

Anonymous Flight Attendant Journey into Recovery

My drinking and using drugs was no different than any other addict's use. Things began to change in my early 30's when I drank. I was drinking more and more. Black-outs started when I would drink. After my drinking, I would make every excuse to try to normalize my behavior- I was tired from flying too much; I did not eat; I was premenstrual; I was post-menstrual; I did not get the trip I wanted; I had a boyfriend; I did not have a boyfriend; my family wants more time from me; my family does not want to give me the time I need.

Many, many times I really wanted to stop my drinking, but, I couldn't! I bargained with myself and others with empty promises, but, something would take over once I started to drink.

Inflight management never knew what was happening to me. I am sure, however, they heard Flight Attendants in the crew lounge chatting about my excessive drinking, my black-outs, and some of the words that came out of my mouth when I drank. In my uniform, I was dependable. I had a great work record. I received multiple company recognitions. I never received a complaint letter nor had excessive sick occurrences in my work record. I was functioning on the airplane, but barely.

Black-outs became the norm when I drank and towards the end of my drinking, black-outs would happen before I finished my 1st drink. Several Flight Attendants as well as my family members shared their concerns after witnessing my behavior when I drank. Quite typically, my response was always the same, "it would never happen again". The reality was that despite those promises and despite the earnestness with which I made them, every time I picked up a drink, all I wanted to do was to continue drinking, not ever caring about consequences that could or would arise.

For months, I contemplated the possibility of seeking help, but was afraid. Several Flight Attendants in recovery with the Association of Flight Attendant's Employee Assistance Program (EAP)/FADAP committee reached over to me. Per my norm, I told them that I was "fine", but, I was not! Even with those calls, I was not ready.

The day finally arrived when I made that decision I had enough and I contacted AFA EAP. I could not look in the mirror anymore without disgust, and I knew I needed help! My decision was to enter into inpatient substance abuse treatment. I spent 32 days inpatient, followed by outpatient treatment, therapy, and a strong continuing care plan for life. I did not know if I could or would be able to stay sober. All I knew was that if I did not, I would either end up dead or I would hurt someone by my drinking. I decided to commit to my recovery, using every tool available to me. I listened and asked for guidance in my journey of recovery. I was determined to be responsible to myself, by working my program, which included attending AA meetings, obtaining a sponsor, and working the steps. My recovery mentors made me accountable, as well.

My first year of recovery was not easy nor was it emotionally comfortable either. I did not return to flying for 4 months, even with that amount of time away from the airline life, returning to the airplane scared me. My old routine of heading down for a cocktail after we arrived in the hotel with the crew could not happen. For an extended period of time back on the line, I became a 'slam clicker'. I needed to maintain my sobriety and my life, which was my only priority.

I am very fortunate. I reached for help and sought treatment before either losing my career as a flight attendant, harming or killing someone, or ending my life.

I was lucky to have so many layers of support, but the most important layer, to me, was the confidential assistance and guidance I received through the Association of Flight Attendants Employee Assistance /FADAP when I asked for help. My local EAP/FADAP committee member not only guided me into treatment, but also gave me emotional support when I returned to flying.

I am still flying with the same airline today. I love my career. Now I am a proud volunteer of the Association of Flight Attendants Employee Assistance/FADAP program because today I am living life sober as a Flight Attendant in Recovery!

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US Airways/American