

Substance Abuse In The Workplace: OUR \$100 BILLION NIGHTMARE



Crack is a highly-addictive form of cocaine.

The veteran landscape salesman was still writing a lot of business, but somehow he seemed to be losing that personal touch with his clients. He no longer followed through on complaints when something went wrong on the installation and maintenance jobs he sold. He was subject to sudden fits of temper that alienated fellow workers and customers alike.

It was clear to everyone that he didn't seem to be himself. As a result, longtime clients were letting their maintenance contracts expire. New installation customers

were canceling because of problems on the job.

His mysterious behavior came to an end at a weekend party, among people whom none of his associates had ever met. There he died of a massive heart attack at the age of 39, although he had been in perfect health until the moment of death. The killer was cocaine.

The husky young climber was calling in sick one or two days a week. His health, once robust, seemed to be deserting him. When he did manage to go on a service call and prune a tree, his cuts were slipshod,

and his behavior so erratic that the other crew members didn't want to work with him. They also feared he'd fall and injure himself—or them.

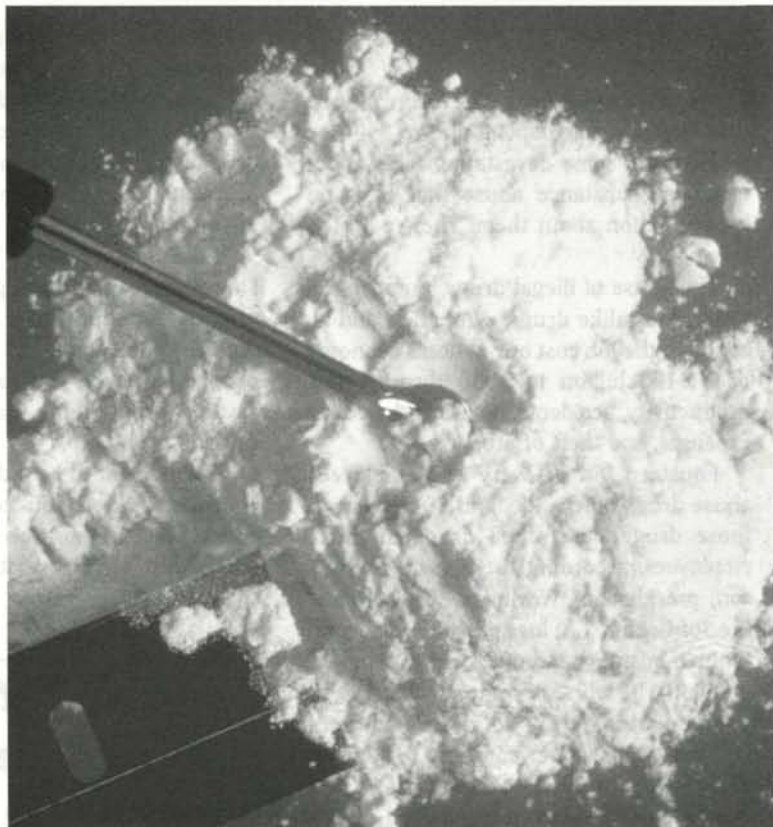
To maintain his costly pill habit, the climber began selling drugs to fellow employees. He was fired when caught selling “uppers” and “downers” to a new crew member, who turned out to be an undercover operative for an employment security firm.

At the landscape architect's office, one of their best young designers was making frequent trips to the bathroom throughout the day, locking herself in for half an hour at a time. She was always sniffing, as if she had a cold that never went away. She was seldom seen without an inhaler in hand.

She became very edgy and couldn't abide any criticism of her work, even from friends or supervisors who were trying to help her. She would fly into a temper tantrum and take every criticism personally. Her allies in the office soon abandoned her, leaving her on her own.

Denial, the curse of the drug addict, kept her from facing up to her substance abuse problem. So her designs continued their downhill spiral, and errors crept into them. To guard against this, she began repeating herself, copying old plans from her drawer. However, even these recycled designs were usually late. As a result, the office was

***With this
public-service article,
we join the ranks of
those who are
fighting this
modern-day scourge
of mind-altering
chemicals.***



Cocaine, once the drug of choice of the elite, has reached all levels of society. Photos courtesy: Drug Enforcement Administration.

missing its deadlines and losing business. Cocaine again.

