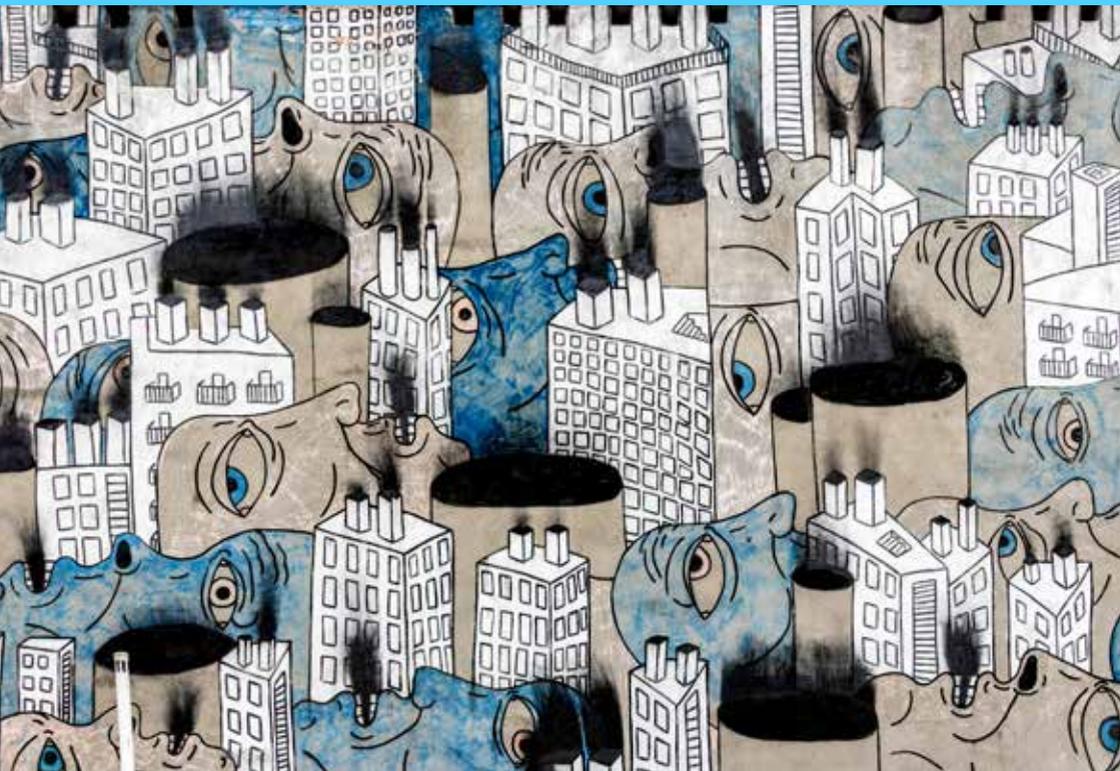


FLIP SIDE

The Association of Participating Service Users



"HIGH" ON THE CAREER LADDER

No. 48 Summer/Autumn 2019

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All contents featured in Flipside are by people with lived experience of drug and alcohol addiction and/or recovery, and by those impacted by someone's addiction.

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Editorial

The workplace is undeniably a very important part of a person's life. Our jobs provide the means to pay for our needs and they also play an important role in our identities. For many work is the main way they contribute to and engage with the society. Many people spend much of their time at their job, so any work related distress will impact on their life in general, and vice versa.

Any workplace can be stressful or dysfunctional at times, but certain industries seem to attract more drug and alcohol use than others. A 2008 NCETA report found that most illicit drug use was occurring in the hospitality industry with 31.8% of hospitality workers having used drugs. Another NCETA publication from 2006 reported that hospitality, agricultural and mining workers were most likely to drink at a harmful level. A national paper on amphetamines also identified hospitality, together with construction and transport industries, as most at risk of harms from amphetamine use. It is no wonder that three stories featured in this issue are about experiences from the hospitality industry.

Drug use among working people can be caused by stress, or it can be related to the workplace culture or working conditions. Excessive drinking, for example, has been linked to the drinking culture, isolation, long hours, shift work, inadequate training and bullying, among other factors. Illicit drug use is likely to have the same causes, though there is not nearly the same level of cultural acceptance and expectation, as for alcohol. The cultural role of alcohol in the Australian society is strongly associated with the workplace, and having after-work drinks with colleagues can be an important bonding opportunity, so refusing to take part can be a self-isolating sentence. Most stories in this issue involve alcohol, and several talk about the drinking culture in the workplace.

Work-related stress is also a common feature in this issue. Using substances seems like an effective way to relax and unwind at the end of the day, but, as some of these stories recount, it can spiral into another problem one has no control over.

