

ALCOHOLISM IN INDUSTRY

Modern Procedures

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ALCOHOLISM— A TREATABLE EMPLOYEE ILLNESS

When an employee is hired nowadays it is frequently a life-time contract. A person employed at 20, paid an average of \$6,000 a year until retirement at 65 will have cost \$270,000 in direct salary.

With this amount of investment in an employee can any business afford to neglect early and effective action when alcoholism threatens the skills, experience and effectiveness of an employee?

Companies which have tested alcoholism programs in their employee relations program and as a part of their general company health approach, have found that the strongest kind of incentive for the individual to accept and cooperate in treatment for alcoholism is the personal value and dignity of the job itself.

In 1959—when The Christopher D. Smithers Foundation received the cooperation of 35 leading U.S. business and industrial firms in preparing its Foundation pamphlet "A Basic Outline for A Company Program on Alcoholism"—management in general throughout the nation was slowly becoming aware that the heretofore baffling and costly personnel problem of alcoholism could be contained through constructive action.

Earlier in the 1950's the American Medical Association had officially declared alcoholism a disease. On this basis an alcoholic employee was suffering from an illness and, moreover, an illness which modern methods had proven treatable. Management through experimental measures then found in an increasing number of instances that there was a sound approach to a personnel condition which formerly had been considered too personal a matter, too inextricably

bound up with the private life of the individual employee, to cope with through company action.

The pioneers in this movement to organize company rehabilitation programs for alcoholic employees, solidly backed by company policy and management affirmation were such nationally-known firms as E. I. du Pont de Nemours & Co., Allis-Chalmers Mfg. Co., Eastman Kodak Co. and Consolidated Edison Co. of New York.

While there were about 35 leading companies with such programs in 1959, today there are over 300 firms which have taken some constructive action toward decreasing the numbers of alcoholics on company payrolls. Whereas the traditional company approach to detected alcoholism among employees had been dismissal in years past, today company alcoholism programs have proven that over 50% of alcoholic cases treated under these programs show successful results through a return to a happy every-day existence without alcohol for the employee and his or her return to normal usefulness for the company concerned.

For the sufferers themselves and their families, the resulting cost in human misery is incalculable.

Through effective company programs for the successful rehabilitation of the majority of alcoholic employees, management has found two important advantages:

1) The company has been able to reduce sizeable losses in operating costs directly traceable to alcoholism among employees as well as retain many valued employees in their jobs.

2) An important and beneficial step has been taken by management in the field of employee relations.

The financial cost of such programs is minimal. In most cases these programs have been found to pay for themselves through significant reductions in operating expenses and increased personnel efficiency.

ALCOHOLISM IN INDUSTRY

by

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Prof. Harrison M. Trice is well-known throughout business and industrial circles as a specialist on the problem of alcoholism among employees.

During his sabbatical year, on leave of absence from his faculty post at Cornell, Prof. Trice joined the staff of The Christopher D. Smithers Foundation from September 1, 1961 until September 1, 1962.

Prof. Trice devoted much of his time during that year toward further intensive investigation in the business and industrial field on recent developments by management in combating the problem of alcoholism among employees.

Already known for his pamphlet "The Problem Drinker On the Job" (published 1959, Bulletin #40, N. Y. State School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Cornell University, Ithaca, N. Y.) Prof. Trice has now written this new Foundation pamphlet as further help to management in combating alcoholism as a major personnel problem. Now in its Fourth Printing (1971), Prof. Trice has added results of recent field investigations, particularly in relation to union reactions and cooperation in employee alcoholism programs.

Prof. Trice herein examines the essential "basics" of a successful program for the rehabilitation of alcoholic employees, considers these various sections in detail, points out their inter-dependence on each other — so that a total successful company effort may be made in reducing the prevalence of alcoholism among the company's total personnel.

Written in a practical "down-to-earth" manner, Prof. Trice's pamphlet is founded upon actual contacts in the workaday world of business and industry and reflects the basic conclusions he has reached after personal interviews with many company executives and union officials — medical directors, personnel managers, industrial nurses, safety directors, shop stewards, employee relations specialists, supervisors, foremen and other key

people who come in contact with working personnel every working day. These interviews have taken place in many companies in a variety of industries.

The Smithers Foundation feels that this pamphlet brings into proper focus the essential "basics" which are encountered and must be treated in proper perspective from top-management down through the ranks of supervisors and foremen in dealing with alcoholism as an illness among employees.

