

"ACAs in the Workplace"

**Adult Children of Alcoholics
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Workshop Presenter

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"Working at the Laundromat"

A Laundry List for ACA's and other 12-Steppers in the Workplace

1. We confuse our boss/supervisor with our alcoholic parent(s) or qualifier and have similar relationship patterns, behaviors and reactions that are carry-overs from childhood.
2. We confuse our co-workers with our siblings and/or our alcoholic parent(s) and repeat childhood reactions in those working relationships.
3. We expect lavish praise and acknowledgement from our boss for our efforts on the job.
4. Authority figures scare us and we feel afraid when we need to talk to them.
5. We get a negative "gut reaction" when dealing with someone who has the physical characteristics, mannerisms or a similar personality to our alcoholic qualifier.
6. We feel isolated and different from everyone around us, but don't really know why.
7. We lose our temper when things upset us, rather than dealing with our problems productively.
8. We busy ourselves with our co-worker's jobs, often telling them how to do their work.
9. We get hurt feelings when co-workers do things socially together without asking us, even though we haven't made an effort to get to know them and join in the social life.
10. We are afraid to make the first move to get to know a co-worker better, thinking they won't like us or approve of us.
11. We usually don't know how to ask for what we want or need on the job, even for little things.
12. We don't know how to speak up for ourselves when someone has said or done something inappropriate. We try desperately to avoid face-to-face confrontations.
13. We are sensitive and can get extremely upset with any form of criticism of our work.
14. We want to be in charge of every project or activity, feeling more comfortable when we are in control of every detail, rather than letting others be responsible.
15. We may be the workplace "clown" to cover up our insecurities or get attention from others.
16. We are people pleasers and may take on extra work, or our co-workers' tasks, in order to be liked and receive approval from others.

Please turn over – more on the back

"Working at the Laundromat"
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17. We don't know how to be assertive in getting our needs met or expressing a concern. We may have to repeatedly rehearse our comments before delivering them.
18. We have felt that we don't deserve a raise, promotion, better workspace, or a better job.
19. We don't know how to set boundaries and let others interrupt us. We can accept more work without knowing how to say "no" appropriately.
20. We are perfectionists about our own work and expect others to be the same and have the same work ethics and values.
21. We become workaholics because it gives us a feeling of self-worth we didn't get as a child.
22. We may jump from job to job, looking for the perfect position as the substitute for the secure and nurturing home environment we didn't have.
23. We get upset when people do things that affect us or our work without asking us first.
24. We have a high tolerance for workplace dysfunction and tend to "stick it out" in an unhappy job because we lack the self-esteem to leave.

This is a description, not an indictment.

From Chapter 14 "Taking Our Program to Work." in the ACA Big Book

My Workplace Challenge

In the space below, write 2-4 sentences about a workplace challenge, current or past **OR** you can draw a picture of yourself in a workplace situation. Write or draw the first thing that comes to mind, because that will likely be the most prominent issue for you. You are in a safe environment, share what is in your heart and on your mind.

In our first group activity, you will be asked to share what you wrote or explain your drawing shows (sharing is optional). If you feel like doing both, when you share, just pick one so everyone has time.

As you think about your workplace challenge, you may want to refer to the handout **"Family of Origin Roles in the Workplace"** which describes the hero, scapegoat, lost child, mascot/clown. This handout is taken from Chapter 14 in the ACA book.

Family of Origin Roles in the Workplace

(excerpted from the ACA Handbook with minor editing)

Literature about adult children of alcoholics includes a description of four roles * that children can take on in an alcoholic or dysfunctional household. These roles can carry over into the workplace, until recovery and awareness can begin to change them.

- ❖ Hero
- ❖ Scapegoat
- ❖ Lost child
- ❖ Mascot/clown

The hero child usually grows up to be the perfectionist, workaholic who is independent and overly-responsible but who still has feelings of low self-worth.

The scapegoat child grows up accepting blame where none is due or attracts blame and acts out with negativity. In the workplace, the scapegoat or problem employee may attract blame with negative behavior and then complain about being picked on or treated unfairly. Operating from a sense of resentment, the scapegoat easily stirs up trouble at work. The ultimate result can be a showdown with an explosion of anger at the boss or a coworker. Many scapegoat or problem employees quit their jobs, believing they have been treated unfairly. They typically repeat the process at the next job.

The lost child is often a good observer and listener and does not demand much of others. As an employee, the lost child does not want to draw attention and may be depressed and unable to establish close relationships. This is the invisible employee who no one knows much about.

The mascot or clown child has a good sense of humor and is easily identified as the workplace clown. He or she is able to entertain and amuse coworkers. The mascot or clown worker seeks attention and makes friends easily, but underneath has feelings of unworthiness.

Children in a dysfunctional family household learn these roles to protect themselves. Most behaviors that come to not work well, started out as defense mechanisms that helped the child survive an alcoholic, dysfunctional or abusive experience. These roles transfer into adulthood with an uncanny accuracy. Persons in recovery can look to the 12-Step solution to change workplace behavior that isn't working.

* Role names and descriptions developed by Sharon Wegscheider-Cruse

Sharing Your Workplace Challenge Small Group Guidelines

Take your Laundry List handout and journal entry or drawing of your workplace issue(s) and join your small group.

Take turns reading your written entry or talking about the picture you drew. At the end of your reading, tell the group if you are willing to have other members of your group talk with you about your issue.