Personal inclination and responsibility also has a role in addiction, and there are plenty of working people who do not develop a drug or alcohol addiction. However, when one third of the workforce uses illicit drugs, like in hospitality, there is likely to be more than those individuals' personal inclination. And the same can be said about cops drinking to cope with brutality they witness daily, truck drivers using amphetamines to stay awake, or business executives using cocaine to stay on the ball. This editorial will not venture into speculations about what the bigger societal causes are, but we hope that these stories will inspire you to reflect on it. We thank our contributors for sharing them with us.

Edita

Mad Men of Melbourne

As most people know, the hit American TV series 'Mad Men' features the owners, employees and clients of a fictitious New York advertising agency during the '60's. Ask any viewer what they remember about the show and they'll most likely mention the unbelievable amounts of booze consumed and cigarettes smoked in the course of the agency's typical working day. During most of the '70's I worked as a copywriter in several advertising agencies here in Melbourne, and I can tell you that, when it came to the consumption of booze and cigarettes, the industry in this town was right up there with our Madison Avenue cousins across the Pacific.



At 30 years of age I was a late starter in the ad trade. Prior to that I had worked as a secondary school teacher in Melbourne, London and Edmonton, Alberta. I had knocked around a bit, and liked a drink, but wasn't prepared for the booze culture that permeated all facets of my new working life. And I took to it like the proverbial duck to water! While the 'suits' - account executives, media planners and buyers - were expected to present a conventional front and behave themselves while at work, we, so called 'creatives', could pretty well get away with anything as long as we did our jobs, which was to come up with the ideas for TV, radio and various forms of print campaigns. We then translated those ideas into scripts, copy and layouts. It sounds like fun, and it was, some of the time. The kicker, though, was the deadline that was always attached to the job. It was the deadline that got most of us reaching for the bottle and the smokes with ever-increasing frequency. And we did it because we could get away

with it. Everybody else was doing it, after all. And, of course, there were no booze buses to worry about at the end of the day.

When I reached the giddy heights of becoming a creative director, my workload meant that I was often in the agency ready to start work at 6.30 am. So by 11 I had done half a normal day's work and reckoned I deserved a drink. No problem. Except there was, because I would then continue to drink through the rest of the day. And, of course, I wasn't alone. I remember one particularly boozy lunch when the entire creative department - half a dozen copywriters and art directors - were still ensconced in the pub at 4pm. Our boss, the agency owner, suddenly appeared and fired the lot of us on the spot. That was a scary moment, but it was rapidly forgotten because he hired us all back the next day because he couldn't afford not to.

Those long lunches are very much a thing of the past. The culture in the ad trade has definitely changed and the booze no longer flows like water. Unfortunately, the industry still has its tragic casualties for one reason or another. After I quit working in agencies, I taught copywriting at RMIT. One of my brightest students was the son of a good friend of mine, also a copywriter. This boy was a very good writer, a natural, and he subsequently got a job in a big Melbourne agency where he did exceptional work. He was invited to work in the agency's headquarters in New York. I happened to meet his father, whom I had lost contact with, just a few weeks ago and I asked about his son. He told me that Mike had come back to Melbourne from New York, destitute and with a full-blown heroin addiction. He's now working in a bakery. But at least he's drug-free. And the deadlines are a lot easier to cope with.

Alex A.

Straight From the Source - APSU Podcast

In case you missed it, APSU started a podcast called 'Straight From the Source' a few months ago, which looks at a range of different issues relevant to those impacted by drug and alcohol use from varying perspectives and talks real, honest stories straight from the source.

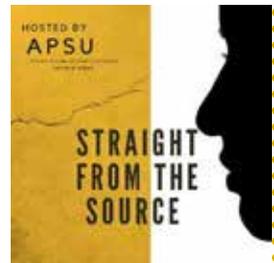
The podcast broadcasts stories that challenge stereotypes around addiction and substance use and open up conversation around the areas of life where substance use intersects such as mental health, homelessness, family violence, parenting issues and the criminal justice system. Through hearing peoples stories we hope to increase awareness, challenge stigma and open up the space for multiple perspectives around substance use, self-growth and recovery. These stories assist individuals and communities to feel heard and less alone. They also incite discussion around Australian Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) systems and the challenges within them.

All of the seven episodes are currently available on our website www.apsonline.org.au and through all major podcast apps if you search for Straight From the Source - APSU Podcast.

If you are new to the podcast, we recommend starting at Episode 1, part 1 with Rustie. Episodes will continue to come out monthly and we have some great ones coming.

Finally, if you like the podcast and believe stories like these are important please support us by subscribing and sharing.

Emma



You're only as good as your last service

"You're only as good as your last service" is a phrase I sarcastically made up to describe the world of your regular hard-working chef. In other words, it doesn't matter how good you are as a whole, just how you went the night before. I used to always say at one particular job, where certain 'rules' bordered beyond ridiculous: "You're only as good as your last staff meal". In other words, all that mattered was how well you fed management, if you weren't sleeping with them. I left that task to the bar maids! I had the never-ending joy of doing the staff meals at that job for about 40 people daily, and no, I wasn't part of the incest there. I was in charge of the monstrous amount of functions that I did alone. Big, big money, that I never saw. Money I could only dream of. I did the work of three men, four actually. And, I still managed to be the life of the party once the venue turned into a disco each night, only to return to work the next day. But, how long could I possibly last?

