

Alcoholism is more than a habit, its a physical addiction with psychological and perhaps genetic roots. **Alcohol anonymous helps millions world wide through its 12 steps but its the habit formation loop which actually causes the change.** How does habit formation help in the long run?

Be it Alcoholism or Obesity, the powerful loop of “Cue, Routine & reward” will change behaviour.

The global spread of psychoactive substances, their general availability, and the ever-increasing number of addictive users are in many States seen as a threat to society and sometimes also as a threat to aviation safety. By 1991, eleven States had reported to ICAO that they had encountered problems with substance abuse, mainly alcoholism, within the aviation workplace.(ICAO Doc 9654)

On an **average 45 pilots test positive per year** for alcohol during the mandatory pre-flight breath analyzer test in India.

Alcohol and substance abuse is not primarily due to the workplace environment but more to do with social and psychological issues. While there are many strategies which can be adopted to deal with the situation, it keeps reoccurring and reviving. **The power of habit is an effective strategy to deal with such maladies.**

Trend

According to [recent surveys](#), **6.2% of people who are 18 years** and over have some sort of alcohol use disorder. Alcoholism is even becoming an issue for our youth, as some studies show that **over 33% of 12th graders** have consumed alcohol during the course of any given month of their schooling.

CONFRONTING CURRENT PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUES HEAD-ON



Public health involves educating and protecting individuals and communities from major threats to their health and well-being. Though the focus of public health policy is ever shifting toward more pressing issues, the leading causes of death are still **heart disease, stroke and diabetes**.

Public health professionals are working with government and nonprofit organizations to improve the health of Americans and prevent illness.



ALCOHOL ABUSE, PRESCRIPTION OPIOID OVERDOSE & MOTOR VEHICLE ACCIDENTS



Unfortunately, what starts as one alcoholic beverage or a prescription for painkillers can turn into a serious habit that could prove fatal. And although driving has become safer over recent decades, motor vehicle accidents still cause thousands of fatalities every year.

ALCOHOL ABUSE

According to the 2015 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), among individuals 18 and older:

26.9%
had engaged in binge drinking in the past month.

7%
had engaged in heavy alcohol use in the past month.

6.2%
had alcohol use disorder (AUD).
9.8 million men | **5.3** million women

6.7%
of individuals with AUD had received treatment in the past year.



The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) lists the following preventive measures:

State excise taxes on beer, distilled spirits and wine

Commercial host liability laws

Regulation of alcohol outlet density

PRESCRIPTION OPIOID OVERDOSE

- Forty-six fatalities occur every day from overdoses involving prescription opioids.
- According to the CDC, in 2017, the highest overdose death rates from prescription opioids were in **West Virginia, Maryland, Kentucky and Utah**.
- The CDC lists the following preventive measures:

Implementing state prescription drug monitoring programs (PDMPs) to track controlled substances dispensed to patients

Requiring prescribers to submit data to the PDMP on a regular, timely basis



Cost of substance abuse

The costs associated with substance use are not limited to the costs of accidents, although those are the most obvious and dramatic. Employee dependence on alcohol or other drugs can lead to increased labour costs caused by **absenteeism and use of medical benefits, theft of property, and decreased employee morale and productivity**. Each of these costs may be reduced or avoided by effective prevention strategies.

Although prevention and occupational health form integral parts of aviation medicine and the concept of preventive measures has been supported by ICAO for many years, it may still be novel to some States to apply substance use prevention efforts to the aviation workplace. It is therefore important to set forth some of the guiding principles of ICAO's actions.(ICAO Doc 9654)

Denial

One of the most common barriers to the success of a prevention programme is denial.

Individuals may deny that they have substance use problems, companies may deny that any of their employees have such problems and may even disregard the possibility of such a problem arising within the company, and regulators may deny or be unable to believe that the aviation workplace in their country is or can be affected.

Strategies

- Education of workforce
- Identification, treatment and rehabilitation
- Employment consequences
- Bio-Chemical testing

Alcohol Anonymous v/s Power of habit

An estimated 2.1 mill people seek help from AA each year. AA doesn't work for everyone and the estimates are difficult to predict since the program is anonymous.

Interestingly AA doesn't attack many of the psychiatric or bio-chemical issues that researchers say are often the core of why alcoholics drink. AA sidesteps scientific and medical findings, as well as psychiatric interventions.

AA provides the method for attacking the **habits** that surround alcohol use. Though habits with alcoholism are extreme, the lessons AA provides demonstrates how any habit can be changed.

Faculty at Harvard, Yale, University of Chicago etc. have found a kind of a science. AA succeeds because it uses the loop of cues, routine and reward.



The power of HABIT, Charles Duhigg

Researchers say the AA program works because it forces people to identify the cues and

rewards that encourage their alcohol habits and helps them find new behaviours.

- AA asks them to list all the triggers, cravings which form the cue.
- AA then asks them to search for rewards they get from alcohol. Intoxication most often is not the reward, it could be escape relaxation or emotional release to name a few.
- In order to offer the same reward, AA has built a system of meetings and championship.
- AA forces them to create new routines for what they do every night instead of drinking.

The triggers and the rewards remain the same, its just the behaviour that changes.

Scientists have tried to deal with alcoholism through surgeries of the brain from where the craving emanates. It deals with the cravings but the relapse happens soon post a stressful event.

However, once they learnt the alternative routines for dealing with stress they gave up drinking.

mindFly analysis

Habits, especially bad habits die hard. Aviation is dealing with such habits and they affect safety. Be it reading the checklist by memory, violation of SOP's or use of problematic substance, there is a common loop as Charles Duhigg has elaborated in his book " The power of HABIT".

Developing good habits and changing the bad ones through certain routines cannot be achieved by the individual alone. The role of the the society, the airline, peers/mentors is essential. Humans form habits by observing other doing it when they are high in seniority or

maturity that they consider as mentors.

Forming better routines can help individuals in solving many other issues like obesity too.

Therefore we need better examples, leaders and more importantly better hero's than Pete "Maverick" Mitchell of the TOP Gun fame. The need to be safe in the workspace and outside is an essential requirement. The attitude towards work be it personal or professional shows it all.

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