

#ELBlog #128: Educators and Alcohol

1 message

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The graphic features a black background with white and red text. At the top left is a circular logo with the letters 'A' and 'M' and a heart. To the right, the text reads 'EDUCATION LEADERSHIP AND BEYOND' in white, 'SURVIVING AND THRIVING' in red, and 'WITH ANDREW MAROTTA' in large white letters. Below this, it says 'INSIGHTFUL - MEANINGFUL - ENERGETIC'. Further down, it states 'Podcast Found Weekly On Facebook LIVE, iTunes and voicEd Radio Canada'. At the bottom, there are several icons: a book titled 'THE PRINCIPAL', a Facebook LIVE icon, a podcast icon, the voicEd.ca logo, the EDUCATION PODCAST NETWORK logo, and a microphone with 'ON AIR' written on it.

**Education Leadership and Beyond:
Surviving & Thriving with Andrew Marotta**



#ELBlog #128: Educators and Alcohol

This blog is guest written by my friend, Dr. Rick Jetter. Learn more about Rick below this powerful blog post. He is a father, husband, school leader, speaker, and author. I support Rick and his message. Thank you so much Rick.

EDUCATORS AND ALCOHOL
#Blog127

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AM

Educators and Booze: The Unreported Facts

If there was ever a more trying time in our society than now--with a COVID-19 pandemic attacking us, racial unrest, major cities in ruin, political gas-lighting and catastrophic natural disasters happening, simultaneously, all over the world, I've learned more about myself as a recovering alcoholic and even more about how to support my friends, colleagues and even acquaintances who have either testified about or ignored their tumultuous relationship with alcohol.

We all have some sort of a relationship with alcohol--even those who do not drink. The existence of and influence of alcohol is part of our daily lives. We see ads on billboards and in newspapers, on social media advertisements and we find liquor stores about a quarter mile apart, or less, in most urban and

suburban communities. Alcohol is served at most functions and the failure of prohibition allowed us the right to liquor.

Yet, in the absence of a peaceful society, feeling inadequate or depressed, or having real job-related stress, many find alcohol to be a pain-cancelling outlet. In 2014, almost 5% in the U.S. teaching profession reported deep alcohol consumption or abuse and those numbers continue to rise. But, those are the reported cases. My colleagues and I think it is more--in fact, a lot more. In Chapter 6 of Escaping the School Leader's Dunk Tank, Rebecca Coda and I write about the prevalence of alcohol within our profession.

However, the field of education is one of the lowest, reported professions, where alcohol abuse exists. However, millions of people die each year from alcohol-related illnesses and this includes educators from both the reported population and unreported population.

Mass marketing and societal norms mold us to believe that alcohol complements almost every daily activity that we do as human beings, such as:

- Reading the newspaper
- Cooking dinner
- Grilling
- Swimming
- Doing yardwork
- Watching sports

- Watching the sun set
- Boating
- Attending a family reunion
- Celebrating birthdays and holidays

A common discourse inherent in society is that we have to “unwind” after a hard-day at work. Educators may also further this type of discourse by compounding it with themes, such as “I had to deal with those kids and parents all day long.”

The qualitative factors that point to increased unreported alcohol abuse can be found on educators’ social media pages (look for the plastic, red Solo cups), by listening carefully to one another talk within the workplace about alcohol, or by seeing the gifts that colleagues give to one another during holidays or birthdays. Many of those gifts are alcohol-themed.



My Relationship with Alcohol

In my past, I remember seeking alleged refuge in alcohol consumption and binging due to my own job-related stress.

I gotta hand it to vodka: It DID numb the daily pain that I felt each day, but in the end, vodka's spell on me only erased my memory, judgment and health. It deteriorated my physical and emotional well-being. It put me to sleep with anxiety and woke me up with double the anxiety. It manipulated my mind into thinking that more will do the trick. It told me that it was my friend when it was really my enemy. Vodka controlled my habitual activities and robotically made me think that a daily stop at the liquor store was what I

needed before I ran out again. My colleagues flourished me with vodka gift-baskets at Christmas time.



I trembled on a rehab facility mattress for the first 48 hours of my ten day recovery (at least, this is what the nurses told me when I stopped shaking and my fever finally went down). I literally shook the booze right out of my pores. I sweated it out, cried it out, urinated it out and bled it out all over myself. I couldn't eat, sleep, think, or smile. I was stripped down to the tiniest fibers of humanity--a newborn, now new to the world, yet again. I had to button-up my liver. I had to reprogram my mind like a computer being stripped of its CPU. My substance abuse counselor taught me to perceive alcohol like paint thinner.

I've come to realize that one doesn't have to necessarily hit rock bottom in order to start hitting rock bottom. Sometimes, it's a process to get there and we all have the power to help our colleagues get back on track. No one was there for me in the past, but I also hid my drinking pretty well.

Helping Others

My story may sound incredibly extreme to you and maybe it is. Lots of people drink and do not hit the accelerator. I get that, nor am I judgmental about those who do drink. Education is an incredibly stressful profession. It is also a thankless profession.