There's an urban legend out there that I heard of when I first started my apprenticeship at the tender age of seventeen; a chef bogey man called Burn Out. Surely, he'd never get me! I had too much energy! I could work double shifts, go out afterwards, play in my band, do gigs, be a night club host. I could do EVERYTHING! That pretty much summed up my early twenties.

I first experienced Burn Out at the venue I mentioned earlier. The hottest club around. Several levels of madness with hot DJs, fashion shows, over-priced drinks and a menu which was a strange combination of pub fare, fine dining and cutting-edge bar snacks. Something for everyone! Just leave your wallet at the bar...

So it was silly season again, Christmas time, and lucky me had functions up to my blood-shot eyeballs. I'd just escaped an extremely violent relationship and thought "Fuck it. I'll work harder this year than ever before. Everyone will respect and love me then, right?" Ha. What a joke!

I was fired after my 'work was done', got a minor pay out (I worked illegal hours), and didn't work for two months. In hindsight, I really could have sued them, but I was too heart-broken. "Where were all my friends from work? How come no one's called or texted me? Why did I push myself so hard?" These were the thoughts that ran through my mind as I sat at home, shaking, and sweating and crying with a bottle of Johnny Walker in my hand and my cat on my lap. The pain in my knees was so excruciating I couldn't walk down the street properly for weeks and the tremors and

cramps in my hands would later become a permanent fixture. I didn't know that then...

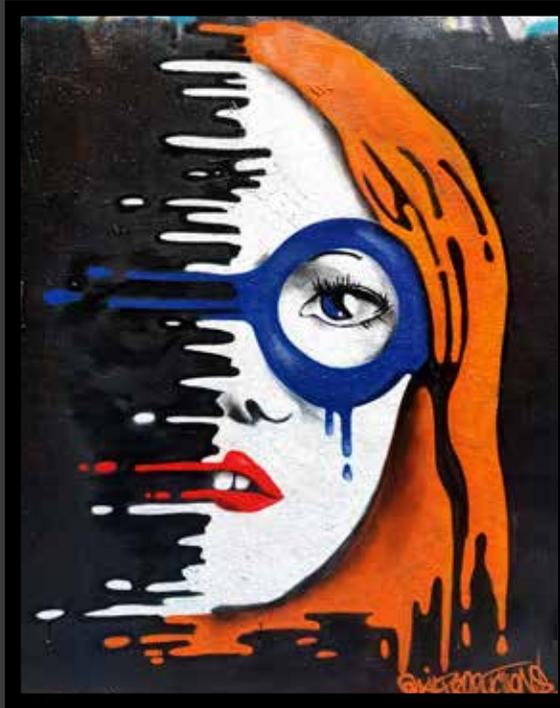
For something different, a promised job offer fell through, so I went back to familiar territory, back to a sunny suburb, to the venue where I once did enjoy working back when times were good. Boy, did I get a shock! All the good staff had left. Whoever was left had become bitter. The menu hadn't changed and all the broken bits in the kitchen were still broken. Can't waste money there, right? The new kitchen staff thought I was some sort of food psychic cause I knew the menu back to front straight away! It was boring, the pay had gone DOWN, and I got stuffed around with shifts. I didn't last long.

After that disappointing experience, I was inspired to quit alcohol, coffee and cigarettes for one whole month and got a new job at a cafe in the hipster north where I did really well for a few weeks until the pressure of doing everything by myself got to me. Sounds like a pattern, right? I got appointed head chef and was lumped with a huge work load, with no support, so I ran back to my old friend alcohol. I remember one morning listening about 'Are You OK Day?' on the radio and I immediately broke down into tears. That was the first time I'd ever stormed out of a job. It felt really good. That venue closed its doors shortly after I left. Justice!

After I quit that job, I lasted two months at another café job that I used alcohol to deal with. Absolutely hated it there.

Made everything from scratch, and the place was never busy enough to sate me. Once again, I managed to stop drinking for two weeks and got another job.

This time I was employed in a diner with a broken jukebox. I used to call it the 'American Horror Story - Diner'. I wasn't wrong. It was surreal in a bad way. I didn't exactly blend in with the 'family restaurant image' either.



I was bullied from the get go there from the then current head chef. In retrospect, he may have had a drug problem himself. As a same-sex attracted woman, I also copped quite a bit of homophobia from him. I was a hit with the waitresses too, which he hated. Ho hum! Alcohol helped me deal with him and eventually he quit. I was appointed head chef again, reluctantly, without a pay rise or respect, and with limited staff. In that time I had to move house and my boss became my rental guarantor. I was miserable and trapped, but unable to leave in fear of being made homeless.

