



Work, Purpose & the After-Shift Drink

Earning a living without losing a recovery · Recovery in Focus · Session Packet

Work and recovery are tangled in both directions. A job gives recovery some of its best medicine: structure for the dangerous hours, money that isn't chaos, a reason to sleep at night and get up in the morning, and the quiet dignity of being counted on. Researchers who study long-term recovery list steady work among the strongest predictors of staying sober. But work also ships with hazards nobody puts in the job posting: the after-shift drinking culture that treats a cold one as the timeclock's second punch, the stress that follows you home, the coworker who uses, the boredom of a job you hate, and the exhaustion that makes every skill harder to reach.

And for people in recovery, work carries two extra questions that can knock you sideways in an interview or a break room: what do I say about my past, and what do I do when the whole crew heads to the bar? This session works all of it: the job as recovery equipment, the workplace hazards named and planned for, the disclosure question (spoiler: you owe less explanation than you think), and purpose, the thing that makes work more than hours, because a person with a reason to stay sober at 2 p.m. on a Tuesday is harder to knock over.

What is in this session?

This session has four parts, usually covered over two group meetings:

CLASS 1

1. Work as Recovery Equipment 2. The Hazards on the Clock

CLASS 2

3. The Disclosure Question 4. Purpose, Beyond the Paycheck

After this session you will be able to

- Use work deliberately as recovery structure instead of just enduring it
- Name your workplace hazards and run plans for each, including the after-shift invite
- Answer the past-and-present questions at work with lines you chose in advance
- Say what your work is for, in a sentence that holds on a bad Tuesday

What will be asked of you?

Honesty about your actual workplace, or about the job search if that's your stretch of the road: unemployment has its own hazards and its own plan, and this session covers that lane too. Nobody needs your employer's name. Patterns, not personnel files.

Part 1: Work as Recovery Equipment

WAIT, REALLY?

In long-term recovery research, **steady work keeps showing up near the top of the list** of what predicts lasting sobriety, alongside supports and housing. Not because jobs are magic. Because structure, income, purpose, and being counted on are four relapse-prevention tools, and a job delivers all four at once.

What a job actually does for recovery: it fills the dangerous hours automatically: forty of the week's riskiest hours come pre-planned. It builds stability: money, a routine that drags sleep and meals along with it, and a new way to describe yourself, from "person with a problem" to "person with a job." And it gives you witnesses: people who expect you Tuesday morning are a quiet accountability system you never had to ask for. If you are between jobs, those same four things (structure, income, purpose, witnesses) still have to come from somewhere, on purpose, every week the job search runs.

EXERCISE 1

Answer yes or no:

1. Work (or school) is currently part of my week. ☐ Yes ☐ No
2. My job has helped my recovery in at least one real way. ☐ Yes ☐ No
3. My job (or the lack of one) has also put my recovery at risk in at least one real way.
☐ Yes ☐ No

EXERCISE 2: THE EQUIPMENT CHECK

Rate what your current situation (job or search) is actually delivering, 0 to 10:

Structure (dangerous hours filled): _____ Income stability: _____

Witnesses (people who expect me): _____ Purpose (a reason beyond the check): _____

The lowest number's fix, one concrete move: _____

Part 2: The Hazards on the Clock

Every workplace has its own hazard list. The common ones: **the after-shift culture**, where declining the bar run reads as declining the crew, and Friday beers are practically on the schedule; **the using coworker**, who clocks what you used to be and offers accordingly; **work stress**, where a bad supervisor or an impossible quota follows you home and turns into "I need something to take the edge off"; **boring shifts**, where a mindless job leaves your mind unsupervised for hours at a time; and **exhaustion**, doubles and overtime that strip your sleep until every coping skill is out of reach. None of these require quitting your job. All of them require a plan made in advance, because a hazard you have planned for is just an appointment on your calendar, and a hazard you have not planned for is an ambush.

EXERCISE 3: MY HAZARD LIST

Check yours:

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ After-shift drinking culture | ☐ Exhaustion, doubles, overtime |
| ☐ A coworker who uses or offers | ☐ Cash tips (money in my hand every single day) |
| ☐ Work stress that follows me home | ☐ Work events with open bars |
| ☐ Long boring stretches, mind unsupervised | ☐ Other: _____ |

My biggest hazard, and the moment it usually strikes:

Oscar

Oscar's crew hits the same bar every Friday, and for his first sober month he just vanished at quitting time, which worked until the foreman started ribbing him about being antisocial, which stung worse than the beer question ever would. His sponsor's fix was two moves: own a role and own a line. Oscar started driving two coworkers home Fridays, which gave him a job and an exit, and when the invite came anyway he had his boring line ready: "I'm good, early morning." Six Fridays later the crew just knows: Oscar drives, Oscar doesn't drink, Oscar's still crew. Nobody needed his story. They needed six consistent Fridays.

