



# Asking for a friend

## Helping the addict in our midst take steps toward recovery



Cooper

BY MILES B. COOPER

Over the past few months, the lawyer heard various stories. “Pat is going to die,” said one. “I’m worried about Pat’s drinking. It’s worsened during the pandemic,” said another. Pat was another attorney, one the lawyer drank with back in the rootin’ tootin’ days, when after the party came the after party. The lawyer gave up *that* kind of bar card years ago, but Pat was still going strong. It left the lawyer wondering, what should

one do? If an addict has to want to change, has to hit bottom, can an outsider make any difference?

### Resources

Because every situation is unique, getting advice from The Other Bar can help. The Other Bar is a longtime organization focused on helping those in the legal profession who are suffering from alcohol and substance abuse problems. They are amazingly insightful and helpful. Contact with them is completely confidential. They’ll answer questions. They’ll help those ready for a change. They’ve been known to help in interventions, and in some dire cases to take over practices so someone can get needed treatment. Al-Anon is another organization. Its sole function is to help those who are worried about someone with a drinking problem.

### The receiving end

As a recovering alcoholic, I have had the pleasure of having had a variety of people help along the way. Some methods helped. Some didn’t. Over a decade before I stopped drinking, another alcoholic sat me down after he had seen me on a tear. “Brother, like can identify like, and you’ve got the gene,” he told me in a loving, direct, and unemotional way. I didn’t want to hear it, even if deep down I knew he was right. But that nudge, along with others, started to stack.

Confronting the alcoholic while that person is on a tear can backfire. On one particularly bad night, when I came home hours after the bars had closed, I was confronted by my concerned wife. I responded by calling her a bitch. I have no memory of the event, being that drunk. Yet knowing it happened sends a surging heat of embarrassment through me every time the memory surfaces. And what really got my attention was my wife, soon after, asking me to watch our two young children so she could attend an Al-Anon meeting. The Socratic method offered by others also helped. “Why do you think you have evenings where it gets out of control?” “Do you think this can continue?” “Do you think it might be time to try to stop?” Those resonated.

The nudges help. Unemotional calling someone on the bullshit helps. Capitalizing on an event – a blackout, a crashed car, an arrest, helps. The conventional wisdom is the addict has to hit rock bottom, and that the addict has to want to change. What is rock bottom, though? That’s when follow-up on an event helps. If one is lucky, rock bottom is something horribly embarrassing, or perhaps a correctable case mistake. If one is unlucky, that bottom can be felony charges and disbarment. If that person is a practitioner in your firm, you may face collateral damage. Don’t wait for the addict to determine what’s rock bottom. Follow up after a significant event, with the hope that particular event is rock bottom. And if it isn’t, and it continues, don’t give up.

### We have seen the enemy...

Perhaps you’re reading this and wonder, “Could I be that addict?” Not everyone who enjoys a glass of wine is an alcoholic. But sit with it and think. If it resonates, perhaps it is time. Time to give The Other Bar an anonymous call to hear what they have to say. Or to reach out to any one of the many outwardly acknowledged alcoholics in our community. Including me. Any one of us can answer questions. We can tell you what it is like. We can describe the relief felt by setting down that bag of bricks, the burden of worry and of being out of control. It is worth the trade. You’re worth it, friend. Your loved ones, co-workers, and clients are worth it, too.

Frank Sinatra said, “I feel sorry for people that don’t drink, because when they wake up in the morning, that is the best they are going to feel all day.” Yep. We wake up without the headache, the cotton mouth, those worry pangs about what was done or said, and the worry about whether it will happen again later that day. That’s a pretty damn good feeling.

### Outro

The lawyer gave it some thought. After a short discussion with the The Other Bar, the lawyer picked up the phone. “Pat? Yes, I know, it has been a long time. Are you in a spot where you can chat for a few minutes? It’s sensitive. I’m worried about you...”

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