Eventually I cracked and quit. I lost my flat, everything I owned and had to give my cat away. I didn't just Burn Out again, I was incinerated. It took me eight months in and out of withdrawal units, day rehabilitation programs, counselling, group therapy, studying, volunteer work and mindfulness, but – I did it! I've been sober now for 18 months.

I've been cooking again for 10 months now; have my own flat and everything I own is mine. It was bizarre going back to the hospitality world sober, and it's taken me a long time to take it all in with a grain of salt. "I'm not saving lives people, I'm just making food!" I keep telling myself this to get me through this new stage in my life. I call it 'Life - Take 2'. This time I will get things right. My next plan is to study and enter the AOD field. Do I have lived experience? Do I ever!



Too many chefs out there have fallen victim to the Burn Out monster. I'd love to one day help educate them, so they don't have to learn it all the hard way - my old way. I feel like a peculiar outsider now, going through the motions because it's automatic to me now. I witness fellow hospitality workers struggle with the early signs. Cramps, severe hand tremors, agitation, irritability... I see the over-compensation to hide the guilt and the shame from the 'functioning' substance use. I hear every

excuse under the sun - the young ones think they invented them! I see it all, silently, as I work effortlessly now and all I can hear is "Tick, tick, tick". Burn Out is always waiting around the corner...

Anonymous

Alcohol & cops

Mention the words “police officer” and many images come to mind. One of the most common is someone strong standing in between innocence and danger. Police officers face so many risks today. Drug use, robberies and violent crimes are on the rise. Repeat offenders seem to perpetually revolve through the justice system. In years past, police officers held an esteemed position in society. In today’s heated climate, it seems more and more people are mistakenly singling police out as a problem, instead of part of the solution. So how does an officer handle the stress?



Learning how to deal with the stress of the job and maintaining a functioning personal life is a skill many officers don’t learn. The end result is alcoholism, drug abuse, and/or divorce.

I thought I was ‘doing OK’. Good job, nice house, nice car, married, 2 kids ... oh and I drank a bit too. But to describe me as an ‘alcoholic’ would be an exaggeration. Medicated for depression and full of fear, alcohol just made those negative feelings go away. It was my solution.

The police force, like many organisations, has a strong culture of drinking. If you didn’t drink, you were on the outer. Early openers after night shift, quick changeovers and days off were all drinking time. Regularly attending family violence and car accidents, investigating death, delivering death messages, taking victim statements, resolving conflict, being abused and many other negative experiences were a part of everyday work for me.

So I was justified having a ‘few drinks’ every day. And I was just fine, thanks for asking. But 15 years of this and it progressively got worse. Then my Dad died and my drinking escalated even more.

My behaviour deteriorated, my work performance suffered, my marriage suffered. I was short fused, didn’t care about anyone, including my children, and had thoughts of suicide. I walked out on my marriage and couldn’t work amongst numerous other issues. How does this happen to a ‘normal’ regular guy?

ALCOHOLISM. It had taken over every aspect of my life and came before anything. It had me locked and I didn’t even know it.

To cut a long story short, on 21st August, 2015, I woke after another night of drinking, but this time was different. I had enough. I surrendered that day and made a decision to do whatever I was told to stay sober.

Being sober, I went back to study and completed a dual Diploma in Mental Health and AOD. I am now working in the Alcohol and Other Drugs field, which is something I never dreamed would happen and it is the best thing to have happened. The biggest change is within my inner self and living in the now.

Oh, and my life today, well let’s just say that it gets better a day at a time!

Anonymous

Tangerine River - a colorless journey

by Tikva

Yes, imagine a journey down the tangerine river
Suddenly the brilliant colors and leaves begin to wither
A kaleidoscopic eye appears, an image on my brain
I can no longer see the purple rain
Remembering as a child the brown autumn leave
Grandma used to hold me up to retrieve
Fingers lightly playing in the dappling sun
Life's journey had only just begun
Now I know as the Buddhist say
Focus and be "mindful" of the colors of the day
I ignored the beautiful shades of green in the grass
Sadly that time has come to pass
The ultimate color I believed could change my world
And now in the corner I have curled
Grey and black colors bounce about
There is nowhere to turn, no way out
Twirling and turbulence all around
Fear and anxiety abound
Thank you my friend for what you have done to me
The slow colorless step through eternity
LSD



Superficial perfection

I worked as a cabin crew for an airline for over a decade. It was good money and after some time I got promoted, but I now realise that the career in the airline, together with my depression and anxiety, created a perfect storm for drug addiction to take over my life.

Before this job I used drugs recreationally, when partying and clubbing. But not too long after starting the airline job my drug use escalated. I developed a crystal meth habit, while earning enough income to support it and having a perfect shield of conditions to keep my lifestyle secret.

I had the benefits of sick leave and annual leave to call upon if and when I could not or did not show for my duty. 2-5 day trips, domestic and some international, allowing me to be dishonest with friends and family about where I really was and what I was up to. The ability to not be questioned about being uncontactable when my phone was switched off. Was it that I was away working on a flight and residing at a foreign destination, or was it that I was on a 3-day binge, and feeling paranoid, ashamed and guilty about what I was really doing.

