



UNDERSTANDING HIGH-FUNCTIONING ADDICTION

Personal Workbook

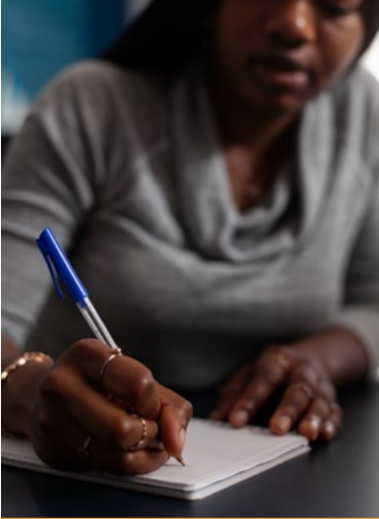
You likely know people who may act like they have it all together, but you're wondering if they could have a problem.

This toolkit will help you see how common addiction is with high-functioning individuals and what it's like.

You will learn how to recognize those issues in others or yourself so that you can take positive steps forward.

You may be hurting and feeling trapped and alone in your struggles. Life doesn't have to be that way!





QUICK ASSESSMENT

1. From 1-to-10 (10 being High), what are the odds that you know one or more high-functioning alcoholics or drug addicts?

2. Think of one person you know (it could be you). From 1-to-10, what are the odds that person may have an addiction issue?

3. What are characteristics you feel a high-functioning person with an addiction issue may portray, even if not on purpose?

4. Even if someone remains high-functioning, what might be some of the negative results of their use of alcohol or drugs?

5. What do you feel is your most compulsive negative habit, one that you know you should stop but have not been able to?



UNDERSTANDING HIGH-FUNCTIONING ALCOHOLICS

**PEOPLE YOU KNOW ARE HURTING,
AND YOU CAN BE THERE FOR THEM IN GRACE**

Unknown to many people, those struggling with alcohol (or drugs) may remain high-functioning, come from a white-collar background, and serve in positions of leadership at work or even at church.

High-functioning alcoholics (HFAs) are people who appear to function normally despite being addicted to alcohol. But they need alcohol, and they use it to cope or feel a way they can't feel otherwise.

For high-functioning alcoholics to get better, there are two critical success factors:

- Self-awareness - Developing humility to accept their imperfections and work on their issues.
- Accountability - Finding vulnerability to connect with people who will be honest with them.

HFAs often attach their self-worth to achievement, which can make it harder for them to acknowledge the problem. Denial is common because their outward success masks their inner struggles, making intervention more challenging.

They may also fear that facing their addiction could threaten their careers, relationships, or reputations.

Once they decide to address their issues, their life will begin to get better, even if it's hard for a little while. They can become even more high-functioning than before! More productive, with greater resilience, and sharper judgment.

Recovery can lead to a stronger sense of self, free from the need for substances, and a renewed focus on their values and long-term goals. Their life will improve in virtually every aspect as they move forward one step at a time.

LESSON 1





RECOGNIZING A HIGH-FUNCTIONING ALCOHOLIC

**A PERSONAL STORY OF ONE OF THE
BEST DECISIONS I EVER MADE IN MY LIFE**

This article discusses my (Steve Ward's) personal journey as a high-functioning alcoholic.

When I graduated college and entered the professional world, especially as I became successful in the high-stakes world of corporate IT sales, it seemed justified to drink. "Work hard, play hard" became a badge of honor.

It became easy to settle into the comfortable and self-serving belief that I deserved to relax - drink - after a hard day at work. As long as I remained high-functioning, alcohol couldn't be a problem, right?

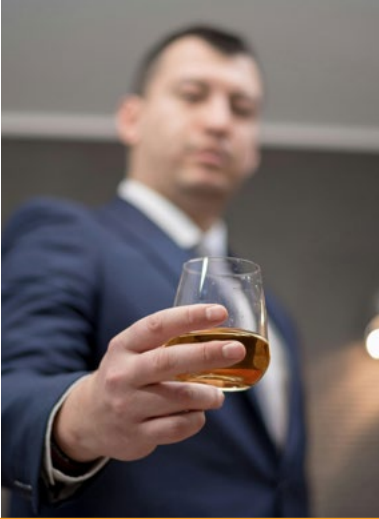
Over time, I started noticing that alcohol seemed to be more in control of me than I was of it. It led to more negative consequences, and every time I tried to quit for any extended time, I found it really hard to stop.

An unsettling thought began to intrude on my consciousness: being high-functioning doesn't mean you're not an alcoholic! Being in church didn't mean alcohol wasn't an idol, and it didn't excuse the fact that I was getting drunk.

I eventually became miserable. Sorry for lost time. Worried about whether I could quit, or if I wanted to. Mostly scared about finishing the rest of my life at half speed, not being the person I had been designed to be and that I should be.

I realized I didn't want my legacy to be that I was a "pretty good high-functioning alcoholic." The thought of looking back with regret on missed opportunities and marginalized relationships pushed me to make a change.

I decided I couldn't live that way anymore. And my new life began.





WHITE COLLAR ADDICTION

WE ARE SURROUNDED BY AND ENCOURAGED AND ENABLED TO PURSUE ADDICTION

We live in an addictive culture, and it is unfortunately a very valid question to ask, “Are we all addicted to something?” There are many factors contributing to white collar addiction today, and a great many people fall prey to them.