EXERCISE 4

1. What were Oscar's two moves? _____

2. Why did vanishing fail where the role-plus-line worked?

3. What's your Friday-bar equivalent, and what role-plus-line could you run?

End of Class 1. Talk it out:

- Which hazard on your list has come closest to costing you?
- What's your version of "Oscar drives"? A role beats an excuse.

Part 3: The Disclosure Question

Two different questions hide inside "what do I tell them," and they have different answers. **The past (interviews, background questions):** answer only what's asked, honestly and briefly, and practice the pivot to the present: "that's behind me; here's what I've been doing since." You're not obligated to volunteer your history, and a rehearsed thirty-second version beats an improvised confession every time. (Legal specifics about what an application can ask vary; your counselor or legal aid can walk your exact situation.) **The present (coworkers, the why-aren't-you-drinking question):** you owe nobody a medical history at a work event. "I don't drink" is a complete sentence; "early morning" is a complete sentence; and the select few you choose to tell, tell on your schedule, sober-you's choice, never a break-room surprise. The rule for both questions is the same: decide your exact words before the moment comes, because nobody writes good lines under pressure.

EXERCISE 5

Answer yes or no:

1. I've over-explained my history to someone at work and regretted it. ☐ Yes
☐ No
2. The why-aren't-you-drinking question has caught me without a line. ☐ Yes
☐ No
3. There's someone at work it would actually help me to tell, chosen on purpose.
☐ Yes ☐ No

EXERCISE 6: MY THREE LINES

My interview pivot (past, brief, then present): _____

My not-drinking line: _____

If I choose to tell someone at work, who and why: _____

Part 4: Purpose, Beyond the Paycheck

Here is the honest part that the structure-and-schedule advice leaves out: a job you only endure protects you less than a job that means something, and meaning is partly built, not just found. Three places people in recovery find it fast: **craft**, doing one thing at work genuinely well, the thing you'd quietly dare anyone to do better; **people**, being the one who trains the new guy, covers the shift, notices the struggler, because being needed keeps people sober; and **trajectory**, the ninety-day direction: the certificate, the better shift, the application you've been circling. Purpose doesn't require loving your job. It requires a sentence that answers "why am I doing this sober at 2 p.m. on a Tuesday", and the sentence being yours.

EXERCISE 7: MY PURPOSE SENTENCE

My craft (the thing I do well, or want to): _____

My people (who's better off because I show up): _____

My trajectory (ninety-day work goal, with a date): _____

My Tuesday-at-2-p.m. sentence:

EXERCISE 8

For members between jobs: the equipment doesn't wait for the offer letter. Fill in this week's versions:

My structure (the search runs on a schedule, like a job):

My witnesses (who expects me, where, when): _____

One application or call going out by (date): _____

SKILL OF THE DAY: RUN THE LINE ONCE

This week, use one of your three lines in real life: the not-drinking line, the interview pivot, or the role move. Notice how little follow-up it actually gets. A rehearsed, boring answer survives the break room.

Take it to the group

- What has work saved you from, and what has it nearly cost you?
- Oscar needed six consistent Fridays, not a speech. Where does that principle apply in your week?
- Say your not-drinking line out loud. Does it sound boring yet?
- What's your Tuesday-at-2-p.m. sentence?

Session summary

Work helps recovery (structure, income, witnesses, purpose) and threatens it (after-shift drinking culture, using coworkers, stress, boredom, exhaustion) at the same time. In this session you rated what your situation actually delivers, named your workplace hazards and built a role-plus-line plan for the biggest one, chose your disclosure lines in advance for both the past and the present, and wrote the purpose sentence that holds it all up on an ordinary Tuesday.

Words used in this session

- **What a job gives recovery:** structure, income, witnesses, and purpose. Four relapse-prevention tools in one place.
- **The hazard list:** your workplace's specific risks, written down. Planned-for hazards are appointments; unplanned ones are ambushes.
- **Role plus line:** Oscar's fix: give yourself a job inside the social moment (the driver, the one who grills, the scorekeeper) and carry one boring rehearsed sentence.
- **The two disclosure questions:** the past (answer only what is asked, then pivot to the present) and the present ("I don't drink" is a complete sentence).

Takeaway: Let the job do its quiet recovery work, plan for your hazards before they arrive, decide your words before the moments come, and keep one sentence that answers "why am I doing this sober on a Tuesday afternoon." The crew does not need your story. The crew needs six consistent Fridays.
