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Addiction Medicine & Psychiatry



How Do You Offer a Recovering Alcoholic a Drink?

Many people are uneasy about what to say or do in the presence of a recovering alcoholic. Bob and Mary had such a problem. One evening they were going through last-minute preparations for their cocktail party. The guests would be arriving any minute.

“Oh, my God,” Mary groaned. “I just realized that we invited Dick and Jane. Didn’t he just come back from one of those alcoholic treatment farms?”

“Hey, you’re right,” Bob said. “What should we serve him? And what are we gonna to tell the other guests?”

“Let’s just not say anything.”

“What? I should just pretend I didn’t notice he was gone from the office for six weeks?”

“Just say ‘condolences,’” Mary snapped sarcastically. Actually, she had no idea of what to do, either.

“Let’s just quietly tell him he can only have beer,” Bob suggested.

“No, I heard that these kind of people don’t drink anything at all, not even beer.”

Bob was taken aback. “What do you mean ‘these kind of people?’ Dick has always been a friend of ours . . . and he was such a nice guy, too.”

Now Mary looked surprised. “Maybe he still is a nice guy. I think we’re both acting crazy because we think this could be embarrassing.”

“Maybe we can tell him quietly to . . . just stick to the punch,” Bob offered lamely.

“Not the way you spiked that punch – we can’t,” Mary chided. “And you better protect him from Harry Booze. You know Harry always gets tipsy and does the lamp-shade-on-his-head dance. Maybe he won’t like Dick anymore.”

“And what about Dick’s wife, Jane?” Bob wondered. “Poor Jane, maybe she had to quit, too, for his sake?”

Mary, exasperated, “Oh, I don’t know what to think. Quickly, mix a bowl of virgin punch.”

“Too late. There goes the doorbell.”

“Oh, I give up,” Mary groaned. “Let’s just say to Dick ‘and what would you like to drink?’”

The party was going along nicely until Dick said he would like ginger ale, Harry Booze, looking surprised, stepped in front of him. “What do you mean, ginger ale? Aren’t you gonna have a real drink?”

“No, I’m not drinking today,” Dick said calmly.

“Well then, have one for tomorrow . . . and one for yesterday . . . ha, ha, ha . . . that will make it a double.” Harry looked around, enjoying his own humor, as a small circle of embarrassed guests had formed around them.

Dick realized that he would have to be more definite. “No thanks, Harry. I don’t drink alcohol because I’m an alcoholic.”

“What do you mean, ‘an alcoholic?’” Harry looked puzzled. “You don’t look like a drunk to me.”

“Oh, I’m not a drunk because I don’t drink anymore,” Dick explained.

“Oh, I get it.” Harry brightened up. “You’re a reformed alcoholic.”

“No, I’m not reformed – I’m Orthodox,” Dick said good-naturedly.

By now, some of the guests were relaxed and laughing at Dick's sense of humor. But Harry wouldn't let up. "Oh, I get it. You are an ex-alcoholic."

"Harry, an ex-alcoholic is like an ex-virgin. I am a recovering alcoholic."

One of the ladies, sipping white wine, came to the rescue. "Dick, I've read about alcoholism as a disease . . . that it's a form of allergy."

"Yes," Dick said pleasantly. "You might say that."

Harry's face lit up, "Now you're talking, pardner. An allergy, eh? That I can understand. I'm allergic myself. Penicillin. When I take that stuff I break out in spots. What happens to you?"

"The same thing." Dick said with a grin. "I, too, break out in spots. I broke out in Chicago. I also broke out in Atlanta . . . And, during our last sales convention in Honolulu, boy, I really broke out . . . But that was before I quit drinking."

Amid general laughter, Harry was about to make his favorite remark. "I'll drink to that," when his wife

Betty cut into the conversation. "Dick, you've just taught all of us a lesson. You can be a guest at our house any time. With your sense of humor, you'll be the life of the party. Also," with a meaningful glance at Harry, "you can truly be relied on to drive the others home."

Dick raised his glass of ginger ale and said, "I always did drive the others home. But now, I actually know where I'm going."

After their guests were gone, John said, "Mary, the party was a success. I'm simply amazed at how Dick handled the whole thing. He is a man of great charm and tact."

"He always was -- when he wasn't drinking," Mary pointed out.

"Yeah," Bob continued, "and tonight, without any booze, he was still the life of the party. And he taught us what to do about recovering alcoholics. You just treat them like you treat anybody else."

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