees in one survey said they had to re-do work due to a co-worker's drinking. Colleagues might also have to both shoulder some of the dependent person's workload, suffer damaging behaviours and have loyalties torn when considering if their colleague should be reported.

Moreover, over half of working family members of alcoholics report that their own ability to function at work and at home was negatively impacted by their family member's drinking. There is even a book on this by *New York Times* bestseller Janet Geringer Woititz called *Self-Sabotage Syndrome: Adult Children [of alcoholics] in the Workplace*. Nick Barton, CEO of Action on Addiction, whose patron is the Duchess of Cambridge, will share research and his experience on these stressed family members at Recovery Plus WARriors.

## Even a little can have a disproportionate impact.

Impairment of skills begins with any significant amount of alcohol in the body. For example, a Modell and Mountz study of airline pilots who had to perform routine tasks in a simulator under 3 alcohol test conditions found that:

- Before drinking alcohol, 10% of them could not perform all the operations correctly
- After reaching a blood:alcohol concentration of 100mg/dl, the 10% figure rose to 89%
- After the alcohol left their systems, 68% still could not perform all operations correctly.

The after-effects of drinking (hangovers) can also impair both work attendance and performance. A survey carried out by YouGov for PruHealth

## UK statistics in a glance

### £7.3billion a year:

lost productivity due to alcohol, at 2009/10 costs ([www.ias.org.uk/Alcohol-knowledge-centre/Economic-impacts/Factsheets/Economic-costs.aspx](http://www.ias.org.uk/Alcohol-knowledge-centre/Economic-impacts/Factsheets/Economic-costs.aspx)).

### 14-20million:

working days lost each year from alcoholism.

### 60% of workplace deaths:

are linked to alcohol, as are 40% of accidents.

### £30,614:

cost to recruit a single staff member, according to report by Oxford Economics (<http://www.hrreview.co.uk/hr-news/recruitment/it-costs-over-30k-to-replace-a-staff-member/50677>).

### £4,000 - £310,000:

cost for a month of residential rehab (figures vary from UK's StreetScene to a swiss clinic).

## US statistics in a glance

### \$134billion a year:

lost productivity due to alcohol-related deaths and disabilities ([www.cdc.gov/workplacehealth/promotion/references/index.html#A15](http://www.cdc.gov/workplacehealth/promotion/references/index.html#A15)).

### \$120billion a year:

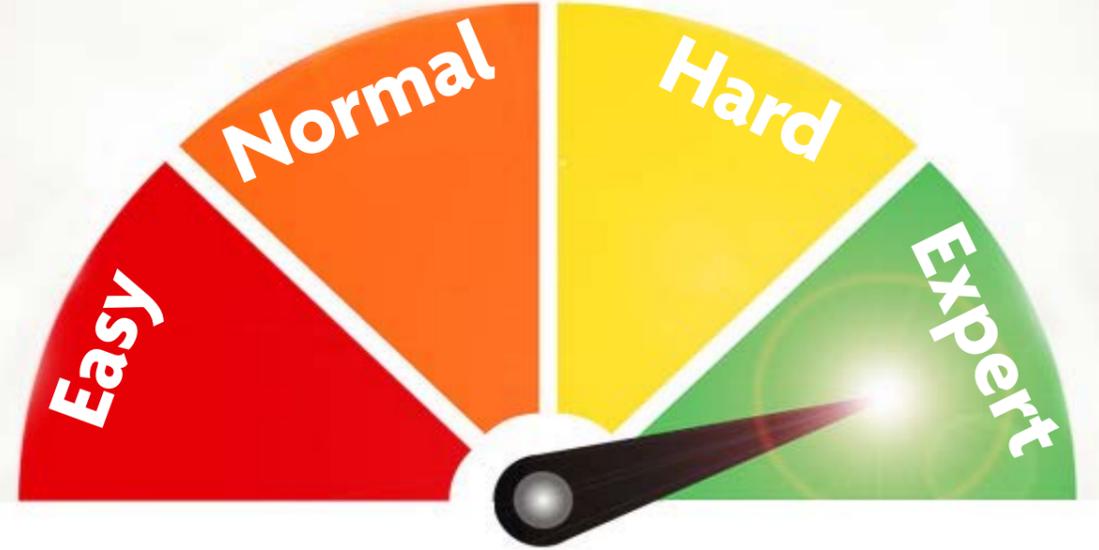
lost productivity due to illicit drugs (<https://www.whitehouse.gov/ondcp/ondcp-fact-sheets/how-illicit-drug-use-affects-business-and-the-economy>).

### 500million:

working days lost each year from alcoholism. (<http://store.samhsa.gov/product/14-Short-Employer-Cost-Savings-Briefs/SMA08-4350>)



# How difficult?



*Delegates at Deirdre Boyd's presentation at Recovery Plus WARriors will leave with the ability to:*

1. Explain and discuss the human and business cost of drug and alcohol use in the workplace
2. Identify ways to minimise these costs
3. Enumerate the financial and human benefits of investing in drug and alcohol policies for prevention and treatment
4. Justify investment in valuable employees
5. Evidence that you have carried out best practice
6. Acquire a list of helpful resources and expert contacts.



found that, on any given day, about 200,000 UK workers are hungover from the night before. 22% admitted to making mistakes at work because of their hangover, 83% that it makes a difference to the way they work, 28% had headaches so could not concentrate and 62% said that they "muddled through the day".