At the country club, the golf course superintendent was always taking off by himself to inspect some distant green. Despite all his inspection trips, the turf was malnourished and developing insect and disease problems. He was once seen buying cigarette papers at the club's gift and tobacco shop. You guessed it: "Reefer Madness," as they called that funny old movie about smoking pot. But it isn't so funny anymore.

Often he called in sick. His field crew, unsupervised, tried to make do as best they could, or just loafed. The club members soon began to complain about the condition of the greens, and some resigned. Yet the superintendent considered himself only a casual user of marijuana until the day the board dismissed him.

The international agriculture consultant's executive secretary was a brilliant young woman who had seemed on her way to the top. Then she began fouling up the boss's busy schedule. She would give her all kinds of excuses as to why key meetings were not properly arranged, lunch dates were mixed up, airline reservations were not made, and reports contained inexplicable but obvious errors.

Returning late from lunch, she often seemed giddy, and her speech was slurred.

Mornings and afternoons, fellow workers would see her stealing nips from a small plastic flask. It contained a clear liquid which turned out to be vodka. Odorless, you know.

These employees are fictional, based on fact. Yet in truth their numbers are legion. Millions of them are hooked on drugs or alcohol, simultaneously victims and perpetrators of substance abuse on the job.

Most of them probably consider themselves to be only casual users of their substance of choice. However, these are the people who are facing your customers, whether in sales or supervisory capacities, or making purchases.

Chances are your crews contain some of these abusers, unbeknownst to you. They may be involved in any area of your business, causing irreparable damage to the credibility of your company and its reputation.

Worse yet, nobody can tell how much your particular company is losing because of poor workmanship, accidents, wasted time on the job, and entire working days lost to hangovers or illness caused by drugs or alcohol. They make your medical, liability, and workmen's compensation insurance rates soar. The damage list goes on and on.

The organizations that harbor such drug and alcohol abusers may be losing

business, money, or employees as a direct result. Sometimes all three. At a minimum, the tragedy is twofold: Good people are ruining their own lives, and their employers are being hurt financially without ever knowing what hit them. Sometimes they learn too late.

Ask most of these employers whether substance abuse is a problem in their shop and they'll probably reply with confidence: "My people on drugs? Or drinking secretly? Or stealing and dealing to pay for narcotics? Never!"

We spoke to the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, to private-sector experts who advise businesses on employee drug abuse, and to certain employers whose identity we will not reveal, because of the sensitivity of the subject. These employers now have model substance abuse control programs you may want to emulate. But it wasn't always that way. In the past, they never dreamed that workplace substance abuse robs American business of over *\$100 billion a year!* Perhaps you didn't know that either, until today.

With this public-service article, which is appearing in all five of our publications, we join the ranks of those who are fighting this modern-day scourge of mind-altering chemicals, whether they be drugs or alcohol. If you haven't done so already, it's time for

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you to join the fight, too. The future of your own business may depend on it.

Here are some devastating facts about employee substance abuse that have no hint of fiction about them. They're all too true.

The abuse of illegal drugs, prescription drugs, look-alike drugs, synthetics, and alcohol on the job cost our nation's economy over \$100 billion in 1988 through lost productivity, accidents, health and medical expenses, and theft of property.

Fourteen out of every 100 employees abuse drugs on the job, and 60 percent of those drug abusers sell drugs to other employees, according to Bruce S. Wilkinson, president of Workplace Consultants, Inc., of Gretna, LA, loss prevention consultants to business and industry.

Wait! The worst is yet to come.

One out of every four drug abusers steals from his or her company to support these habits. At some companies, 40 percent of all post-accident urine drug screen samples have been positive for the presence of controlled substances—that is, illegal drugs.

All of these numbers are subject to change, and statistics are hard to come by. Fortunately, some of the figures have been revised downward, as more and more companies develop substance abuse prevention and control programs, according to Wilkinson.

Public education through schools and media, law enforcement, and federal drug interdiction campaigns have also played a part in lowering the totals, Wilkinson confirms. However, at those companies which have no substance abuse program at all, alcohol and illegal drugs in the workplace constitute crimes and accidents that are either happening or waiting to happen.

Those companies that include education components in their programs prior to the implementation of drug testing have registered significantly lower confirmed positive tests among the employee population, Wilkinson reveals. This is one of the few pieces of good news available at present in the nation's increasingly desperate battle against illegal drug use.

