

# About AA

## ‘To Employers’

Recognizing that many individuals and families face a multitude of difficulties when alcoholism strikes, and that these difficulties quite often spill over into the workplace and wider community, Alcoholics Anonymous has sought since its earliest days to improve and expand its communication with professionals who encounter problem drinkers in their work.

Says Racy J., staff member currently handling the Cooperation With the Professional Community (C.P.C.) assignment at A.A.’s General Service Office, “At G.S.O., we frequently speak with doctors, judges, lawyers and such about alcoholism and recovery. But at this desk, my most frequent professional calls actually come in from people in business — bosses, administrative personnel or human resources professionals, saying ‘I have an employee who has a problem with alcohol— what can I do?’”

With some workplace reports revealing nearly 8 percent of full-time employees to be heavy drinkers, the workplace can be an important and effective arena in which to address alcoholism.

“What I try to communicate in cases like this,” says Racy, “is that Alcoholics Anonymous can help, and our job, once that person says they want help, is to be there.”

### Finding Help in the Workplace

First published in 1939, A.A.’s principal text, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, known in A.A. circles as the Big Book, contains a chapter titled “To Employers,” aimed at providing a resource for those who work with or have hired an alcoholic.

The chapter details the experience of an A.A. member who has spent much of his life in the world of big business, hiring and firing hundreds of employees, many of whom were alcoholic. Outlining an approach for dealing with an alcoholic in the workplace, the chapter provides some guidance for employers addressing alcoholism in their ranks.

Says the text, “Alcoholism may be causing your organization considerable damage in its waste of time, men and reputation. We hope our suggestions will help you plug up this sometimes serious leak.”

Over the years since publication of the Big Book, the range of resources for alcoholics in the workplace has grown and evolved, especially with the advent of Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs). Originally known as Occupational Alcoholism Programs, the earliest workplace programs began in major industrial firms, including Dupont, Eastman Kodak, and Kemper Insurance, and often employed counselors who were familiar with A.A. Says Carvel Taylor-Valentine, a social worker and addictions counselor from Virginia, “Many, if not all, of these early counselors were A.A. members who, while they had no professional expertise, knew alcoholism from the inside out.”

Bolstered in the early 1970s by federal legislation aimed at broadening the application of alcoholism services, EAPs began to address a wide range of problems beyond alcohol, including depression, drug addiction, mental health, and a variety of family issues. This change in focus encouraged worker self-referrals and put an emphasis on prevention, seeking to identify alcohol abusers earlier in the disease progression. This period also saw an increased number of referrals to outside agencies and resources, marking a shift away from in-house programs toward an external model wherein services were delivered by outside providers, oftentimes staffed by professional counselors, who began to replace the paraprofessionals of the earlier programs.

### A Changing World

“Most EAP work is contracted out now,” says Lee Halligan, a human resources professional in the Northeast, “and some EAP providers are more knowledgeable about addiction than others. Nowadays, many EAPs are interested in overall health and wellness, providing seminars and information on all kinds of health issues, from stress and weight reduction to diabetes, smoking cessation, and, of course, alcoholism. There’s a lot more openness now than there was years ago about alcoholism. It’s not the same stigma, although in some industries there is still a lot of resistance to recognizing alcoholism as a problem that can be treated and addressed effectively in the workplace.”

“I’ve been doing EAP work in a lot of different capacities for the past 20 years,” says Charlie Dann, an EAP counselor for a major bank in Pennsylvania. “Historically, it used to be that A.A. was it in terms of referrals. But, there are other options now, though I think, for the most part, you still have that historical connection with A.A. and most EAP counselors that I’m familiar with are saying to their clients, you need to be going to A.A. meetings, you need to be working the Steps, and you need to have a sponsor. You need to be working the program.”

Garry Giannone, vice president, health and wellness, Prudential Financial Inc. in Newark, New Jersey, concurs. In his work as an EAP counselor, he has always made use of A.A. meetings as a resource for employees who need help with a drinking problem. “There was a time when everyone got sent away for 28 days to a rehab, but no more,” says Garry, noting how increasingly restrictive insurance coverage has made the availability of A.A. meetings even more important. “If I could, I would get everyone in early recovery to go to a meeting every day,” he says.

### Getting Back to Work

“Typically when you’re dealing with people in an EAP capacity,” notes Charlie, “most of them aren’t coming to us because things

are going well, but because they have a problem that has affected their job. Whatever the issue may be — whether it's alcoholism, depression, or an emotional issue — it has affected their job and somebody in their workgroup, either their supervisor, a coworker or friend, has brought it to their attention. Or maybe they have been able to see on their own that it's beginning to affect their performance and want to reach out for help.

