



My name is Jane,
**AND I'M A WORK
DRINKS-AHOLIC**

When every Friday night turns into an excuse for a drink...

For many office workers on the nine-to-five grind, nothing

welcomes the start of the weekend quite like a crisp glass of house white. Actually, it doesn't matter what the drink of choice is, as long as it's served ice-cold at a bar within hobbling distance of work.

Friday-night drinks can easily become part of your weekend ritual, but just because everyone from the office is going, it doesn't make them harmless.

Belinda*, a 24-year-old financial consultant from Sydney, discovered this the hard way. Downing a drink or two with her office podmates had been Belinda's Friday routine for months – until a few weeks ago when she was enjoying happy hour and a game of pool with some of her co-workers, as usual.

"We were playing doubles, girls versus guys, and someone said 'If the girls lose, they have to take off their bras.' I'd had a few wines and it seemed like a bit of fun – I don't even remember what the guys were meant to do if they lost," she says.

The male colleagues won and, true to the bet, Belinda whipped off her bra without a second thought. She was left wearing a white see-through blouse.

A short while later, her tipsy partysomething manager began hitting on her, and Belinda realised that the night could get out of hand. When he tried to kiss her, she swiftly decided to call it a night. "This was a guy I looked up to, who I had sought career advice from – I've even met his wife!" she says. Belinda feared being the subject of office gossip and accused of flirting.

Catherine Bourke, director of careers consultancy firm Directioneering, says the social lubrication alcohol provides can be dangerous with colleagues – who might judge you once back in the office. "A very important part of your career is building relationships and expanding your network, so you have people willing to speak up for you," says Bourke. "If you've been demonstrating poor judgment when you're drinking, you may not have people supporting you – and consequently, you may not get that next step."

GOOD TIME GIRL

It's just a few drinks on a Friday night... however, if you're turning up every Friday night, you might end up with a party-girl reputation. Fiona Webster, head of career coaching and outplacement at Randstad, says that even if you're not attending a company-sponsored event, you still need to remember you're with colleagues, and should act accordingly while you're in their company. "Doing something silly, embarrassing or unsafe in a work-related zone is something your peers may remind you of again and again at work," she says. "In many organisations, this kind of information filters up through the ranks. You can't assume that because the directors haven't commented, they don't know."

THINK BEYOND THE NEXT DRINK

The other consideration is that a work peer who you share gossip, confidences and embarrassing moments with might end up as your boss one day – or you hers. "If you've been 'one of the girls' and all of a sudden you're promoted, you may have to start relating to people as a supervisor or manager," says Eleanor Shakiba, a trainer and counsellor with Think Learn Succeed. Or, on the other hand, a newly promoted manager may not take you seriously. "Unfortunately, it's often these events that stick in the minds of colleagues, clients and managers, so you might be remembered for things you wish had never happened," Webster warns.

A HEALTHY BALANCE

There's no reason to abandon your work drinks altogether. Instead, try to strike up a healthy relationship with your co-workers, so you don't sabotage or limit your career opportunities by forgetting where you are and who you're with.

"Work drinks can be a good time to unwind and get to know your colleagues in a relaxed environment, away from the phones, emails, meetings, demands and

formality of the working day," Webster says. "It's worth making an effort to attend at least every now and then, as people will appreciate you being part of the group, even if you only come for an hour." Just be sensible about these get-togethers. If your work drinks start at 6pm, arrange to meet your partner or non-work friends elsewhere at 7.30pm, so you can be social, and leave sober. **Sarah Megginson**



SNAPPED!

"Digital cameras and mobile phones can capture ugly drunken moments, which can be quickly circulated and stored," says Webster. "If you're at risk of losing all of your inhibitions in a work setting after a few drinks, then be smart and know when to stop."

Fixing the faux pas

If you do something you regret, Catherine Bourke from Directioneering offers the following steps to fix it:

1 KEEP OFFICE CHAT CASUAL. Never address the problem over email. Instead, have a quick face-to-face chat.

2 OWN UP If you've done something embarrassing, owning up shows you're open and honest, and demonstrates you're addressing the problem.

3 MINIMISE THE IMPACT With those directly involved, acknowledge, apologise and drop it. It's about moving forward, so the less details, the better.

4 DEMONSTRATE THE LEARNING Improved actions speak louder than words.

Four Australians under 25 die due to alcohol-related injuries in an average week. Go to drinkingnightmare.gov.au for safe drinking advice.