The eight chapter headings (which follow) take up in detail the various segments which form a company program on alcoholism ending with "the \$64 question" — how to motivate the alcoholic employee himself to accept treatment under company direction?

Through the basic approach of Prof. Trice, the Smithers Foundation hopes that management in U.S. business and industry can more expertly further its overall attack on what has become in recent years known as "The Billion Dollar Hangover" — the annual cost of alcoholism among employees in our nation's economy.

As Prof. Trice states: "Now that a substantial number of companies have developed a treatment approach (for alcoholism among employees) many others are showing interest. This bulletin is designed to help move this interest toward concrete action."

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INTRODUCTION

In many ways current efforts to "do something" about alcoholism are merely extensions of traditional definitions and conflicts. Thus there is a heavy trend toward government-supported treatment and research programs, paralleling the involvement of government during the prohibition era. The persistent, deep-seated image of the alcoholic as a late-stage "lush" continues to influence doctors, jurists, and educators despite a lessening of the moral stigma.

Skid Row remains an obsession out of all proportion to its numbers and treatment potential. Alcoholism, as an illness, is still closely identified with welfare work, with the persistent notion that social and public welfare agencies are the vehicles for treatment.

In other words, those who work in the alcoholism field today run the grave risk of merely reviving old definitions and emphases, thus putting them in new and modern garb, rather than producing a genuinely new approach.

This booklet aims at reducing this risk. It does so by making a simple assumption: alcoholism and its treatment must become a part of the pivotal, basic institutions of our society rather than isolated in welfare agencies and among social workers.

First and foremost among our basic institutions is the business world made up of management and labor. Ours is a business civilization. The values of the business community receive support and reinforcement in school, religion and mass media. The central position of the business world in the power structure of American life is clear cut, almost obvious. To the extent that business managements and labor unions, both large and small, develop realistic policies about alcoholics, and follow through on them, will the traditional mold be broken and effective action taken.

Consequently what follows is an effort to help business firms of all types think through the essentials of a company program for the rehabilitation of alcoholic employees.

It is no "canned" program, no blueprint. Rather it is an attempt to deal with the common problem facing practically any organization which wants to explore setting up a program. The "basics" a company will face are considered, leaving to any particular concern the fitting of these basics to their own requirements.

One fundamental belief lies behind all that is said herein: a truly basic change toward alcoholism will occur when American business and labor act realistically. And perhaps an even more basic belief lies just under this one: the possibility for wide-spread, effective results when business and labor do act to combat alcoholism as an employee health problem in an ever-increasing number of companies. This concerted action will be so much greater than the potential elsewhere within the framework of American life that even the most skeptical will come to slowly realize that alcoholism is a "respectable" disease among American citizens, that it should bear no stigma, and that the disease is treatable in a majority of instances.

CHAPTER I

CENTRAL ROLE OF THE WORK WORLD IN REHABILITATING ALCOHOLICS

For numerous reasons the work world has a big part to play in setting the stage for the recovery of alcoholics. In many ways it has more to offer than other parts of American society. Reasons for this are numerous and simple.

Aids Early Case Finding

Developing alcoholics in the early and early-middle stages of the disorder continue to work actively at a job. So they are regularly in an on-going situation where they are visible to bosses, fellow workers, and union people. Thus the early and middle symptoms of alcoholism can be seen and identified on the job. True it is that the earliest signs are skillfully covered at work by the alcoholic employee. But as the middle symptoms begin to appear they are readily visible. It is also true that certain jobs are mobile, somewhat isolated, and often free from supervision. But these are a small minority of jobs. Most jobs by their very nature — schedules, routines, inspection — act to expose clues of alcoholism.

It is not difficult for a supervisor to observe a repeated decline in work performance. At first it will be spotty, but as the illness progresses, over-all work effectiveness will decline. Indeed the boss can hardly fail to notice it in most cases. Various forms of absenteeism, including unusual kinds such as leaving a job for a sizeable block of time, are equally obvious.

At first the boss will not notice too much and the alcoholic employee will go to great lengths to cover up, but, again, signs will soon become apparent. For example, he will notice the unusual excuses that pile up to explain absences — even to the point of flagrant, open lies. The same could be said for mood changes after drinking — especially after noontime drinking — for spasmodic work pace, and for such physical clues as red or bleary eyes, hand tremors, and flushed face.

Indeed it is difficult to accept the oft-heard description of the "hidden" alcoholic on the job. Beyond doubt the earliest signs are not too visible, are well covered by the employee. But relatively soon various clues begin to appear on the job. These are correspondingly early in the illness so they can help identify the illness at a time when therapy has a better chance of succeeding.

