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**Hi! I'm Coach
Margie**
I'm glad you're
reading the Brave
Space newsletter.
My newsletter is
written to share
information and
support.

Let's Talk About Alcohol Awareness in the Workplace

Hello Everyone,

I hope you're all doing well. Today, I'd like to discuss a topic that's been gaining importance in our society but often remains hidden in the shadows: alcohol misuse and dependence in the workplace. Let's be brave and talk about it!

Breaking the Silence: Alcohol in the Workplace

For too long, the issues of alcohol misuse and dependence have been concealed, with many individuals struggling in silence. **I hear these stories in my coaching practice from people who know what it's like to hide a drinking problem at work.** It can take years to become alcohol-free, and these stories naturally resonate with me, since I too hid it. **The shame and fear of consequences often prevent people from seeking support at work.**

I successfully functioned in the work world as a gray-area drinker who would slide forward and backward along the continuum of a sometimes light drinker, a sometimes moderate drinker, and a sometimes heavy drinker over the course of my 30+ year career in corporate America. **No one ever mentioned how much I drank in relation to my job performance.** I don't think I'm alone in this reality. I know many women (and men) who drink to cope with the stress of their job, family, and life in general. I also believe there are many people who suffer from alcohol use disorder who also suffer discrimination because of it.

As we're aware, alcohol has long been a part of workplace socializing, from after-work drinks, (sometimes lunch-time drinks), to company conferences and work-related events. However, **the evidence suggests that more individuals, especially women, are increasing their drinking** to the point of catching up with men. Does that come as a surprise to anyone reading this? I doubt it.

Alcohol and Women: A Growing Concern

Between 2003 and 2016, the rate of alcohol-related emergency department visits for young women in Ontario, Canada increased by a staggering 240%. A 2018 report showed that the alcohol-attributed death rate for women increased by 26% from 2001 to 2017, compared to a roughly 5% increase for men during the same period. The U.S. saw a 41% increase in women's heavy drinking episodes compared to pre-pandemic times.

This rise in alcohol-related issues among women in the workplace is concerning and something that should be addressed. **Many women feel they have to hide their drinking due to societal pressure and the fear of letting others down.** Please read that sentence again. It's so true. I was ashamed to admit it. I was afraid I'd be labeled and my career trajectory would be stalled at best and ended at worst.

Understanding Marginalized Groups

It's crucial to acknowledge that marginalized women often face additional challenges. Factors like workplace discrimination and higher stress are connected to an increased risk of alcohol addiction. For Indigenous communities, intergenerational trauma and oppression have led to higher rates of substance misuse.

For queer women, some LGBTQ+ individuals have a complex relationship with alcohol. Bars have historically been safe spaces for the queer community, but they can also be places of vulnerability due to past traumas and stressors.

The fact is that no one decides that one day they're going to start drinking to excess in order to put their lives and their livelihoods in jeopardy. Alcohol overuse doesn't discriminate. **Alcohol becomes a societally acceptable way to cope when things go wrong in our lives.**

A Call to Action: Let's Break the Silence

I believe it's time to open a dialogue about alcohol-related issues in the workplace, just as we've done for mental health. Education programs and initiatives can reduce the stigma surrounding alcohol dependence. Sharing personal stories can be a powerful way to connect and learn from one another. **This is why I always share parts of my story in these newsletters, in my social posts, in my coaching practice, and when I'm speaking to groups. We're not alone. We are just afraid to speak about it.**

It's quite a paradox, isn't it? **Drinking alcohol is not only accepted in our society, it is expected in our society. As long as we don't talk about the downsides of it.** That makes us a buzzkill, a killjoy, a stick in the mud, and a party pooper. That points the finger at us as 'having a problem'.

As we return to the workplace, issues like alcohol misuse will likely become more visible, as the statistics show an increase in women's heavy drinking episodes. It's an opportunity for organizations to review and refresh their workplace policies around mental health and substance use. **Workplace leaders should be trained to recognize potential problems and provide a safe space for their colleagues without judgment or shame.**

Let's also consider reevaluating how our work-sponsored events and socializing revolve around alcohol. **Creating inclusive environments that don't rely on alcohol can promote connection and more meaningful interactions.** I've tried on many occasions to advocate for adding non-alcoholic alternatives at social functions. The typical response is either no response, water, or some sickeningly sweet punch concoction that I really never know whether or not it's been spiked with alcohol.

I invite you to share your thoughts and experiences regarding alcohol awareness in the workplace. Let's discuss how we can support one another and make our work environments more understanding and inclusive. If you work in Human Resources or in a senior-level position in your organization, I invite you to start a dialogue. Start it with me. Start it among your senior groups in your organization. Start somewhere, and start it now.

Your voice matters, and your insights can help bring about positive change. Please reply to this email, and let's start the conversation. Together, we can make a difference. There are two ways to share this newsletter with your social groups. One is Facebook and one is LinkedIn. Just click the button below and add your voice!

Thank you for being a part of this community.

Until next week, be brave and make space for yourself!

Margie

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