Because of my dysfunctional family background, I felt that I needed to be perfect in order to be acknowledged and loved. This job required perfection, so the combination seemingly worked well. But the superficial perfection in the way we had to dress and provide the inflight service, while the other side of me was in the depths of addiction, became really exhausting. I was increasingly lying and self-sabotaging my career.

The disease of addiction thrives on the above. There was an element of excitement in getting away with this for many years. But it couldn't last forever. I started losing control and rock bottoms became frequent. Rock bottoms for me went from calling in sick for a flying duty at the last moment and being constantly called into the office to "please explain", to not even calling in sick and using for days on end and avoiding the numerous calls from management and airline operations.

I must insist that in no way did the airline allow a crew member to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol. In fact, there were measures in place, including random drug and alcohol tests, and assistance with the EAP (employee assistance program). But the drinking culture is strong and thriving. Staying in hotels, being informed about bar opening hours at the check-in, getting complimentary drinks... Drinking alone in a hotel room was a way to de-stress.

I lost my job eventually, and that forced me to confront my problems. I went into treatment and did a lot of work on myself since. In reflection and the benefit of hindsight I would ask for help sooner, talk to someone, go to treatment. What I did was living this way for many years, scrapping the bottom of the barrel, allowing my addiction to define me.

Anonymous



In memoriam Regina Brindle

On 6 December 2018 the APSU community lost Regina Brindle, a wonderful human being and a great consumer advocate. Regina left us suddenly, following a very brief illness, which seemed less serious than it was. Many of us are still grappling with the shock of her passing.

Regina was the APSU manager from March 2006 to October 2011. When she arrived, APSU was undeveloped. In spite of very limited resources, Regina's enormous passion, knowledge and work ethic made it grow into a well-recognised state-wide service.



Photography by Maya Sugiharto, Agent Morphe

Under Regina's leadership APSU grew its membership base; developed programs like Peer Helper Training, Experts by Experience and Flipside; published 'Straight from the Source' consumer participation manual (co-authored by Regina and Miriam Clarke), 'Locked Out' report about experiences of AOD consumers with a criminal record and 'Where's the Help?' publication about the experiences of service users and family members impacted by dual diagnosis. Regina worked on many projects, too many to mention. The 'Victorian alcohol and other drug client charter' is a standout, which involved 160 Victorian service users in its creation. She tirelessly attended AOD sector events to promote consumer voice and participation, and collaborated with

many AOD services to improve their consumer engagement.

After she left APSU, Regina worked for a couple of years in homelessness and mental health sectors, but eventually returned to the AOD sector as the Consumer Participation Facilitator at Uniting ReGen, where she remained until the end. At ReGen she demonstrated her incredible capacity to translate her theoretical knowledge into practice – the mark of a true genius. She developed processes and embedded practices that truly brought ReGen’s consumer community to the decision making table, and made ReGen a sector leader in consumer engagement.

Regina’s work was always driven by her lived experience. She used to say “Drugs have saved my life and almost killed me at the same time”. She had a very deep personal understanding of the complexities of drug use and recovery, and everything that surrounds it.

During her busy working life, Regina developed friendships with many of us who had worked with her as consumers or co-workers. We will always miss her brilliant sense of humour, her snorty laughter, her ability to discuss any idea without discrimination, her inclusiveness and fairness, her complete lack of judgement, her unique colourful fashion style, her loving concern, her courage to name injustice...

Regina strongly believed in education, democracy and advocacy. She believed in the good in people and in the duty to fight for a fairer society. She once said that social change can be slow and you might die before you see the fruits of your work, but it is something bigger than each individual, it is about the community.

Regina left a beautiful legacy to our community. It is now up to each one of us that were touched by Regina to continue carrying the torch of change and spreading her light.

Edita



It wasn't hospo, it was me



The hospitality industry as a whole gets a pretty bad rep. There is a misconception that staff finish a shift and are smashing shots and racking up lines on the bar as the door shuts but that's bullshit. I'm not saying it doesn't happen because I've done it and a lot of the time I was doing it while working. What I'm saying is it's not the norm. There are plenty of people who pull a shift and just go home, not everyone parties all the time. In fact, the majority of people in the industry choose to go home to bed, balance two or three jobs and study, go out one or two nights a week and lead stable lives but still there is this misconception that everyone in the industry is a party animal. Drinking is absolutely more prevalent but not out of control and depending where you work the

partying is more accepted but overall it's not what people make it out to be. Whilst most people wait to get home to have a drink, in hospo it's right there waiting for you at the end of your shift. Hospo didn't turn me into an alcoholic or an addict. It enabled me to hide issues that were problematic from the start.