Of course, the term "hidden" may well be true of executive alcoholics who have excellent opportunities to camouflage themselves. The same might be said for doctors and scientists who work in industry. But for the majority it is difficult to see how their developing alcoholism can be hidden

for very long from those in direct, regular day-to-day contact with them. Higher echelons of management may not observe them. Staff people who are also removed from the specific work place may likewise be unaware of them. But their immediate supervisors and face-to-face fellow workers in all likelihood observe many of the on-the-job signs of alcoholism in its earlier forms.

It is less likely that those close to the problem drinker on the job will always connect what they observe with incipient alcoholism. On the other hand there is a good chance that such linkage can be made. It is not too difficult to put "two and two" together, although definite errors are a hazard. It is reasonable to say, however, that training can aid in bringing about an awareness of what various alcoholism signs mean.

Work World Has a Simple Definition

A second reason why the work world can greatly contribute to recovery from alcoholism is its emphasis on performance. Because doing a good job — "getting the job done" — is a core value in the work world, it is in a unique position to define early and middle symptoms as undesirable and disruptive. One of the chief job features of employed alcoholics is their repeated poor work. So the malady produces a direct violation of a basic work value. This gives all levels of management a clear basis for entering an employee's private life. It gives the union a simple reason to join with management in support of a treatment policy.

Recurrent poor job performance due to the use of alcohol becomes a simple, direct and clear definition of alcoholism. Compared with the definitions of the clinic and research project, this is the essence of simplicity. It avoids the complex. As such it is easily understood by busy supervisors as well as the alcoholic employee himself. Alcoholism is simply repeated poor work because of the way the employee uses alcohol. This in turn has a bad effect on smooth job operations as far as the boss, peers, and union representatives are concerned.

By using this simple key to what alcoholism is, two very basic things happen. First, the behavior is seen as *undesirable*. This definition does not come from home or church, but from an unsentimental, practical, "hard-headed," work world. It does not provide any prestige at all for the early and middle symptoms of alcoholism as is often the case. Rather it calls "a spade a spade" in a simple manner, linking it with easily-understood job behavior.

Secondly, the definition helps "clear the air" generally. Americans have been traditionally mixed up about alcohol, both praising and blaming it for all kinds of results. Definitions of alcoholism — especially those that include the earlier symptoms — have suffered from this confusion. Industry

has the unique opportunity of providing clarity by firmly and consistently defining alcoholism as recurrent unsatisfactory job performance due to the use of alcohol. In addition a wide-spread use of such a definition would help reduce the historical "wet-dry" battle over alcohol. This traditional struggle has produced a moralizing, crusading atmosphere. The calm, detached tone of the job-oriented definition acts to put the behavior in an illness category where it can be treated rather than argued about.

Can Use Constructive Confrontation

A third feature of business and industry makes them especially able to cope with alcoholism. Because the work place is typically organized around *authority*, the definition of alcoholism can be given to any alcoholic employee in an atmosphere of "crisis precipitation." In other words, not only can there be a simple, easily-understood definition, but there can be tied to this definition an inevitable result should alcoholism continue: some form of job loss. Examples: lay-offs without pay; grade reduction, some seniority loss and termination.

Applied in an impersonal fashion, but underscoring a positive offer of treatment help as its main feature, this sanction is probably the most readily available way for getting the developing alcoholic to "face-up" to his problem. Obviously such use of authority must be tailored to the individual differences of specific cases. Also obvious is the fact that this approach is not a cure-all. But compared to possible action by home or church it probably has more "teeth" in it. So it must be ranked very high among available tools. *In short, an effective approach to the problem of alcoholism calls for the development of new, authoritative group sanctions.* Job centered definitions, treatment, and sanctions offer an excellent source in our society for these needed forces.

Never believe that the job is no longer important in a person's life, nor that its loss is easily accepted. Work, and the work place, continue to play an important role for Americans, especially men. Despite a wide-spread reduction of the skill content of job, it still occupies a central position in our lives. Eighty per cent of a recent national sample of adult men said they would continue to work even if they could get along easily without working. In addition, retirement often brings with it a sense of loss at no longer performing a job. This feeling occurs among employees in a wide range of occupations. Both of these points show the value of the job in the lives of large numbers of people. Finally, unemployment is obviously demoralizing, showing thereby the importance of being employed.