"Let me give you these numbers," he volunteers. "According to an American Management Association research report dated May 30, 1990, those employers who did *not* include a drug education awareness program prior to their drug testing found that 10.3 percent of their current employees tested positive for drugs. Those employ-

ers with both drug testing *and* education components reported positive tests in just 4.7 percent. That's a good number! It shows that the concept of education, along with drug testing as a deterrent, is more effective in reducing substance abuse than just testing alone."

Wilkinson continues, "There's a slogan I always use when starting a drug education program for supervisors and management: 'You're trying to get rid of abuse and not people. However, you can only get rid of abuse if people think they're going to get caught.'

"There's got to be a deterrent," he emphasizes. "When you conduct employee education programs, you must tell workers the health effects related to substance

Fourteen out of every 100 employees abuse drugs on the job, and 60 percent of those drug users sell drugs to other employees.

abuse. But you must also tell them the job consequences, as well as the type of enforcement activity that's going to be utilized. If they believe that these consequences are significant, and that they may get caught, most substance abusers will stop utilizing these substances, in order to keep their job."

This is Wilkinson's philosophy: "It's better to have education along with the testing, because you save more people. That's the whole idea. The answer is not just to keep pushing these employees to other people. The answer is to get them off of drugs and alcohol, so that we don't have these in the workplace. However, that has to be the employee's choice. We can only give the employee options. He or she has to make the decision."

Aside from avoiding the loss of people and profits, eliminating drugs from the workplace is good business for yet another reason, Wilkinson points out: The federal government has passed a law that requires employers to have a "drug-free workplace" if they receive a government contract for the procurement of property or services

valued at \$25,000 or more.

That's not the only government edict on the subject. The Departments of Transportation and Defense are now requiring that contractors perform mandatory drug testing on any of their employees in safety/security-sensitive positions.

Under the Commercial Motor Vehicle Safety Act of 1986, green industry truck drivers hauling lawn care chemicals must be tested for drug use as of December 21, 1989. This date applies to companies with 50 drivers or more. Companies with fewer drivers have until December 21, 1990 to comply. The law mandates that these drivers be tested for the presence of marijuana, cocaine, opiates, amphetamines, and phenylcyclidine (PCP).

Whether or not your firm is big enough to be currently impacted by these regulations, the reason for their existence applies to companies of all sizes. For anyone except a dope dealer, drugs and business just don't mix.

Many firms in the green industry, as in others, are responding to drug abuse with comprehensive policies and procedures, fortified by testing and training programs. The aim is to identify employees who transport alcoholic beverages or illegal and unauthorized drugs into the workplace, in order to use and/or sell them there. Many, if not most, of these programs bear a remarkable similarity to each other. At least the successful ones do.

Usually formulated with the help of trade groups or outside consultants who specialize in this area, such programs give the employer many tools with which to control worksite exposures. They learn how to keep alcohol, illegal drugs, and drug paraphernalia off the premises. They also gain increased enforcement capabilities.

The employer's arsenal of weapons includes legal searches, urine drug testing that does not abuse individual rights, and employee assistance programs for those drug and alcohol abusers who are willing to accept help and want to be drug-free. Such programs are frequently covered by health insurance.

Many workshops offered by chambers of commerce, industry associations, and private consultants aid employers in their efforts to combat the potential losses related to workplace substance abuse. These workshops show companies how to design and implement their programs in a reasonable and cost-effective manner.

Attendees generally receive information on how to identify employees with substance abuse problems, as well as guidance

on locating and working with drug testing laboratories and employee assistance providers who specialize in such problems. At the same time, they are taught how to keep their programs in compliance with state and federal drug testing legislation and ensure that individual human rights are carefully observed.

An example of this kind of program can be found at a landscape firm that agreed to describe its employee substance abuse program for our readers. The head of the company revealed, "Our company is very active in a national contractors' association, and in 1985 I was president-elect of our state chapter.

"I went to a meeting in Albuquerque, NM, where the Texas and New Mexico state chapters put on a presentation of how to implement a drug-control program. They started by giving you some feeling of why you might need a drug program, and how you should formulate it. There's a right way and a wrong way, as I found out!"