I've worked all sorts of hours including the Monday to Friday daytime hours in the city serving the lawyers, accountants, doctors, nurses, retail staff, insurance sales people, politicians and every other profession. Trust me, I saw them all come to work in the morning, nursing the effects of the night before, the weekend before or of what had become their daily routine. When you live the life yourself you quickly start to identify those that are struggling with the same shit you are. But this is about me and hospo, so how did it contribute to my downward spiral?

It started young and was all about accessibility. At 14 I was working in my uncle's café and got to know a lot of the tourists, older guys who were camping and could buy beer. I was sneaking out nearly every night over summer holidays and drinking with them feeling pretty fucken special. When I started my cooking apprenticeship it was all about the free "knock-off" which I'd worked hard for all day and deserved. I'd sit playing the pokies with my boss and being an alcoholic (although I didn't know that then). There was no such thing as just one. That would happen five days a week, and, of course, then there was my weekend, so I had to party. At 19 I was

basically drinking, drugging and gambling seven days a week. That was a theme that continued for nearly twenty years, and, for a vast majority of that time, it all just seemed normal.

I always worked in busy places. If it wasn't busy I didn't want to work there, I was truly addicted to that rush too. There's something about the stress of pumping out 400 meals in four hours, screaming at each other, threatening to stab each other, and then sitting down for a beer at the end of it all laughing about it. The split shifts and long days meant that sleep became an issue, especially as I'd go home after those beers and polish off a 6 pack with a copious amount of bongs. That was a part of my life that was hidden from most people. No one knew how much I was having alone behind closed doors and my wife didn't know how much I was having before I got home.

I've worked with 1000+ people in my time, some only briefly, but always managed to attract the ones who partied just like me and I could get you whatever you wanted at nearly any time of the day or night. Trouble was I started to use it at nearly any time of the day or night, but I always held down my job. I learnt to have just enough. The cones in the morning would stop a hangover, the cones in the changerooms in the afternoon would keep the edge off, beers at the pub during the break of a split shift would get rid of the hangover, betting on the horses or the dogs would pass the time and a few hours after that a knock off beer would be waiting. On a weekend we'd be out dropping pills or snorting coke, sometimes going to work the next day without sleeping at all. Those days might require a few well timed lines of speed or coke to get through. A few squirts of clear eyes, a coffee or seven, and not making too much eye contact with the bosses ensured there was never a problem and I always got the job done. We were a team and we relied on each other to get through.



The substances varied over the years but the way I used them never did. A move to Perth saw an increase in prescription meds, because everyone was on something and could just get another script from the doctor. That move came about because I'd

become best mates with a guy and we'd finish work, drink beers, smoke cones and started to drop eccies up to six nights a week just while we wound down playing video games. Needless to say, my mental health deteriorated and I had to get away, the only trouble being the first person I met when I got off the plane was me and the merry go round continued. I just made new hospo friends.

My downfall really began years later when I became the manager of a pub and part of that job was to drink with the customers. Hello!!! I was going to work to get paid to drink and I couldn't handle it. I'd started to get to work and "testing the beer taps" before we opened because that was what I needed to do to get through. However time was catching up with me. My physical and mental health were deteriorating due to the substance abuse, and somehow I still managed to hide the full extent of my addictions. No one had any idea of the full picture and whenever I came close to being found out I just changed jobs and made short lived changes to my lifestyle.



I could ramble on forever with stories of working and partying, partying and working but no matter which industry I had landed in my story would always have been one of addiction, I just wouldn't have had such an easy access to the substances I craved. I used the late nights, the split shifts, long hours and stress to justify the lifestyle to myself because I was in denial, but hospo didn't make me live that lifestyle. I lived it that way because I'm an alcoholic and an addict. Thankfully, I'm in recovery now.

I could quite easily have stayed in hospo in recovery and continued to carve out a fantastic career like so many others. There are plenty of great career pathways available, but I've found a new industry to work in where I can use that history of addiction to help others... and it's fucking awesome!

Justanotherhospoworker

The coping mechanism trap

I was 40 years old, working in an industry that I despised as a younger person, but in a job that I was very good at. I was also earning more money than ever before, and as it tends to happen, our lifestyle methodically expanded to match our income. And with a very young family we grew even more reliant on the money. I told myself that I was sacrificing my vocational dreams and values to provide for my family, and that worked... for a while. After a couple of years in an analyst role I was feeling disillusioned with constantly dealing with incompetent managers who had great qualifications, but had little ability to implement change. So, I set my sights on moving into a project management role. After several false starts, I was finally successful in getting a role.

There were aspects of the role that I loved – leading a team, engaging with stakeholders, setting the direction of the project, presenting to impacted employees (from executive management to front line staff). But there were aspects of the role that I wasn't good at, and they were the non-people components. The tedious details, that whilst painful, were unfortunately necessary. The project that I was given was supposed to be a pretty straightforward one that ultimately proved to be anything but. Constantly moving scope, stakeholders that changed their mind on an all too regular basis, software developers that didn't follow directions and a sales manager that promised the world, without knowing whether we could even deliver an atlas – all these issues made it essentially impossible to deal with the tedious details. My solution? Ignore them. Doomed from the start, this approach seemed ok at first, but quickly caused significant and almost exponential levels of stress.