In addition to emotional needs for work, there are also increased economic benefits in the job. "Fringes" of every conceivable kind have been added to the cash incomes of millions of jobs. Seniority due to union membership adds a second economic investment. It represents in the minds of

many employees a degree of job ownership similar to home ownership after years of mortgage payments.

While the emotional and economic values of jobs remain high, so does the work routine and discipline that organizes them. Thus in manufacturing and retail trades the number of planners, supervisors, schedulers, and coordinators is growing. On large numbers of jobs the timing and sequence of tasks has never been so specifically spelled out for the employee. Not only does the typical employee have many investments in the job; he usually does his job in a network of controls and routine. These usually make his work behavior highly visible to bosses and fellow workers.

A developing alcoholic is therefore usually unable to treat a job threat lightly, especially if it is connected with constructive chances for treatment. He knows that the results of his alcoholism can be seen and defined due to work routines and disciplines. For once in the progress of his illness he faces a situation he cannot manipulate or stall. Many potential behavior problems are held in check by such firm, easily understood social pressures even though there is still some emotional crippling as a result.

Finally, such sanctions and the treatment offer linked to them can reach a mass of developing alcoholics provided there is wide-spread acceptance by industry and business. Compared with such agencies as welfare and social services, the work world can influence and educate literally millions.

Supervisors Have a Readiness to Act

But all is not impersonal, cold-blooded authority on the job by any means. The work world contains one of the most important, emotionally charged relationships in practically everyone's life—the MAN-BOSS RELATIONSHIP. Here is an agent almost without peer for identifying, defining, and applying a policy of "crisis precipitation" to alcoholism. As such the supervisor, regardless of his level in management, is a fourth reason why the work world can play such a big part in attacking alcoholism.

With all due respect to spouses it can be reasonably concluded that of the various non-alcoholics in his life, the man-boss relation has the most promise for "doing something" effective about the problem-drinking employee. In a fair number of cases he is without a spouse; indeed, he may be without relatives of any kind.

Why is the man-boss situation of such importance? The boss of a developing alcoholic takes the brunt of alcoholism on the job. It is he who must frequently face the unpleasant problems of replacements for absenteeism, of poor job performance, and of fear of incidents. It is he who never knows what to expect and so has one employee less to rely on when he plans his work. Could we get inside the head of this boss we would probably hear him say: "If I had two like this guy it would drive

me nuts, and if I had three I would ask for early retirement." In other words, there is a readiness-to-act in his practical, on-going, situation that just isn't available anywhere else.

Furthermore, most bosses of alcoholics do not engage in deliberate, willful cover-up of the condition. They may for a short time, but soon they are pressured in two directions at the same time — toward helping the worker manage the problem, on the one hand, and toward "reporting" him, on the other. Rather than "cover-up," the boss is in a "seesaw" situation. It all adds up to classic indecision. So most bosses of alcoholics are ripe for help from their companies and usually welcome a way out of their dilemma.

The difficult "spot" the boss of an alcoholic employee finds himself in is underscored when the impact of alcoholism on the job is compared with other behavior disorders. Neuroses and psychoses, for example, often do not affect the job as much as we are prone to believe. Or, if they do, it is in a sudden, dramatic incident about which there can be no indecision: the only action left open to the supervisor is removal from the job for a long time for treatment.

But the alcoholic employee often presents a frustrating mixture of poor work and able performance, charming and disagreeable personality, hard work and rank negligence. The boss' eyeview is one of effective job performance mixed with an annoying, unpredictable loss of effectiveness and dependability. He never knows what to expect. But just when he believes his "headache" is intolerable, his problem-drinking worker "snaps out of it" and looks good again. Nothing like this "tug of war" starts when the supervisor works with the neurotic or even the psychotic. The response to them is usually a consistent one, regardless of whether it is favorable or unfavorable. This probably helps to explain why many companies rank alcoholism above these mental illnesses as a personnel problem — some at a 2 to 1 rate.

Matters aren't improved much for the boss by the prospect of early discharge, transfer, or quitting. Despite the highly publicized "firing" of alcoholics, they show no unusual job changing features when compared with non-alcoholics in the same occupations. In short, early and middle stage alcoholics are not "job hoppers" in any unusual way. In practical terms the immediate supervisor is more often than not "stuck." If the illness is not arrested, the alcoholic may eventually get fired, but it will then be too late for it to do much good.

Impact on Job

In sum, the impact of alcoholism on the job situation is considerable. It centers around the difficulties of the immediate boss and poor work. Since