About one half of families has someone struggling with a substance or mental health issue, and about 1 in 7 people has a substance problem. Guess what? The vast majority of them are working and striving to be high-functioning.

The discretionary income and lifestyle of white collar workers allow them to afford alcohol or drugs and keep their use hidden. And, since they seem to have it all together on the outside, others often give them the benefit of the doubt.

The risks we face:

- Social and professional environments may normalize alcohol. “Work hard, play hard” as a mindset may feed addiction.
- High stress and performance expectations lead many to use substances as a shortcut to cope or enhance productivity.
- The increasing availability of substances, like prescription drugs and legalized marijuana, makes their misuse easier.

What we can do:

- **Raise awareness:** Recognize that addiction could happen to anyone - including you or someone close to you.
- **Educate ourselves:** Learn how to prioritize health and make choices that continually move us toward wellness.
- **Connect with others:** Find people or groups who understand addiction and can provide guidance and support.

Addiction is not rare; it’s pervasive, and everyone knows people who are struggling. With awareness, education, and connection, we can combat white collar addiction and lead healthier, happier, and more effective lives.



WHITE COLLAR ADDICTION PART 2

**WE ARE BLINDED TO AND WIRED FOR
ADDICTION, AND WE MAY PROLIFERATE IT**

Addiction with white collar professionals is a huge issue. Due to pride or fear, many ignore or rationalize the problem:

- **Lack of Awareness:** We remain productive and successful at work, so we convince ourselves nothing is wrong.
- **Denial:** A dangerous stigma that we feel or perceive around addiction blinds us to the depth of our struggles.
- **Fear of Change:** We resist giving up harmful habits, even as they harm our job, marriage, family, and self-worth.
- **Spiritual Immaturity:** We lean on intellect or self-dependence rather than spiritual growth, leaving us vulnerable.

The traits of high achievers—which include risk-taking, perfectionism, and a strong drive for success—are the same qualities that fuel addiction. Add stress and entitlement to the mix, and the risks multiply.

What We Can Do:

- **Take an assessment:** Take an honest and thorough assessment to identify our compulsive or dependent behaviors.
- **Get more educated:** Use this material and the STEPS toolkits for “Behavioral Health” to better understand addiction.
- **Connect with our family:** Use the STEPS “Proactive Parenting” toolkits to avoid passing harmful habits on to our kids.

It is one thing to allow a self-destructive habit to harm our own life. It’s quite another to take someone else down with us. But that’s what many people do with their kids, because they see and copy much of what we do.

By addressing these challenges with awareness, education, and connection, we can help prevent addiction and build healthier, happier, and more productive lives—for ourselves and our families.



THE COST OF HIGH ACHIEVEMENT

**THE TRAITS PORTRAYED BY HIGH ACHIEVERS
AND ALCOHOLICS ARE EERILY SIMILAR**

The qualities of high achievers include a sense of control, an aim for perfectionism, and self-sufficient decision-making. Want to know some of the traits of many people dealing with addiction? The same list.

Entitlement and pride can lead high achievers to feel that they deserve to indulge and do whatever they want to do, making it even harder to recognize when their behaviors are becoming harmful.

High-stress environments, such as those in law, medicine, and business, often exacerbate these tendencies, leading professionals to seek unhealthy ways to cope with the pressures of work and their anxiety.

The drive for success can evolve into an unhealthy obsession that can potentially manifest as workaholicism, compulsion for control, or anger issues, and these can then escalate into addiction as a way of dealing with problems.

Unfortunately, traits that enable high achievement can also hinder progress toward recovery. Traits like control and perfectionism conflict with recovery principles, which require self-reflection and vulnerability. High achievers may struggle to acknowledge imperfections, and a lack of awareness and humility can also delay recovery.

The first step for high achievers is to recognize that there is a problem and ask God for help. The next step is to decide to face up to their issues. And to begin to realize the pain they may be causing to the people closest to them.

Hope is both possible and available. By taking one step at a time, high achievers can find a much more balanced life—embracing hard work and excellence, but in harmony with their other positive qualities.





PLAN



CREATE A PLAN

1. Do you believe there are many high-functioning, white-collar professionals with an addiction problem? Why or why not?

2. List characteristics you feel are helpful in determining if someone—even if high-functioning—has an addiction problem?

3. What are some of the things you could do to be available and helpful for anyone you know who could be struggling?

4. In the Assessment, you named a compulsive negative habit. Capture the harmful results or consequences of that habit.

5. What next right steps should you take to help you better deal with that bad habit and prevent it from getting worse?

About 1 in 7 people struggle with addiction, and 90% of them do not get help.

This workbook is part of the STEPS Online Toolkit for *Understanding High-Functioning Addiction* which shares useful information to help you see how common addiction is with high-functioning individuals and what it's like. You can reach that toolkit at the link shown below.

A potentially life-changing thing you can do is to share this workbook and the Online Toolkit with people you know. Send them to someone who is hurting or share them with all your friends. Many of them are struggling, but they're just not talking about it.

Wherever people are on their journey, this is helpful and interesting knowledge to know. For some, it can be transformational.



LifeImprovementSteps.com/HighFunctioning