

# Employment and Addiction Examined

By Jim Rachels



Employment and addiction is a topic that is often overlooked and not spoken too much about. Many of us addicts have not had a job for many years and when we did they were jobs that we were most likely barely making it by there due to our addiction. But this is something that we addicts need to face once we get sober. We need to make our way back into the workforce and that transition can be difficult for some. Many of us don't have a trade or any other special skills that would qualify us for certain jobs. Some of us have no experience or background to even put on a resume.

Employment can be an essential part of anyone's recovery. It doesn't matter who you are or what you do for a living, employment can be just another tool in your toolbelt in the fight against addiction. Having a job statistically leads to better overall performance and progress in someone's recovery. Employment can be a vital tool for someone in early recovery and throughout their entire journey of sobriety.

So what are some of the roadblocks that we face on the road to employment? In my research, I found that there are two different types of roadblocks. There are internal ones such as co-existing mental health issues, having low self-esteem and what type of effect is this going to have on your recovery. These are things that could stand in the way of our progress. But they are manageable and something that could be overcome. Then there are external roadblocks which are things like having a criminal record, having long gaps in employment and not having the proper skills for some jobs.

Some of us are going to have an extremely hard time being completely honest about our past. Many of us are ashamed and embarrassed by many of the things we did while in active addiction. But many times this is something that must be done and it must be done the right way. This includes being completely honest about our past and honest about what we are currently doing to help ourselves and get our lives back together.

There are also many businesses that are recovery friendly. They provide much-needed assistance to addicts in recovery. They offer them a second chance by giving them a job. This can be an invaluable tool for many people that are currently looking for jobs but are facing hurdles with the stigma of addiction. And many of these jobs have an open-door policy for their employees battling addiction. Instead of being fired for their drug use, they are offered assistance. They can get into some type of treatment without worrying about losing their job. They can get the help they need and return to work when they are done. This is so important to an addict in recovery as many places do not have the same policies in place and they fear risking their job by coming out and saying that they have addiction issues and furthermore need to seek treatment where they will be missing time at work.

For some their addiction issues do not have anything to do with or affect their work. For many people, this is not the case. In a study done asking 800 people it was said that only 26% were employed. Many people who have been dealing with addiction on a long-term basis are much less likely to be employed. And if we are going to be looking at the data a little more closely we will also notice things like black people are much more disadvantaged when it comes to comparing to the other groups. There are certain things that have an impact on the unemployment rate. Things like sex and race are huge factors. Males and caucasian people are twice as likely to be employed. Things like mental health issues also factor in.

People that are stuck in active addiction do many things that jeopardize their job. This can be anything from showing up to work under the influence of something to even using while at work.

It is also quite common for people with substance use disorders to have gaps in employment as well which leads them to have trouble finding employment and then stay stuck in unemployment. It can also lead to them not being hired as many companies don't like to see these large periods of unemployment and an overall poor history of employment. This leads to having a difficult time finding the proper employment. Another thing to consider is the criminal history of a person. Many companies check the criminal background of all people they are considering hiring. And many companies will not hire someone with any type of criminal background. This might just be another thing that you have to explain to prospective employers.

There are many other hurdles people with a substance use disorder face while trying to find employment. One thing that really affects someone's chances of getting hired is the stigma of addiction. Many people just simply don't understand how addiction works and what types of things are done in order to deal with addiction issues. Many people will base hiring and keeping someone employed on their personal beliefs about addiction, and they don't always go by the facts. Many people just think of addicts as all the same and think we're lazy and not willing to put in the work needed to get and maintain a job. Because of this stigma, many people are looked over when it comes time to hire someone.

There can also be things like a lack of transportation to and from work. I know for me many of the jobs I had asked right there on the application if you had transportation to and from work. Also, some jobs require a valid driver's license to work there. I know for me that was a requirement for me at my job. I lost my job because I had lost my license due to a DUI. Then I was unable to work in the only industry I had ever known because of my losing my license. I had to change my entire life and career to start over. So I went through a complete change due to my addiction and it was scary and

difficult to do. I was never able to land a job that I truly liked and was good at. The moment I got my license back I went back to what I know best and it changed my life for the better.

People in recovery also have to deal with things like missing work or needing special hours to make their meetings whether that be AA, NA A-A or some type of intensive outpatient program. So this means we need to find someone that is understanding and willing to be flexible with us when doing the schedule at work.

So what are some of the positive and important things that make work important to us? I think the first thing that a job does for us is it provides a form of structure. Most of us have to get up at a certain time to get to our daily jobs. This in turn helps provide a much-needed form of structure. Many of us had absolutely no structure when we were in active addiction. Getting all this together in turn helps you with your journey to sobriety.

This also gives us addicts a reason to change and overall behavior to act and behave the appropriate way while working. For many of us, this is not an easy thing. It takes a lot of time and a lot of effort but this is something that can be done. Once people have employment and are making a living they have more to lose which might lead them to make better decisions. Simply put, when you have more to lose you stop to think before making any rash or life-changing decisions.

Another thing to consider when it comes to employment is triggers. Many occupations have been known to influence and sometimes even encourage someone's addictive behaviors. I've heard many times that in the food service industry there is a lot of drug and alcohol abuse going on. What the reason for this is I don't know. But for whatever reason that might be it is unfortunately true. I know some people have extremely stressful jobs which can in turn lead someone to someone getting into trouble with their addiction as stress can be another trigger.

When people cannot work many times their mental health suffers. The first thing this does is when people are unemployed they typically have a complete lack of structure in their lives. For many the hours in the day just blend together. I know my long-term unemployment had terrible effects on my mental health. I had no structure, no discipline and no drive to try to get a job and better my life. There is a saying "an idle mind is the devil's playground" and I believe this to be a true statement. When you're sitting idle and not doing anything it leaves room for the brain to go wild with all types of thoughts and many times there are a lot of negative thoughts coming to us. Of course, everyone is different but this is especially common among addicts in particular.

Something else I think is quite essential is when you are looking for employment try to find something you are passionate about and enjoy. I've heard it said that if you enjoy what you do for a living you'll never work a day in your life. I love that saying as it's got a lot of truth behind it. Some of the most successful people in the world pursued their passion and are now living their dream. It is something that is possible and attainable, you just need to work for it. I don't think there is anything more important than this when getting your next job.

So how do we go about finding a job for something we are passionate about? I think the first thing is research needs to be done about the types of jobs available based on your job search. For one field there may be many different jobs involved. Then the next thing would be getting the proper training or schooling in the area you are interested in. This will help build up and strengthen a resume for your future. These are all things that are possible to accomplish once you get sober and start staying sober.

And finding a new job is part of your recovery. No matter which way you look at it jobs to change a person's life. It gives you some purpose in the day and also provides an income in which you can live your life comfortably.

Employment is a part of life but it is a part of life that you can turn into a positive tool to use during your recovery. It will give you the much-needed structure that is healthy for everyone during their recovery. It can also help rebuild a person's self-esteem.

And something else I think all addicts in recovery should know is that they are included in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This was signed in July 1990. Having a substance use disorder is a disability. And you are actually covered under all the parts of employment ranging from the application and interview, after a job offer but before starting work and to actually being on the job. This act states that a prospective employer cannot discriminate against someone during the interview process simply for the fact that they have a disability but are otherwise qualified for the job. Furthermore, an employee cannot be terminated for any reason related to their disability.

Employment can be a crucial part of everyone's recovery. It gives you structure, freedom and independence. I think everyone should take their time but sooner or later you have to get back to work.