They talked about employee accidents, thefts, and excessive absences that may indicate a substance abuse problem in one's company, the contractor reveals. Then they told some horror stories about drug abuse programs gone wrong.

One building contractor in Dallas, TX, had in excess of 500 employees on a single building project, the landscape contractor recalls. "He implemented a drug program on the job without proper planning, and lost 69 percent of his work force!

"Here's how he did it: Using a meat-axe approach, his company used trained dogs to search the employees' cars, searched their lunchboxes or purses, and performed unannounced drug tests—all in one day."

Despite this horror story, or perhaps because of it, the landscape contractor became worried about his own company and decided to do something. "The presentation made an impact on me," he admits, "because we were having too many employee thefts, absences, and accidents—all three of the things they warned against!"

"I got copies of the drug programs those chapters had implemented, and read them on the way back. Before I reached home, I made up my mind that we would implement a program of our own, though I didn't copy their programs word-for-word."

At a regularly scheduled supervisors' meeting, the contractor announced, "We're going to have a drug program, and I want you guys to help me devise it." Thus the program was based on their own situation and needs. However, they had expert advice.

"We hired a personnel manager to help us. He wasn't an expert on drugs, but he soon became one! We implemented a program that can be summarized in a nutshell," the landscape contractor reveals.

"We will test all new hires for drugs. We will test anyone who is involved in an accident with damages over \$250. An injury will mean an automatic drug test for all participants. And we will test for cause: If we suspect someone of being on drugs or alcohol and two supervisors think we should test him, we will. However, two supervisors must agree on the need for that

test. One is not enough," the landscape contractor stresses.

They also implemented another feature: "We have an outside party whose phone number we give to the employees. Then, if they have a drug problem and want to get assistance, but don't want us to know about it, they can call this third party outside the company. He will get them into a program to treat their habit. Our medical insurance will pay for a portion of it, and our company will hold their job for them while they're gone. However, when they come back, if it's

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known they had a drug problem, one requirement is that they have to continue being tested randomly to make sure they stay clean."

Based on his personal observations since implementing the program, this landscape contractor offers the following behavioral hints that may indicate an employee has a drug problem: "Dilation of the eyes—a glassy look. Erratic work habits and changeable temperament: one minute high-strung, the next minute docile. Their personal car is all trashed from collisions, big and small. Their personal appearance is sloppy. And someone whose behavior changes dramatically should always cause suspicion. Say the employee used to be very prompt, and suddenly attendance falls off and tardiness rises.

"Ironically," the contractor warns, "sometimes a person on drugs appears to have undergone a *positive* change at first. In the beginning they're on an upper. They're high! They get a lot done fast. Then, as they get more into drugs, they deteriorate, and it's downhill from then on."

That's some of the anecdotal evidence of substance abuse. Here's a concise list of symptoms you can clip and save, as provided to us by the same employer:

Suspicious Circumstances

Associated With Substance Abuse

*Abrupt changes in work attendance, quality of work, discipline.

*Unusual flare-ups or outbreaks of temper.

*Withdrawal from responsibility.

*General changes in overall attitude.

*Deterioration of physical appearance and grooming.

*Wearing of sunglasses at inappropriate times (to hide dilated or constricted pupils).

*Continual wearing of long-sleeved garments (to hide injection marks), particularly in hot weather, or reluctance to wear short-sleeved attire when appropriate.

*Association with known substance abusers.

*Unusual borrowing of money from friends, co-workers, or family members.

*Stealing small items from the workplace.

*Secretive behavior regarding actions or possessions. Poorly concealed attempts to avoid attention and suspicion, such as frequent trips to storage rooms, closets, restrooms, or basements (to use drugs).

Another employer, a major power company that does extensive line clearance work, offers the following contribution to

this article. This concise policy statement on drugs and alcohol is distributed to all employees as part of the company's comprehensive substance abuse control program. Again, you may want to save it as the possible model for a statement of your own, should you have no program in effect at this time.

It is the policy of the Company that:

*Employees are expected to report for work and remain at work in a condition to perform assigned duties free from the effects of alcohol and drugs.

*Illegal drug activity on or off the job will not be tolerated. Employees shall not be involved with the unlawful use, possession, sale, or transfer of drugs or narcotics in any manner. Alcohol use which could



Marijuana is traditionally said to lead to harder drugs.

have an adverse effect on an employee's job performance or which could jeopardize the safety of other employees, the public, Company equipment or the Company's relations with the public will not be tolerated.

