

How Happy Should You Get At Happy Hour?

Pretty early in your new job, you may be invited to take part in a tradition that is as old as commerce itself – the Friday night happy hour. You now have a new group of people to get to know. And, of course, they want to get to know you better, too. So, what can be the harm? Actually, this can be a really good opportunity to bond with your new coworkers, but you must be aware of the pot holes that lay ahead.

Going to the local watering hole is a great place to learn more about the people you are working with and about the company you are working for. Many people, particularly the ones who have been with the company for a while and feel secure about their job, tend to let their hair down and reveal a side of themselves not normally displayed around the confines of the office. It can be fun to see this aspect of your workmates. Also, you can often get more information about what really goes on in your office in these informal settings that you can from any stack of memos, press releases or management meetings.

The after-hours pub scene is one that can fit very well into your career enhancement, that is, if you use the opportunity in the right

way. It can be used in a subtle way to increase your reputation in the eyes of your fellow workers. But, beware. It can also be a road to self-destruction, filled with potential booby traps. You don't believe me? Then read on.

When invited to go out with the "office gang" after work, be sure to remember that people will size you up outside, as well as inside the office. Your reputation should always be protected like a precious gem. It should be guarded constantly with no time clock attached. In situations where drinking is going to be taking place, you should remember to err on the side of conservatism. Remember, your work ability may still be unproven to your coworkers or supervisor. You do not want people to attach any negative labels to you such as "he has a drinking problem" or "she seems to have a chemical dependency." You do not want to risk your future because of one drink too many.

Getting drunk with your new colleagues can do permanent damage to your career. So what are you to do? Simply put, do not get drunk. Period. I know, I know, everyone is going to call you a prude. Right? Well, maybe. But it is a small price to pay in exchange for a reputation of being serious and responsible. I understand, I understand, everyone else is drinking heavily. Why all the fuss? Well, I'm glad you asked.

First of all, this is not college anymore. You cannot drink into the wee hours and wake up with a hangover and a vague memory, if any at all, of what was said the night before. At least without consequences.

At this point in your career, it is much better to be considered a "lightweight" than a "party animal." Save your heavy partying, if you'll do it at all, to those reunions with your old college buddies, far away from the workplace, but under no circumstances with your new colleagues.

If you wake up too often with hangovers, it won't be too long before your work is affected. You may become tardy or worse, absent. And you will most certainly not be at your sharpest, most productive level

if you come to work with this type of self-inflicted wound.

Also, staying sober during these occasions leaves you less likely to have loose lips or to say something that may be taken the wrong way. When someone you are with starts complaining about the boss and you agree or add to the complaints, then you have compromised yourself. In fact, there may be times when people are trying to bait you, to get you to complain or criticize. Then they might have something that they can run to the boss with. Remember, you will all wake up sober, but the things you say can never be taken back.

Staying away from alcohol will help you avoid a sort of personal blackmail where you may wonder if you said or did anything wrong last night, including the dreaded “Did I Make An Ass of Myself Last Night” Syndrome.

I realize that this is a time when you want to be accepted. The temptation to join in the fun is tremendous. But this is an important time to make the right choices and the right decisions. And, of course, there are some very blatant positive results that can come out of staying sober, as well. You may need to drive somebody home if you are the only sober one in the group. This will be remembered and appreciated for a long time. It will add to the impression that you are a socially responsible person.

Another problem with alcohol consumption with your coworkers crosses into the subject of office romances, which is addressed elsewhere in this book. But suffice it to say that not only do our lips tend to get a little looser with every drink we take; but also, our sexual inhibitions tend to be a little more liberated, as well. A little in-office flirtation, mixed with a few out-of-office drinks may lead to you and one of your new colleagues sneak off to a corner of the pub or the parking lot to start sucking face. The very last thing you want to do is to get involved in a drunken romantic fling that you will both regret just a few hours later. Although it is discussed later, office romance itself should be avoided. Drunken one-night stands

with coworkers are a prescription for disaster.

So what can you do to “fit-in” without being exposed? Here are a few tips. One idea is that when you go out after hours, you can substitute tonic or soda water for a mixed drink. With a twist of lime, it looks like the real thing and nobody will be the wiser. The same thing goes for beer. Non-alcoholic brews are very popular and available in many parts of the country. So try these alternatives as a start. If people give you a hard time about it, just laugh along and say that you have some important work to do first thing in the morning and you want to be sharp. This is a good line and will be hard for anyone to argue against.

While everything you have read in this section has dealt with alcohol, I should note that these points be emphasized ten-fold when it comes to illegal drugs. Under no circumstances should you partake in illegal drug activity or use with your coworkers. This could not only be devastating to your career, but could ruin your entire life as well.

A last note before we move on. You may find a funny thing happening to you if you decide to take the challenge and follow the suggestions in this chapter. You may actually realize that you can have as much fun on these occasions without the associated negative side effects of alcohol. You may find that just being out having fun with these new people helps you attain the same good feelings or changes in your state of mind that most people use alcohol for in the first place. I’m not advocating against alcohol consumption, but you may actually realize that you don’t need it to have a good time. And that would be a great personal achievement in itself!