“A lot of times we'll facilitate an employee into alcoholism treatment, for example. Get them stabilized, and once they're released make sure they put together a good plan going forward, inclusive of making sure they plug into Alcoholics Anonymous meetings in the community.

“The goal for all EAPs is to get the employee back to work,” he says, “and for those suffering from alcoholism, A.A. can be a great start. A lot of times people tend to isolate, especially if they are low-bottom drunks, and in the end days you hear them talking about how they're no longer drinking at the bar anymore, they're drinking at home. The friends are gone and it's just them and the bottle. And so to get somebody back into some kind of a social gathering — it's a little awkward at first, there's a lot of fear for people to go to their first A.A. meeting, but if they are alcoholic and seriously want to find a new way of life, once they go they typically find that they like it.

“This kind of early socialization bodes well for a return to the workplace. And we know from crisis trauma research that the greater the support network the greater the ability to overcome trauma.

“So the greater support network you can put in place for these people the better the likelihood is that they're going to maintain sobriety.”

Facilitating this effort, A.A. and its members routinely offer help and information to the professional world, working primarily through local Cooperation With the Professional Community committees, which answer questions about A.A. from professionals and the general public, organize community-wide informational events, and provide a wide range of materials on recovery in Alcoholics Anonymous. In addition, A.A.'s General Service Office regularly responds to inquiries from professionals — those who frequently encounter problem drinkers in their work — while also helping to coordinate A.A.'s presence at a number of national professional conferences each year in order to provide information and increase awareness of A.A. as a resource in the struggle against alcoholism.

“Many A.A.s get involved on a personal level,” says Racy, G.S.O.'s C.P.C. coordinator, “making themselves available as a resource for information about Alcoholics Anonymous, telling the human resources departments where they work or the health centers, ‘I am an A.A. member, and if anybody ever asks for help I'd be happy to provide you with information and put you in touch with A.A.’ So as individual A.A. members, I see more and more people doing this, letting people on their job know that they are willing to be a resource for A.A. information about recovery.”

“Today, we have a lot of volunteer A.A. people working with our program,” says Carvel Taylor-Valentine about her EAP work in Virginia, “people who become temporary A.A. sponsors and have worked with the employees from our company.

“A.A. has been woven into the very fabric of employee assistance here,” she notes, “a beautiful, steady backdrop to everything in the foreground.”

More information about A.A. for Employment and Human Re-

sources professionals can be found on the A.A. website at [www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org), including a video presentation ([http://www.aa.org/pages/en\\_US/information-for-professionals](http://www.aa.org/pages/en_US/information-for-professionals)).

## A.A. on the Scene At Professional Conferences

For nearly 60 years, Alcoholics Anonymous has presented information and set up exhibit booths at the major conferences of a number of professional groups, including those for public health, corrections, social work, education, medicine, nursing, clergy, and the military. The aim is to inform those working in these fields of the ways A.A. can be a resource to them. Along with A.A.'s comprehensive website, exhibits have proven an efficient vehicle for disseminating information about the Fellowship.

The General Service Office in New York and local Cooperation With the Professional Community committees in the United States and Canada coordinate the work. In 2015, A.A. is planning to exhibit at 24 events, among them the National Association for Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Counselors, National Association of Drug Court Professionals, the Employee Assistance Professionals Association, the American College of Physicians, the American Public Health Association, and the Council on Social Work Education.

A.A. has been exhibiting at some organizations for many years and chooses meetings based on how effective its presence can be in spreading knowledge of the A.A. program. Coordinators of big professional meetings sometimes invite A.A. to set up a booth.

The exhibits, which are stocked with literature published by A.A., are staffed by local A.A. members who volunteer their time.

“In my view the basic purpose of the exhibit is to not only provide printed program material and information about A.A. but to personally and immediately outreach to these professionals to offer solutions to these problems where possible,” says Maryka de O., an A.A. member who last year helped staff exhibits at half a dozen big professional gatherings in the mid-southern California area.

“I believe this exchange of information between A.A. and the professional community is paramount to assuring that the Alcoholics Anonymous program and how it communicates with professionals remain relevant, informed and up to date,” says Maryka. “Exhibits provide a personal interface between Alcoholics Anonymous and the professional community. Through this interface relationships form, it is my hope men and women whose lives are impacted by these professionals will find long-term sobriety and satisfying, positive lives.”

## How Can A.A. Help You?

Would you be interested in having an A.A. presentation at one of your professional gatherings? Or would you like information about recovery from alcoholism in A.A.? If so, please contact the C.P.C. desk at the General Service Office, P.O. Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163, or [cpc@aa.org](mailto:cpc@aa.org). We welcome your questions, comments and requests.

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