### Benefits of addressing substance use.

- Savings from investing in substance abuse treatment can **exceed costs by 12 to 1**
- Substance-abuse treatment improves work performance and productivity
- It simultaneously reduces interpersonal conflicts, absenteeism, drug- and alcohol-related accidents and insurance costs
- Avoid the cost of replacing valuable employees which can be **25-200% of annual compensation** – and avoid the consequent loss of institutional knowledge, service continuity and coworker productivity and morale
- **76% of people** with drug or alcohol problems are employed – firing them won't make the problem go away, but **addressing the core issues** can yield improvements
- At the extreme ends of the spectrum, errors due to substance use have cost £\$millions to many individual organisations – witness oil disasters and ship/plane crashes – but reclaiming the lives of top directors and salespeople can earn extra £\$millions for their companies.

The cost of comprehensive insurance for alcohol treatment is very small. Actuarial estimates by SAMHSA suggest that upgrading employment-based health insurance coverage would **increase premiums by only 0.2%**.

### Prevention is better than cure.

Maintaining a healthier workforce can lower direct costs such as insurance premiums and worker's compensation claims. It will also **positively impact many indirect costs** such as absenteeism and productivity. To improve the health of their employees, businesses can create a wellness culture that is employee-centred, provides supportive environments where safety is ensured and health can emerge, and gives access and opportunities for a variety of workplace health programmes. Here, the **boss can be the hidden fighter** in the war on drugs. Government should give more support to employers on this issue.

Many businesses have implemented drug-free workplace programmes to develop and maintain a safer, happier working environment. Such is recognition of their value that these are championed by unions, too – for example, click on **Unison's overview**. There is a checklist from mediation specialist **ACAS** on what should be included in a policy on drugs misuse at work. This is expanded on in the next article and typically covers:

- An extensive policy
- Supervisor coaching
- Employee training
- Employee assistance
- Drug testing.

This last factor can encroach on an employee's privacy/rights, so must be implemented with care. George Powell of Summit Diagnostics will be speaking at more length on testing at the Recovery Plus WARriors conference in October.



### About the author

For two decades, Deirdre Boyd has been a leader in the field of recovery from addiction, based in the UK with an international reputation. She heads up DB Recovery Resources, supplying a daily news service to the international alcohol/drug addiction-recovery field. For over 20 years, she was CEO of the Addiction Recovery Foundation charity, editor of *Addiction Today*, author of *Addiction & Recovery: self-help for friends, families and addicts*. She serves on the Addictions working group of the Centre for Policy Studies and on IC&RC's Advisory Council, and contributed to government policy. Deirdre was voted by the public to win the Directory of Social Change Influencer Of The Year Award 2012. The International Council on Alcohol & Addictions awarded her the 'Dr Vincent Bakeman Memorial Award for Outstanding Community Services'.

### Cannabis: clearing the haze.

Keeping workplaces drug-free is becoming more muddled by 'medical marijuana' legalisation: a reality for some US states and an opinion-shaper in the UK. Marijuana legalisation has **clashed with drug testing** in the workplace. Employers must take steps to avoid becoming a target of an employee lawsuit, whether the employee has a strong case or not. "There are four scenarios in these types of lawsuits that I see over and over again," shared employment lawyer Todd Wulffson; read his **advice**. And note the near miss at this **human rights tribunal**.

The billionaire-funded disinformation about legalisation and 'Big Pot' – a potent blend of Big Tobacco and Big Pharma – has hooked many working people outside the US, who can devise sensitive dilemmas for their colleagues and employers. Too often, managers find themselves nonplussed for answers. Their uncertainties will be addressed at Recovery Plus WARriors by **Kevin Sabet** who cofounded, with Patrick Kennedy of the political family, *Sensible Approaches to Marijuana* and given evidence to Senate and other government hearings.

### Safeguard your business legally.

In the UK, there is no direct legal requirement for employing organisations to implement alcohol policies *per se*. But health & safety at work law requires both employers and employees to maintain a safe working environment: were an alcohol-related accident to occur, the employer, the employee concerned or both could be liable depending on circumstances. Employers are obliged to look for signs of alcohol dependent

behaviour in their staff as, although an employee found drunk on duty is at risk of dismissal for gross misconduct, employment protection law means employers are required to treat dependence as a form of sickness, giving an employee the chance to overcome the problem rather than an immediate cause for discipline. This approach is supported by the **Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service**, the ILO and the Employment Appeals Tribunal.

An existing effective alcohol and drug policy is paramount. But don't be complacent. For example, do those rules or guidelines change when psychoactive substances are consumed outside work, to excess or not? Proving impairment to performance is absolutely key.

Heavy drinking in personal leisure time can have a long-term effect on work performance, including absenteeism, inefficiency, poor decision-making and damaged customer relations. Specific productivity problems include procrastination, inconsistent performance, neglect of detail, poorer quality of work, less quantity of work, more frequent mistakes, and interpersonal difficulties. Where there is clear evidence of alcohol affecting an employee's behaviour or performance in the workplace – including recklessly coming to work having been drinking – dismissal is likely to be held to be fair at an Employment Tribunal, especially where there might be a risk to others.

Avoid, too, becoming an organisational culture which tolerates heavy drinking as a way of socialising or bonding, or doing business.