I turned to drugs as a coping mechanism. I'd always been a social user of drugs but felt that I was in control of them, not the other way around. And that's how it was for a while after the pressures of the role started mounting. Without even



realising it, I was feeling the need to 'self-medicate' on a regular basis. I had my non-negotiable rules though – only on Friday and Saturday nights. But as the stress of my non-sensical approach increased, I re-wrote the rules. I could use every day, but only at night... after the kids were in bed... when I could just relax.

And the nightmare grew.



I was able to maintain a positive in-control façade at work, even as the pressures mounted. I was feeling incredibly vulnerable, thinking that any minute someone was going to tap me on the shoulder and expose my incompetence. Obsessed with feeling like this, I was increasingly incapable of doing anything about it. Within a ridiculously quick period, I was seeking relief and escape at work, so I re-wrote the rules... again. I'd only use after work, before I went home... then again after the kids were in bed... when I could really relax.

And the nightmare grew.

I was becoming foggier, sluggish (the best way I can describe it was I felt like I was walking in wet cement all of the time), paranoid and actually incompetent, all whilst constantly thinking about relief and escape. I would be in the middle of an important conversation and totally fixated on when I could use drugs again. It's fair to say that it was pretty much all I thought about – so I rewrote the rules again. Now I was using whenever I could be alone. On the way to work, during work (many times), lunch time, after work. If I could, I would tell my work that I had to leave early and tell my wife I had to work late just so I could sit in my car at a park and use more. My wife knew I used drugs, but didn't know how much I used, and definitely not how addicted I was.

And the nightmare grew.

Not just the drug taking, but the web of lies I had constructed both at work and at home (I learned the hard way that having to manage a web of lies is absolutely exhausting), and the damage I was doing physically and mentally – I felt like I was going insane, and in hindsight I probably was. Apart from the first half hour of my waking day, I was stoned the entire time.

The inevitable breakdown came one day when I was supposed to present a progress update to my boss, who definitely knew something wasn't right. With one hour to go before the meeting, I was done. I told my boss I had to go (telling yet another lie about one of my kids being sick), burst into tears on the train on the way home, sat outside our house unable to go inside. I was absolutely cooked – physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. I told my wife everything, I cried a lot, I hid from my kids, I prayed that I could get better... I never went back to that job. I was also convinced I shattered my professional standing and slashed through any future opportunities I had in that industry.

That was nearly five years ago, and fortunately, that episode was my rock bottom. I went to rehab, and was able to give up all drugs, including alcohol. The mental, emotional and spiritual recovery however has taken a lot longer. I was virtually unemployable, as I was left with crushing depression and anxiety, that meant for many days, weeks and months after, getting out of bed was a significant achievement. On a lot of those days, anything else seemed insurmountable.

Since then I've chipped away at rebuilding my life. Professionally this started with volunteer work – building self esteem by doing estimable things. Relatively simple work, but feeling like I was making a difference, without putting myself in danger of becoming sick again. And, gradually my confidence has slowly grown as has my ability to concentrate on complex tasks. I still have days where I feel completely lost and incompetent, but I also know that I'm not alone in feeling like that. Plenty of people suffer from imposter syndrome.



The difference now is that I don't need or want to turn to drugs to manage my emotions. I face them, even welcome them in. I know they're inevitably temporary and that I can, and will get through them.

What I don't know is what is ahead of me professionally. I'm not sure if I want to go back to the type of work I was doing before the crash, or whether I even could go back. But for now, I don't need to answer that question.

Anonymous

The enabler

To a drug addict an enabler is someone or something which enables him or her to use drugs. It could be a friend, a parent, a family member, the place you live in or environment. In my case, it was work. It wasn't the people I dealt with on a day to day basis (although there were some sketchy characters), but the money I made, and the ease with which I could make it.

It helps when it's all cash, and tattooing was all cash. My job enabled me to use for three years before anyone really noticed. My world crumbled fast once it started to show. I had been a heroin addict in my early 20s, but now I was in my early 40s, owned my house and had a teenage son. What got me using again is another story, what kept me using was my job.

It started small, a half gram or 5 points a week, and a quick drive to a neighbouring suburb, a mere \$150 a week lighter in the pocket. Not much when I could make \$1500 - \$2500 a week. Then 5 points turned to 10. Explaining \$300 a week was not a problem. My wife knew my weekly earnings could fluctuate by \$1000. But it was not long, and my weekly drive across town would become a daily one, a morning ritual.

Tattooing was at an all-time high. The tattoo shows on TV turned to boom time in the industry. I was telling a different story at home, and even believing my own lies. I'd say "things are quiet, there's too many shops opening now, it's an over saturated market". Meanwhile, my daily drive became a morning, noon, night. I would even mark time out of my appointment book from 1:00 pm till 2:00pm for my lunch time fix.

