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Do You Have a Drinking Problem, Counselor?



(<http://images.law.com/contrib/content/uploads/sites/292/2016/10/Alcohol-Article-201610071615.jpg>)

The drinking behaviors of lawyers—long understood as frequently unhealthy—have been under an increased spotlight this year, following the publication of the first ever national study of the matter in the February issue of the ***Journal of Addiction Medicine***

The disconcerting data has put the profession on notice about the current scope of a troublesome nexus between liquor and law.

With between 21 to 36 percent of licensed, currently practicing attorneys qualifying as problem drinkers, many stakeholders in the profession are now looking for answers and becoming more serious about the need to prioritize the health of our members. Similarly, on an individual level, more lawyers are beginning to examine their own level of alcohol consumption and to explore the possibility of cutting back or quitting if necessary.

As encouraging as the renewed and heightened attention to this issue is, however, we still have a very long way to go. For a variety of reasons, including fears around reputation, confidentiality, licensure, and impacts on their practice, the majority of lawyers who drink too much prefer to keep that fact hidden as long as they can.

So what to do if you think your drinking might possibly be cause for concern? Ideally you should talk to someone about it—someone who is qualified to give you knowledgeable feedback and direction. If you are uncomfortable with that idea, a good starting place would be to pause, clear your mind, and begin by asking yourself some important questions about your drinking behaviors and history.

It might go without saying, but you're a lawyer, so I'll say it: don't rationalize or otherwise allow yourself to craft answers that might make you more comfortable. Be honest, be objective. Nobody is going to know how you answered these questions.

- Do you lose time from your practice because of drinking, or sometimes drink more or longer than you intended?
- Is drinking affecting your reputation as a lawyer?
- Do you rely on drinking to help you become less shy with colleagues, clients and friends?
- Do you regularly crave a drink at the end of the day?
- Have you made mistakes or otherwise underperformed on a client matter as result of being drunk or hung over?
- Have friends or colleagues expressed concern or otherwise commented about your drinking?
- Does your drinking make you care less about your responsibilities at work?
- Do you ever want a drink the morning after a night of drinking?

- Do you regularly drink alone?
- Has drinking led to legal or ethics problems for you?
- Have you found that you need to drink more than you once did in order to get the desired effect, or found that your usual number of drinks had much less effect?
- Do you avoid drinking with people in the legal community so that you feel freer to drink more?
- Have you ever missed or rescheduled a client meeting or court appearance because you were drunk or hung over?
- Have you gotten into financial problems because of drinking?
- Is drinking making your home life unhappy or otherwise causing domestic issues?
- Has your professional ambition decreased since drinking?
- Does drinking take priority over exercise or other forms of self-care or hobbies that you may enjoy?
- Do you drink to escape from professional and personal worries or troubles?
- Have you ever had a complete loss of memory (blackout) as a result of your drinking?
- Has your physician ever expressed concern about your drinking or suggested you cut back?
- Do you feel uncomfortable if alcohol is not available in social situations?

Answering yes to even one or two of these might be reason enough for you to take a harder look at your drinking and to examine the role it plays in your life. Beyond one or two, the more of these you answered affirmatively, the more important it will be to have your drinking further assessed by a professional and to otherwise take proactive steps towards reducing your alcohol-related risks. This questionnaire is meant for instructive purposes only, to help the reader develop important insight about their own drinking habits. This is not intended as a formal diagnostic tool and should not be viewed or used as a substitution for a clinical assessment.

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