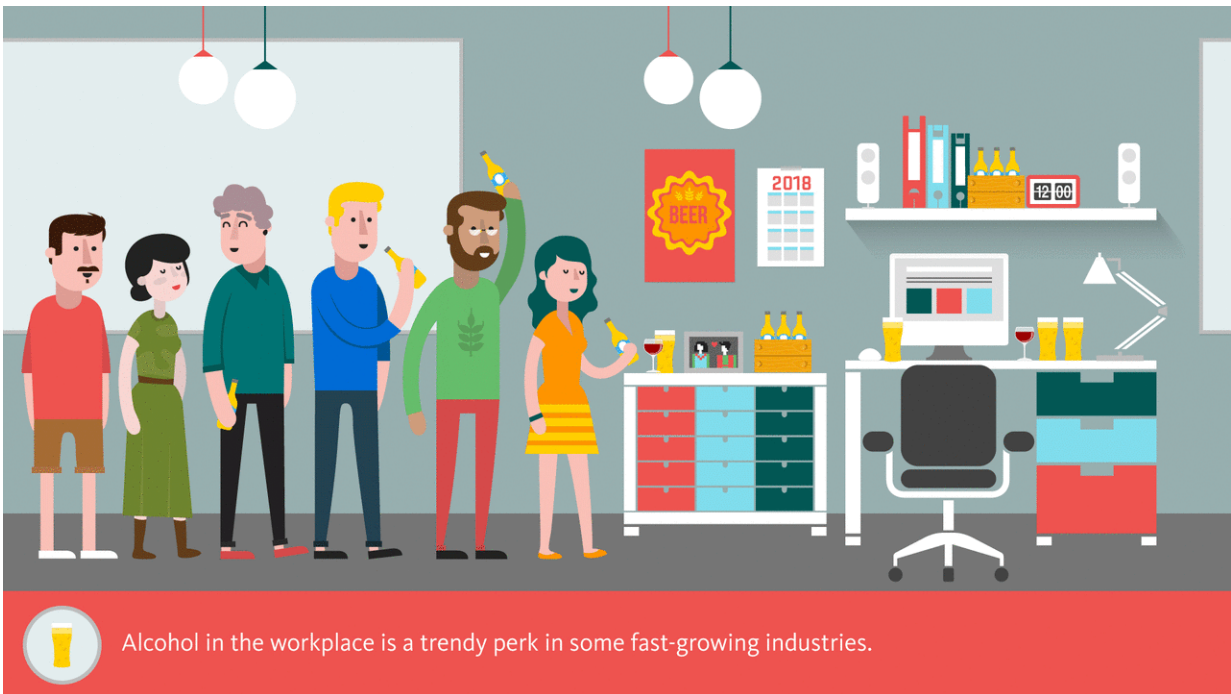


# Workplace alcohol not always a perk for recent college grads seeking jobs

February 20 2018, by Michelle Klampe



Animated GIF to illustrate story about alcohol in the workplace. Credit: Oliver Day, Oregon State University

Offering alcohol to employees in the workplace may be a trendy perk of employment, but it doesn't appear to be an enticement for recent college graduates just entering the workforce, research published this week from Oregon State University shows.

Some technology companies, marketing agencies and consulting firms are embracing consumption of [alcohol](#) in the workplace as part of their organizational culture. Wine, beer and even full bars are touted as [employee](#) perks to help attract talented employees and entice employees to stay on the job during evening hours.

But alcohol can also be a divisive issue in the workplace, and may actually be a deterrent for some potential employees, said Anthony Klotz, an assistant professor in the College of Business at OSU and lead author of the paper.

"A lot of companies seem to assume that young people will view alcohol-based perks positively, but in reality, alcohol can be a turn off for many applicants," Klotz said. "These kinds of little things can play a significant role in terms of people's interest in working somewhere."

Klotz began examining the role of permissive workplace drinking in recruiting in part because of questions from students and recent graduates.

"Students preparing to enter the workforce ask a lot of questions about alcohol and job interviews and the best way to navigate those situations," Klotz said. "And generally, people are confused about how to deal with alcohol in the workplace. Not everyone finds it appealing."

Klotz and co-author Serge da Motta Veiga of American University conducted two studies to evaluate how permissive workplace norms affected prospective employees' perceived fit with a company and their attraction to the company. The results were published in the journal *Human Resource Management*.

In the first study, 180 college students in an upper-division business course were randomly assigned to review one of two recruitment flyers

for a fictitious company and answer survey questions about their attraction to the organization and their perceived fit with the firm.

In one version of the flyer, employees were depicted holding coffee cups; in the other version, they held alcoholic beverages. The first version of the flyer described employee activities including staff luncheons, while the other listed happy hours.

In the second study, 122 college students were randomly given one of two variations of a job interview scenario involving dinner with prospective coworkers. In the first scenario, each coworker orders water at dinner; in the second, each coworker orders an alcoholic beverage. Study participants were asked what they would do next. They also answered similar questions about their attraction to the organization and perceived fit with the company.

In both studies, participants were also asked questions relating to their level of political skill, which refers to the a set of social abilities that helps them effectively understand others at work, influence others in ways that enhance their own objectives and navigate social situations with confidence.

Klotz and da Motta Veiga predicted that those with high political skill are more likely to be comfortable at alcohol-based events, while those with low political skill may be unable to take advantage of the social benefits that the combination of alcohol and work provide.

The studies showed that participants with lower levels of political skill were less likely to see themselves as fitting in and wanting to work at the company when the recruiting advertising and dinner out included alcohol.

"This is a specific condition where alcohol is harmful in recruiting

prospective employees," Klotz said. "However, we didn't find any significant upside to including alcohol for the participants that showed high levels of political skill."

The findings suggest that job seekers examine and attempt to decipher even small aspects of an organization's culture, including references to and availability of alcohol during recruitment activities, as they evaluate whether that workplace will be a good fit for them, Klotz said.



Credit: Oliver Day, Oregon State University

"When people enter the job market, they are looking for a company that

shares their values," he said. "When the sales pitch is focused on the area's wineries, happy hours, or the availability of beer at work, it may raise questions about fit for [prospective employees](#)."

Companies should be authentic about the culture of drinking within the workplace; if alcohol is part of the [workplace](#) culture, it should be clearly communicated in recruiting materials and through the hiring process, Klotz said.

"Realistic portrayal of the job at hiring leads to lower future turnover among employees," he said. "You don't want to cover it up."

Klotz also suggested that those entering the workforce pay close attention to signals of a company's values during the recruiting process, on [company](#) visits and during interviews.

"Think about whether the values you are seeing align with your values," he said. "Some of these small things can play an important role in whether you are happy and satisfied in your job."

**More information:** Recruiting under the influence: New labor market entrants' reactions to workplace drinking norms, [DOI: 10.1002/hrm.21906](#) , [onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/hrm.21906/full](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/hrm.21906/full)

Provided by Oregon State University

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