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Sober Curious: Questions We Can Ask Ourselves

By Douglas Querin

Many people today, lawyers included, are asking themselves about their use of alcohol. *Do I drink too much? Do I have a dependency on alcohol? Should I consider stopping? What would this look like for me?* Even people who generally drink moderately are asking similar questions about their alcohol use. *I wonder what a sober lifestyle would be like for me? Do I really need alcohol in my life? Would I just plain feel better?*

The last few years have given rise to the “sober curious” movement.¹ This has coincided with a growing health-conscious trend that includes mental health awareness and the rejection of traditional social norms that tie alcohol consumption to success, fun, and relaxation. Events like “Dry January” and “Sober October” have become popular, providing participants with a temporary break from alcohol as a way to assess its role in their lives. Sober Curious communities, social media groups, and alcohol-free events have emerged to support this lifestyle shift.

This topic is also important within the Oregon legal community. Law schools have been incorporating substance use information in their curricula; law offices are questioning the frequency of alcohol use as a part of their professional, networking, and social functions; and legal organizations and associations throughout the state are reconsidering the role alcohol plays in the activities and events they sponsor and attend. The issue is likely here to stay.

The Sober Curious movement allows a person to explore the possibility of having an alternative to alcohol in their lives. Anyone considering reducing or eliminating alcohol use may find the following questions helpful as they clarify thoughts around their motivations, goals, and readiness for change:

- **Why do I drink?**
 - Is it out of habit, social pressure, stress relief, or boredom?
- **How do I feel before, during, and after drinking?**
 - Do I experience regret, anxiety, or physical discomfort after drinking?
- **What role does alcohol play in my social life?**
 - Do I drink to fit in or because it's expected in my social circle?
- **What role does alcohol play in my professional life?**
 - Do I feel like I have to drink at work-related events?
- **What are the potential benefits of reducing or eliminating alcohol from my life?**
 - How might my physical health, mental clarity, or emotional stability improve?
- **Has anyone important in my life suggested I quit or reduce my use of alcohol?**
 - How have I typically responded?
- **How often do I drink without truly enjoying it?**
 - Am I consuming alcohol just to participate, rather than out of genuine enjoyment?
- **How does alcohol affect my productivity, mood, and energy levels?**
 - Is alcohol hindering my work, relationships, or personal goals?
- **Am I using alcohol as a coping mechanism for stress, anxiety, or sadness?**
 - Could I explore healthier alternatives for emotional management?
- **What do I hear from others regarding my drinking?**
 - What does my spouse or partner say about my drinking?
 - How about my friends or colleagues?
- **What am I hearing from others about their experiences living a life of sobriety?**
 - What are the pros and cons?
- **Has my drinking ever gotten me into trouble?**
- **Do I feel pressured to drink in certain environments or with certain people?**
 - Would I feel comfortable declining alcohol in these settings?
- **Am I curious about how my life might improve without alcohol?**
 - What positive changes could occur if I cut back or stopped drinking entirely?
- **Am I ready to explore new social activities that don't revolve around alcohol?**
 - What hobbies or events might I enjoy more without alcohol being involved?
- **What strategies can I use to resist social pressure to drink?**
 - How can I prepare to say "no" confidently when offered a drink?

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► **Am I willing to address the emotional challenges that might arise without alcohol?**

- What support systems can I rely on or put in place? Friends? Groups? Therapy?

► **What nonalcoholic alternatives could I explore in social settings?**

- Would I enjoy mocktails, sparkling water, or other options?

► **How do I envision my social identity or relationships changing if I drink less or not at all?**

- Will I need to set new boundaries with people who encourage my drinking?
- Will I need to establish new practices regarding the professional and social events I attend?

► **What's stopping me from trying a sober curious approach?**

- Am I holding on to fear, doubt, or preconceived notions about sobriety?

While a sober lifestyle may not be for everyone, it might be worthwhile for some. For those considering such a change or exploring the possibilities, reflecting on these questions may provide clarity in the decision-making process.

Caveat: When a person is ready to reduce their alcohol intake, it's important to approach the process thoughtfully, especially for those with a history of heavy drinking. Abruptly stopping alcohol consumption can lead to withdrawal symptoms, ranging from mild discomfort like anxiety and nausea to more serious symptoms such as seizures or hallucinations. Medical supervision is strongly recommended for heavy alcohol users to ensure the process is safe and managed properly.²

For those interested in exploring the role of alcohol in their lives or considering other options, the Oregon Attorney Assistance Program can be an invaluable resource. It is completely confidential, voluntary, and free to members of the Oregon legal community.

– DOUGLAS S. QUERIN
JD, LPC, CADC I
Senior Attorney Counselor, OAAP



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ENDNOTES

1. Sheppard, Sarah. “What Does It Mean to Be Sober Curious?” August 19, 2023, www.verywellmind.com/what-does-it-mean-to-be-sober-curious-4774971.
2. National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. “Understanding Alcohol Use Disorder,” 2020 (updated September 2024). Available at www.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/brochures-and-fact-sheets/understanding-alcohol-use-disorder.