*Employees shall not use, possess, sell or transfer drugs or alcoholic beverages in the workplace. Employees shall not consume alcoholic beverages in association with the workplace during work time, including breaks and meal periods.

The purpose of this procedure is to outline the methods for implementing this policy and maintaining a work environment free from the effects of alcohol or drug use or other substances which adversely affect the mind or body.

There follow some 14 pages of implementation relating to searches, drug testing, penalties, appeals, and rehabilitation. They include random drug and alcohol

tests for employees in particularly sensitive jobs related to company security and personal safety, who have a whole list of rules of their own.

There is a complex Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for both disciplining and/or assisting employees with substance abuse problems, in hopes of salvaging these employees instead of dismissing them outright. Employees who volunteer to enter this program are given every cooperation in helping them recover, as are those who are referred to it by the company for cause. For instance, this includes provision of sick leave for those undergoing withdrawal from alcohol or drugs.

However, compassion has its limits, and they are stated in so many words. Included in the implementation of company drug policy is the following significant statement, extending the program off the premises: "Off-the-job illegal selling, distributing or manufacturing of drugs will normally result in discharge."

While the company does not have a formal educational program to warn its employees of the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse, an informal procedure is in place. A company spokesman explains, "We have Monday morning safety meetings where we have handouts on the subject. These handouts teach supervisors what to look for in the way of drug or alcohol abuse among their people. For the employees, there are brochures explaining what drugs can do to their minds and bodies."

As this power company's drug abuse program became known in the communities where it operates, a remarkable thing happened. The company spokesman reveals, "At first 33 percent of people tested as new hires came up positive. Now it's down to five percent." In other words, those who preferred to retain their drug habits did not bother to apply. Nor were they missed.

Another green industry employer has a somewhat similar program. "We teach our supervisors how to detect signs of drug or alcohol abuse," he confides. "We inform our employees that we have a testing program."

The program involves tests for reasonable cause. The spokesman explains, "If a serious accident occurs, and if we have reason to believe drugs or alcohol were involved, we can ask for a test. Or if a person shows signs of being under the influence of alcohol or drugs and two or more supervisors can qualify this, we can insist on a test. However, we also allow the employee to have a second sample and give

it to a laboratory of his or her choice, but this is at their own cost."

What happens to employees who test positive? The spokesman says, "Prior to and even *after* a positive test, we allow them to go into a rehab [rehabilitation] program, either an outpatient program or the normal 28-day in-house program as a resident at a rehabilitation center. Both types of treatment are paid for through our comprehensive medical insurance program."

He adds, "We think we have a reasonable program—a *good* program. There is the

It is arguably the most important query of all: Why do so many people in our society today abuse drugs and alcohol?

threat of testing, but we also have the rehabilitation. We have had a substance abuse program in effect for many years, but we really went into it hard beginning May 1st of this year."

The spokesman explains, "We had employment drug testing of new hires before, but not a program of 'reasonable cause' till May 1st. We negotiated with the union successfully, and they bought it without any problem. We are a relatively rural company, and in a business that can be extremely hazardous for someone who is not up to par. So we encourage employees to come forward on a confidential basis and go into our rehab program. Many of them have done so, and we have been very successful with it."

Although \$100 billion a year is a tremendous loss to the U.S. economy, dwelling on the financial costs of workplace substance abuse is not the whole story. To end this article without facing one final question would be to leave this report incomplete, perhaps even superficial.

That question lies in a region far below the bottom line, the secret depths of the human heart. All too often this consideration is ignored. Yet it is arguably the most important query of all: *Why* do so many people in our society today abuse drugs and alcohol?

That is one of the questions we asked

management consultant Charles Vander Kooi of Littleton, CO, whose seminars on competitive bidding and other business strategies have taken him around the world. Here is what Vander Kooi, a long-time green industry observer and a part-time minister, has to say. It is based on his own personal experiences in counseling drug and alcohol abusers from all walks of life, as well as seeing the financial toll their problems have inflicted on businesses around the country.

What is startling about Vander Kooi's comments is the fact that he now has to figure the cost of employee substance abuse into his bidding programs! This means it has become deeply embedded in the bedrock of today's business world and the way we live now.

