

My drinking and using drugs was no different than any other addict. Things began to change in my early 30's when I drank. I was drinking more and more, black-outs started when I would drink. After my drinking, I would make every excuse to try to normalize my behavior. I was tired from flying too much, I did not eat, I was premenstrual, I was postmenstrual, I did not get the trip I wanted, I had a boyfriend, I did not have a boyfriend, my family wants more time from, my family does not want to give me the time I need. Many, many times I really wanted to stop my drinking, I couldn't! I really bargained with myself and others with empty promises, but something would take over once I started to drink.

Inflight management never knew what was happening to me, although I am sure they heard Flight Attendants in the crew lounge and the chatter around my excessive drinking, my black-outs, some of the words that came out of my mouth when I drank. In my uniform, I was dependable, had a great work record, received company recognition and never receiving a complaint letter nor had excessive sick occurrences in my work record. I was functioning, at work, but barely.

Black-outs became the norm when I drank, and towards the end of my drinking, black-outs would happen before I finished my 1st drink. Several Flight Attendants as well as my family members shared their concerns after witnessing my behavior when I drank, but my response always the same, it would never happen again. The reality was, even though at the moment of me making those promises and meaning to keep those promises, when I drank, a switch in my brain went off, and all I wanted to do is to continue to drink, not ever caring about consequences that could or would arise.

For months, I contemplated the possibility of me to seek help, but was afraid. As a Flight Attendant, I was independent but now, I needed the help. Several Flight Attendants who were Association of Flight Attendants Employee Assistance Program committee members in my base and in recovery, reached over to me, but I told them that I was "fine". I wasn't! Even with those calls, I was not ready, until multiple months later to seek assistance.

The day arrived when I made that decision I had enough, I could not look in the mirror anymore without disgust, and I knew I needed help! The promises of trying to cut down were ending me with the same result.

My decision was to enter into inpatient substance abuse treatment. I spend 32 days inpatient, followed by outpatient treatment, therapy and a strong continuing care plan. I did not know if I could or would be able to stay sober, but what I knew that if I didn't I would either end up dead or I would hurt someone by my drinking, I decided to commit to my recovery, using every tool available to me. I listened and asked for guidance in my journey of recovery. I was determined to be responsible to myself, by working my program, which included attending AA meetings, obtaining a sponsor and working the steps. My recovery mentors made me accountable, as well.

My first year of recovery was not easy nor was it emotionally comfortable either. I did not return to flying for 4 months, even with that amount of time away from the airline life, returning scared me. My old routine of heading down for a cocktail after we arrived in the hotel with the crew could not happen, and for an extended period of time back on the line, I did become a 'slam clicker'. I needed to maintain my sobriety and my life, which was my only priority.

I am very fortunate; I reached for help, and sought treatment before I either came in with a positive test, lost my career as a flight attendant, or my life.

I was lucky to have so many layers of support, but the most important layer, to me, was the confidential assistance and guidance I received thru the Association of Flight Attendants Employee Assistance Program when I asked for help. My local Association of Flight Attendant's Employee Assistance Program committee member, not only guided me into treatment, but also gave me emotional support when I returned to flying.

Today, I am still flying with the same airline; love my career, a proud volunteer of the Association of Flight Attendants Employee Assistance Program, and of course, living life sober as a Flight Attendant in Recovery!

Anonymous Flight Attendant

US Airways/American