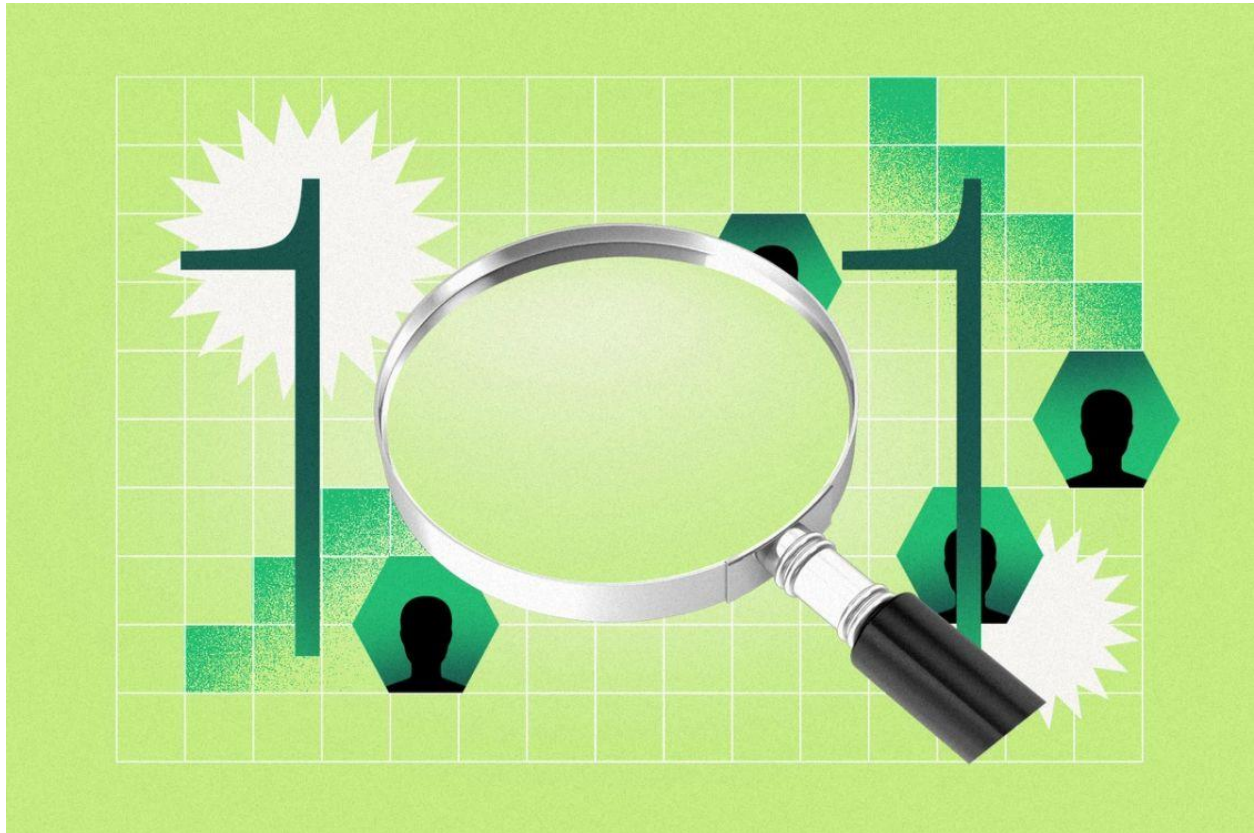# HR 101: The History of Happy Hour

HR Brew | Amanda Schiavo | December 20, 2023

Francis Scialabba

Welcome to HR 101. Class is now in session. Today's discussion will focus on the history of happy hour. The tradition of meeting up for drinks and entertainment after work dates back to WWI.

The history. The first happy hour was in 1914, when the US Navy, in an attempt to entertain on-duty sailors, hosted an evening of food, music, and dancing. An April 1914 newspaper article described the sailors at one such happy hour as enjoying themselves "with as much abandon as though no war were in the air."

Happy hour took on another meaning during prohibition, when the 18th amendment, ratified in 1919, barred the manufacture, sale, and transportation of alcoholic beverages in the US. During this period, "happy hour" became a way to describe the illegal act of grabbing a drink between work and home, according to the Huffington Post.

"For those law-breaking Americans who wanted to imbibe in secrecy, a kind of a 20th century pre-game emerged," Senior Editor Carla Herreria Russo reported. "Friends would meet at speakeasies or someone's home before going out for dinner, thus creating the cocktail hour."

When prohibition ended in 1933, Americans had fully embraced the idea of happy hour, turning it into a socially acceptable form of post-work entertainment, the Huffington Post article continued. And by the 1960s, restaurants and bars realized they could capitalize on it, offering cheap food and drinks as a way to get more customers in the door.

Fast-forward. While happy hours did see a dip in popularity in the wake of the pandemic, employees who've returned to the office are fueling their slow comeback, the New York Times reported.

That's good news for HR. Happy hour can provide employees with an opportunity to build community, according to In The Works. And that's no small thing.

Establishing community at work can provide employees with a "greater sense of thriving," Christine Porath, a Georgetown University professor, told Forbes. "They tend to perform better objectively as rated by bosses. They're far healthier. They have much less burnout. I think that there are a lot of potential outcomes [for the community] that speak to a much happier, more productive workforce. That's much more likely to stay [with the organization]."