

Health and wellness

Sober-curious movement enters the workplace

By [Cheryl Brown Merriwether](#) March 26, 2021

People think about alcohol consumption in a variety of ways. Some use the term “sober curious” to describe their relationship with alcoholic beverages. In 2018, Ruby Warrington published her book, [Sober Curious](#) that introduced the term and challenged readers to pause from drinking long enough to explore the what, how, when, where and why behind their drinking.

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While some *Sober Curious* people may be motivated to consider their alcohol consumption because of an alcohol, health-related, or other incident, others simply desire to improve their overall health and well-being, which can be accomplished, in part, by being more mindful and making better choices with respect to their use of alcohol or other substances.

Unlike individuals who are committed to total abstinence or sobriety, *Sober Curious* people may reduce or avoid alcohol consumption for a period of time, which can range from one occasion to a lifetime. As a result of this conscious change in their behavior toward alcohol, these individuals may experience the documented health benefits associated with abstinence or moderate alcohol use.

In the workplace, employers also recognize many benefits from implementing programs that are designed to improve [employee health and wellness](#). According to a [2019 survey](#) by the National Business Group on Health and Fidelity Investments, large employers spend an average of \$3.6 million annually on wellness programs. These programs primarily focus on chronic diseases (heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure), [stress reduction](#), weight loss, smoking cessation, exercise, and nutrition programs, while at the same time frequently failing to address issues related to alcohol or substance misuse.

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This failure by omission is particularly noteworthy given that substance misuse costs the US economy more than \$740 billion every year, according to American Addiction Centers. And the [impact on the workplace](#) is felt through employee absenteeism, theft, on-the-job accidents, lost productivity, and increased healthcare costs.

The good news is that *Sober Curious* individuals are increasingly part of a movement that is growing in popularity. Support for the movement comes from a variety of sources including individuals in ‘recovery’ from substance misuse or addiction. We know, based on research done by SAMHSA, that 70% of illicit users of alcohol or other substances work full or part-time, and

more than 24 million people in the US self-identify as being in recovery. Many individuals in recovery are often eager to support others that are curious enough about sobriety to take a step to learn more.

In recognition of these trends, employers can demonstrate support for *Sober Curious* and other interested employees by working with their wellness program providers to incorporate new programs, policies, and practices within their workplaces. For example, companies can:

- Shift the focus of “Happy Hours” away from alcohol consumption to things like “networking”.
- Reduce / limit the frequency and quantity of alcohol provided at company-sponsored events, while including more non-alcoholic beverage options for non-drinkers.
- Diversify the types of company-sponsored activities to include more alcohol-free events and prominently promote participation in these events.
- Utilize certified professional recovery coaches, certified addiction awareness facilitators, and others to provide addiction awareness education, training, and resources to all employees.

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Workplaces are encouraged to utilize existing wellness and other programs and initiatives (i.e. Diversity & Inclusion) as a way to provide information, access to resources and encourage safe conversations about substance misuse, addiction and recovery for the benefit of *Sober Curious* and other individuals proactively as opposed to the current normal protocol, whereby these topics are only discussed reactively in response to serious performance issues, critical incidents or accidents.

Companies that incorporate *Sober Curious* policies, programs and practices are able to create a workplace culture and community that is inclusive of a broader spectrum of talented individuals who are committed to maintaining a sense of well-being and personal resilience for themselves and others.

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