When everyone has had a chance to read, then have open discussion about the issues that have been mentioned by group members. Respect the privacy of anyone who said they did not want to talk about their issue in front of the group.

At the end of the small group activity, we will ask for one volunteer from each small group to share something to the whole workshop attendees about the small group discussion or problems shared. These sharings and discussions will stay anonymous, of course. Please don't mention any names of people in your group or where they work if you are the group spokesperson.

Small group discussion guidelines:

1. Share your experience, strength, and hope with each other.
2. Share if you have had to deal with a similar issue and any solutions you have found.
3. Share if you know someone who has had to deal with a similar issue.
4. Identify if there is something on the laundry list that applies to this issue.
5. Try to generalize suggestions and comments rather than directing them to a specific person in the group.
6. Suggest to the whole group any ideas and approaches to handling this workplace issue based on the 12 step approach.
7. Avoid statements such as "You should" or "I think you should do this or that."
8. Some good ideas for "solutions" may come up in these discussions, which is an extra benefit.

Using your Toolbag at Work

We have a recovery toolbag. Sometimes we may fortify ourselves mentally with all our tools before we begin our workday. Sometimes we may forget to mentally strap on our toolbag before we go to work. We learn that we are not perfect, and to accept that there is a learning period in recovery. If we try something and it does not show immediate results, we must be willing to try it again. The tools and principles of 12-Step work will be successful if we are willing to work them.

Some Tools to Try

- ❖ Make a decision to use 12-Step principles in the workplace.
- ❖ Circle the number of workplace laundry list items you identify with and make a decision to work on one of the items each day.
- ❖ Establish a telephone or e-mail pal and share your need for support. We know of two people who supported each other by email during the work day. Reading a message such as "Hang in there. I'm with you." can mean a lot when you are changing your behavior at work.
- ❖ Break out of isolation at work. Sometimes you are not the only one having problems with a difficult person or situation at work. If you make an effort to talk neutrally with someone else at work, they might share that they also have problems in the same area. Knowing you aren't the only one struggling with a situation can help. You will want to be cautious about what you share, depending on the situation, and may want to confide only with persons outside the workplace.
- ❖ At the end of the day, make contact with someone in recovery. When they ask, "How are you?" begin talking about your day at work. Describe which workplace trait you are trying to change. Avoid focusing on a coworker's behavior. Talk about your behavior and what you are doing to change.
- ❖ Get information. Become an expert on the workplace but avoid analyzing coworkers. Keep the focus on yourself. There are many books written about workplace organizations, cultures and personalities.
- ❖ Watch out for HALT, (hungry, angry, lonely, and tired). When you get overly tired, it is easy to over-react to a situation. Exercise, get enough sleep, write in a journal, and aim for a balanced lifestyle.
- ❖ Take a risk and try to make new friends and acquaintances. Ask someone to go to lunch with you or join others at lunch if the opportunity arises.
- ❖ Keep a journal on the progress you have made in addressing the workplace laundry list.
- ❖ Carry a token or charm in your pocket or carry the Serenity Prayer with you in your pocket or purse. Say the Serenity Prayer as often as needed.
- ❖ Seek counseling if necessary. Many in 12-Step recovery have found this very helpful in addition to their group work or Twelve Step study work.

The Promises and the Solution

Many phrases of the ACA "The Solution" reading can help those in recovery handle workplace issues in ways that work better for them. Some relevant phrases from the ACA "Solution" are:

- ❖ we risk moving out of isolation
- ❖ we become an adult who is imprisoned no longer by childhood reactions
- ❖ you will become your own loving parent
- ❖ we learn to re-parent ourselves with gentleness, humor, love and respect
- ❖ you will learn how to keep the focus on yourself in the here and now
- ❖ we become free to make healthful decisions as actors, not reactors

Working our program on a daily basis helps us to spot situations where our childhood patterns and tendencies are motivating our behaviors and thinking in ways that are not in our best interests. That "ah-ha" moment when we recognize that our past is affecting us in the present is a first big step toward a new way of thinking and behaving at work.

Once we have connected the dots on how our past is affecting our present, we can come up with a solution. Practicing it on a daily basis is a challenge, but over time, it gets easier.

Below is a sampling of messages and sayings that may be helpful in workplace recovery.

- To find yourself, think for yourself. Socrates
- You are never more than a decision or two away from having a completely different life. A spiritual teacher
- Today, you are you. That is truer than true. There is no one alive who is you-er than you. Dr. Seuss
- We have to let go of the life we planned to achieve the life that is planned for us. Joseph Campbell
- Be the change in the world that you want to see. Mahatma Gandhi
- Today's challenge is just the latest installment in a process of my healing that has been going on for a long time. A spiritual teacher
- You may have pushed my button, but you didn't install it. A spiritual teacher
- When they discover the center of the universe, a lot of people will be disappointed to find they are not it. Bernard Bailey
- The best thing anyone can do for you is to challenge your beliefs, especially if you hold a false belief that you have been holding on to for a long while. Unknown
- Am I a human doing, or am I human being? If someone asked you to tell them a little about yourself, would your first response be about your working self? Unknown
- Good luck is nothing more than opportunity meeting preparedness. Deepak Chopra
- It is not enough to think that "Well, this is my karma," and take no action. Buddhist texts talk about "misplaced tolerance" or "misplaced forbearance" when an individual is subject to a very destructive, negative activity. To passively tolerate it is the wrong response...one should take some action. From "The Art of Happiness at Work" by His Holiness the Dalai Lama.