With all of this going on, I have to say I lived a very normal life. My day would go: drop son at school, pick up drugs, lunch run, pick up drugs, finish work, pick up drugs, super mart get dinner, home and cook. I am the cook in the house and would cook 5 or 6 nights a week. I even managed to do junior sport drop off and pick ups, and coach teams. I had always kept my work life and home life separate, avoiding any work functions, like Christmas break up or birthdays, in a chance of running into a colleague who would brag to my wife how good things were at the moment, and I'd have to tell her more lies. The questions at home were growing and my lies were getting less credible.



Eventually all the lies caught up with me and things fell apart. I had fallen behind in shop commission, and I could not make the weekly payments, money for bills and food for home. And the tax I had just not put away for...

I really wanted out, and to this day I'm not sure how, but I told my wife everything. Over the next six months I would be in and out of rehab twice, and would turn my back on my enabler. Two years would pass before I would go back to my chosen industry, no longer an enabler, but a job, one which I'm not so fond of these days.

I have only one regret, and it's not the heroin, but the lies I told my wife. We've been together for 25 years and it's the one thing I still hate myself for.

Anonymous

After work drinks

You never know where a job will lead you. In many ways, that's what makes starting a new role so exciting. Can I do it? Will it lead me somewhere I want to go? What I didn't expect with a position in hospitality was that it would often lead to me taking drugs at and after work. The story I often tell about getting this job is how I got knocked back by a fast food chain only to be hired by a five star hotel in Melbourne. It seemed such a strange



thing to occur within the space of a week. The job I would end up having for five years and it would lead to me not only developing friendships that are still strong two decades later, but to marrying a co-worker and having a child together, our beautiful son.

I'd taken the job because it was flexible. I worked according to the availability I gave, which was when I wasn't studying at university. I was already taking drugs at this stage in my life; nothing too heavy, but often enough that when without it I was irritable. Though that didn't matter so much with this job, as not only could I do drugs at work, but also after work, and the after work drinks were always on the house. In fact, so pervasive was alcohol in the workplace that my manager would often be at his desk with a glass and champagne bottle. His manager would also often be drinking on the job, the chefs always wanted a drink as well... It was hospitality – you worked hard, you played hard. I also soon found that supervisors and managers were happy to smoke dope at work and for other staff to deal it, and even occasionally for chefs to bake muffins for those in the know that contained either dope or magic mushrooms.

I couldn't believe my luck. I'd landed a job where I could turn up to work stoned, continue to get stoned and then get drunk, with much of it being paid for by others. We took turn to bring the drugs, and if you forgot... well, things wouldn't be so great. So soon more people would bring gear, just in case. Sure we did drugs, but it was usually when not directly dealing with customers. It was difficult to work with 'the public' when you were high, so management often got me and occasionally others doing back of

house jobs, so that we could sneak off and do what was by then becoming a regular part of work.

Though we often got high, it was drinking that was the big thing in hospitality – everybody drunk, all the time. It was after every shift and after free drinks at work and maybe a traveller or two, you'd hit the club's for 'hospitality night'. Which meant young people and lots of cheap alcohol. I'd never been much of a drinker, hence why I moved to drugs, but I soon learnt that practice makes for a better drinker, and we practiced often.



I continued studies, finally passed and vowed to never work in hospitality again. It wasn't necessarily because of the drinking culture, it was more that you had to work all the days and events that people look forward to celebrating. Days like Christmas, New Year's Eve, Melbourne Cup, Friday and Saturday nights. All these days I missed for many years. We were young, often earning great penalty rates on these days, but you would kind of feel hollow after a while. You were working so others could celebrate, so when you finished you had to work hard at celebrating for you. Only you were tired, had eaten little food and you drank quickly and heavily – a bad combination.



I look back at this time and wonder where I would've ended up in my drug taking career if I'd had a more 'normal' job. I don't for a moment look back with regret. I've got a fantastic son and even a great ex-wife. It's just that I learnt how to drink hard and how to disguise being high at work, neither of which were to lead me to making better choices in the future. I'm not sure if working in hospitality has changed, but I've not experienced another work environment quite like it. I also know it's not a job I'd like my own son to work in. Well, certainly not if it has remained similar to the workplace I experienced.

Anonymous



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Self Help Addiction Resource Centre

APSU believes that people who use alcohol and other drug treatment services are the reason the system exists; their needs, strengths and expertise should drive the system. APSU is run by service users for service users and has an active member base. We invite you to join us in having a say. APSU membership is **free**, confidential and open to anyone interested in voicing their opinions and ideas on the issues facing AOD service users today. We need your help to give us all a fair go. To become a member please fill out the form below and post to: **140 Grange Road, Carnegie VIC 3163** or fax to: **03 9572 3498** or go to: **www.apsuonline.org.au** to register online.

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