"Drug and alcohol abuse is very expensive to our industry in two major areas," Vander Kooi notes. "Number one, of course, is that it definitely raises workmen's compensation and other insurance costs. Secondly, it does lower production.

"I feel there are a couple of reasons why workplace substance abuse is so prevalent in our industry," Vander Kooi advises. "First, I've always said that this industry is a young person's industry, at least from the field standpoint. We usually employ people in their 20s, who are physically able to perform the kind of work we do. And obviously that's the time in life when they are more prone to some kind of drug abuse, whether it be alcohol or whatever.

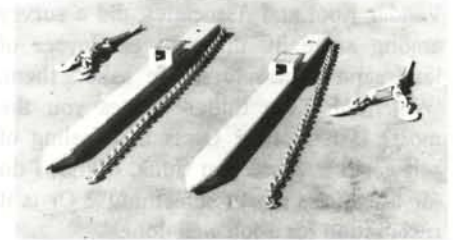
"So there's a maturing factor involved: Hopefully, when they get a little bit older and more mature, they will grow out of that," Vander Kooi believes. "In the meantime, because we do have to use younger people in our industry, and because substance abuse is more prevalent among younger people than among mature people, drug and alcohol abuse will be harder to avoid.

"Secondly, I think we have a self-esteem problem among most of the people we hire as labor in this industry," Vander Kooi confides. "Too often, our industry is not looked at as a career. It's seen as 'something I have to do because I'm on the bottom of the labor chain.'

"If we can raise both the career aspect of this industry and the esteem factor by letting these young people know that this is an honorable career, I think we can help eliminate some of the substance abuse problems," he asserts. "We have to show our people that their work in this industry is an important part of their life, so that they

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can feel good about themselves and about what they're doing for society."

Vander Kooi has some specific ideas on how the self-esteem of these younger workers can be raised. "I think we can help them by continually recognizing them and their worth," he advises. "Our company, Charles Vander Kooi and Associates, did a survey among some 30 different employees of landscape contractors. We asked them, 'Which of three things excites you the most? Is it money? Or is it a feeling of self-worth because you think, "What I do for a living is worth something"? Or is it recognition for a job well done?'

"When we got the surveys back," Vander Kooi reveals, "everybody except one person put money as their last, *bottom* choice! *Everybody* put as their number-one choice recognition for a job well done. So we're coming out with a 'recognition kit' that we'll be marketing around the country. It's a system one of our clients and I developed, to provide recognition of employees' good work on a regular basis, and to satisfy their deep need for self-esteem. It won't end substance abuse, but it *will* improve

people's self-image. And I think that can lower the incidence of drug and alcohol abuse in the workplace."

Getting down to the basic question of *why* there is an epidemic of substance abuse all over America, not just in the green industry, brought some further comments from Vander Kooi.

"I believe there are several reasons," he suggests. "I think we've become a very materialistic society, and a very humanistic society. Humanism is the concept that we are an end to ourselves, and that we can ultimately make ourselves perfect. We strive for perfection. And when we fail, we feel very badly about ourselves. That contributes to our low self-esteem.

"If I expect myself to be perfect and can't accept the fact that I'm not, yet I'm *not* perfect, that's when I'm vulnerable and may get high, trying to forget my failures with substance abuse.

"I believe we should place our focus more *away* from the materialistic side of life, recognize that human failure and human error are a part of life, and focus more on the spiritual side of life," says Vander Kooi.

If he is correct, it means that substance

abuse, which has afflicted every single level of American society, is really not a matter of external economic circumstances, but of the human heart. It also means that money is not the only answer to the discontent and low self-esteem that breeds such abuse.

It is not very difficult to facilitate job recognition with encouragement. A little human kindness to our employees and each other, a little recognition of the best in people, and a willingness to forgive their failures, is very simple medicine. It may never take the place of a professional drug abuse program, but it might eventually make such programs less necessary in the first place. And it costs a lot less. Basically it's free.

It is ironic that America, still the wealthiest of nations, is the world's greatest consumer of illegal drugs such as heroin, cocaine, and marijuana. We seem to be awakening to the dangers of alcohol, but that war is also far from won. If simple caring can help remove the underlying causes of substance abuse, it just possibly might go a long way toward healing this great national plague that has poisoned American business and our whole society.

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