



# One more for the road

**Jane de Graaff** asks if hospitality workers are more at risk of alcohol abuse and addictions than other industries and what affect this has on the workplace.

**T**he big nights in the middle of the working week, the 'staffies' and aftermath - is it all standard practice for someone embracing the rock'n'roll lifestyle of the hospitality industry worker? "At the end of the night, after working in an intense environment, a cleansing ale or glass of wine helps to pull back the gears," says Ross Godfrey, owner of Sydney's Oscillate Wildly and veteran of the hospitality lifestyle. "You don't go home after work, take a shower and change whilst sipping on a gin and tonic. You tend to enter a bar or party where everyone's been imbibing for the past five hours or so," he says. And as a result, you can end up playing a kind of catch-up in the drinking stakes.

Chef of 25 years and owner of Van Stom Foods, Michael van Stom agrees. "Drinking is definitely ingrained in the hospitality industry. In every kitchen that I've worked in we looked forward to the 'knockoff' beer. It's your reward for a hard nights work." He points out that proximity to alcohol also play a big part.

This combination of access and attitudes contributes

to what the 2006 report *Alcohol & Work: Patterns of Use, Workplace Culture and Safety* (conducted for the Australian Institute of Health & Welfare), calls 'workplace culture'.

Lead by Dr. Ken Pidd, the report interviewed a broad range of employed drinkers across different industries and occupations. The findings were that hospitality was one of the industries with the highest levels of workers drinking at 'risky and high-risk levels'.

"Long-term risky and high-risk drinking levels are based on average consumption over long periods of time and are associated with chronic harms such as cirrhosis of the liver, cancer and heart disease," says Pidd.

Availability, active promotion of alcohol as part of the industry, managerial support for the use of alcohol, as well as the traditionally young age of employees were all contributing factors to an industry 'workplace culture' of accepted alcohol use.

And whilst current research doesn't deal specifically with actual levels of alcohol dependency in hospitality, it can be seen that the patterns of alcohol use are similar.

For Pidd, "long term risky and high risk drinking on its own is not a measure of alcohol dependence, however, it is the pattern of consumption most closely associated with dependence."

However there are more immediate implications for the industry. The research indicates that hospitality has both the highest levels of absenteeism due to alcohol use, and the highest levels of employees

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who have attended work under the influence, potentially disrupting the workplace and creating hazardous conditions for themselves and others.

Many in the industry are reluctant to talk about their experiences, except to say that at some stage they have either covered up for a coworkers poor performance, or been sent home in 'no fit state to work'.

According to an industry source, "hospitality has little gaps with regards to drug and alcohol related performance, sometimes it's whether you can perform well and slip under the radar without anyone batting an eye, and it happens quite often." The source said that as a manager with a tight knit team, it can be a fine line between 'having a wind down drink' and then finding yourself short-staffed the next day, or with team members turning up worse for wear and less than cooperative. This can create friction, he says, and may eventually lead to dismissal, not so much for drinking on the job, but for poor attitude, increasing staff turnover.

For the most part, there seems to be little industry specific training outside of Responsible Service of Alcohol, leaving managers to deal with each incident on a case-by-case basis.

"No one I have encountered that has a problem with alcohol [in hospitality] has identified it in themselves," says Jared Ingersoll, owner and chef of Sydney's Danks Street Depot. "It's something that others see first. Compounding this is the working culture that accepts a hangover on a Tuesday because we often have our weekend mid-week".

To help combat this, Ingersoll has a strict one-drink policy after shift. He uses this time to educate staff about new products, from beer to tea. "But I must stress that I provide one drink, and one drink only and I have, in the past, removed this privilege at the first sign of abuse. By sticking to this rule, I try to engender an understanding of respect for the product, the staff and the business," says Ingersoll.

In addition to this, in 2005, The Alcohol Education and Rehabilitation Foundation (AERF) provided funding for Tourism Training Australia (TTA) to run the training workshops People, Product, Profit (PPP).

The training addresses attitudes to alcohol in hospitality by educating employees on the effects of work-related drinking, both personally and for the business. But with 68 per cent of hospitality operating as small business, the reach of PPP is only as far as employers who seek it out.

For now, shaping attitudes to alcohol in the hospitality industry predominantly falls to managers and co-workers in each individual workplace, the majority of whom have little or no training for it. It's a big responsibility. Identifying alcohol misuse is one thing, but being able to avert it or address it with a positive outcome, is entirely another.



## References

Alcohol & Work: Patterns of use, workplace culture and safety. National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction (NCETA). Ken Pidd, Jesia G Berry, Janes E Harrison, Ann M Roche, Tim R Driscoll, Rachel S Newson. Prepared for the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare: <http://www.nceta.flinders.edu.au/workplace/documents/injcat82.pdf> 2006 report current. Updated analysis to be released in upcoming months. Results for the hospitality industry are fairly consistent.

Government related links for alcohol: [www.alcohol.gov.au](http://www.alcohol.gov.au)

Health Insite: Alcohol abuse: [www.healthinsite.gov.au/topics/Alcohol\\_Abuse](http://www.healthinsite.gov.au/topics/Alcohol_Abuse)

For further information regarding the People, Product, Profit training: Tourism Training Australia: [www.tourismtraining.com.au/](http://www.tourismtraining.com.au/)

For further information on ways we can change attitudes to alcohol: Alcohol Rehabilitation & Education Foundation: [www.aerf.com.au/home.aspx](http://www.aerf.com.au/home.aspx)