But, you may know a friend or colleague who talks about alcohol, says that they don't have a problem when they really do, or knows that they have a problem and doesn't have anyone there to help them. Do not take their alcohol-themed social media posts lightly, though. Be on the lookout for awkward interactions with other colleagues that might start to exist. Look out for forgetfulness, anxiety, paranoia, or sudden mood swings.

We also actually have the power to stop celebrating booze. No more alcoholic gifts are needed. No more school-house punchlines about alcohol intake should be funny. Summertime pool parties focused on getting hammered with your colleagues may prevent you from inviting some really nice people who don't want to see you just get hammered and complain about your job.

The virtual platform of teaching from home only increased educators who can now drink while teaching from the confines of their home with no one to really know that they had a few glasses of wine with their lunch. It has happened and it is now happening. Be on the lookout.

We can help one another in the absence of really solid data about alcohol consumption and abuse in education.

Is there someone around you who is showing signs of needing your help?

Look for the signs. I want them to live longer so they can help more of our students. I know you do too.

**Biography:**

Rick Jetter, Ph.D. (a.k.a. “Dr. J.”) is an educator, author, speaker and national education consultant. He has worked in the field of education for over 20 years and has held the positions of: alternative education teacher, English teacher, assistant principal, principal, assistant superintendent and superintendent of schools before pursuing a career in consulting, speaking, writing and publishing. Rick is currently the Asst. Head of Schools at the Western NY Maritime Charter School. He is also the co-founder and lead consultant at Pushing Boundaries Consulting with his co-author of various books, business partner and friend, Rebecca Coda. Rick has written 7 books for the educational community, numerous articles and has also contributed various chapters for other authors’ edited works. You can learn more about Rick and his work by visiting

www.rickjetter.com or contacting him at drjetter1@gmail.com or 716-860-0380.

You can find Rick on most social media channels by searching @RickJetter

Questions? Comments? Click here to contact me.



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Quote: "The way I see it, if you want the rainbow,
you gotta put up with the rain." - Dolly Parton

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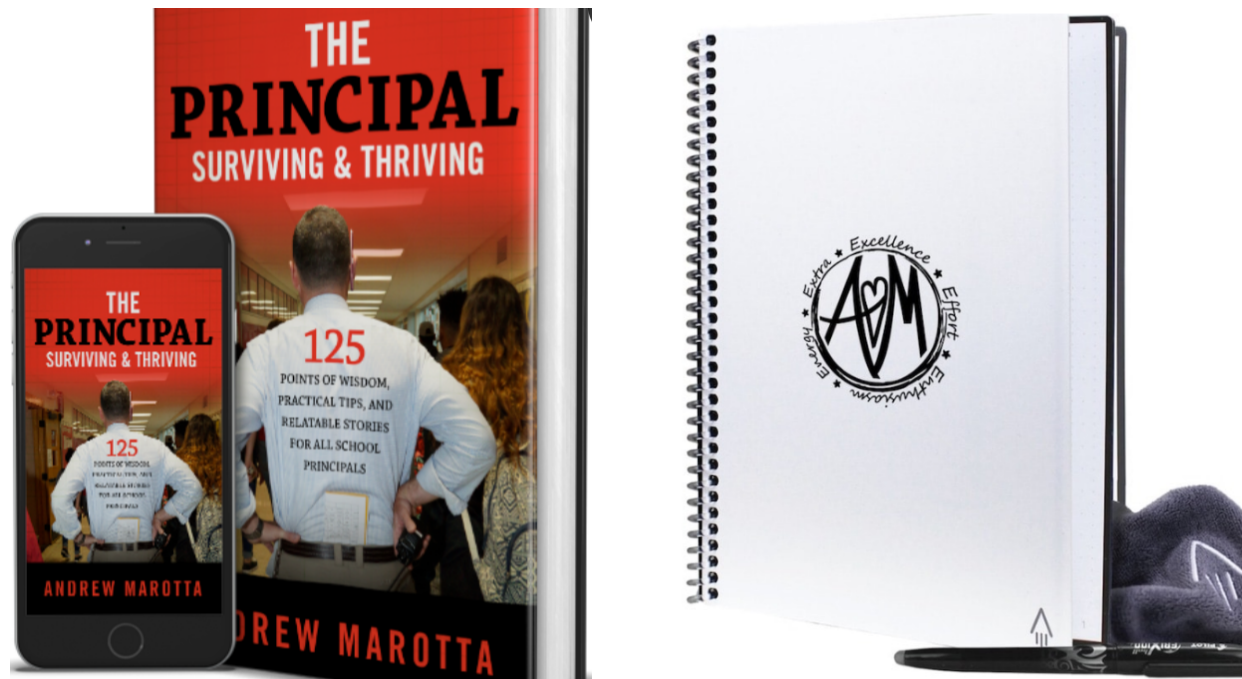


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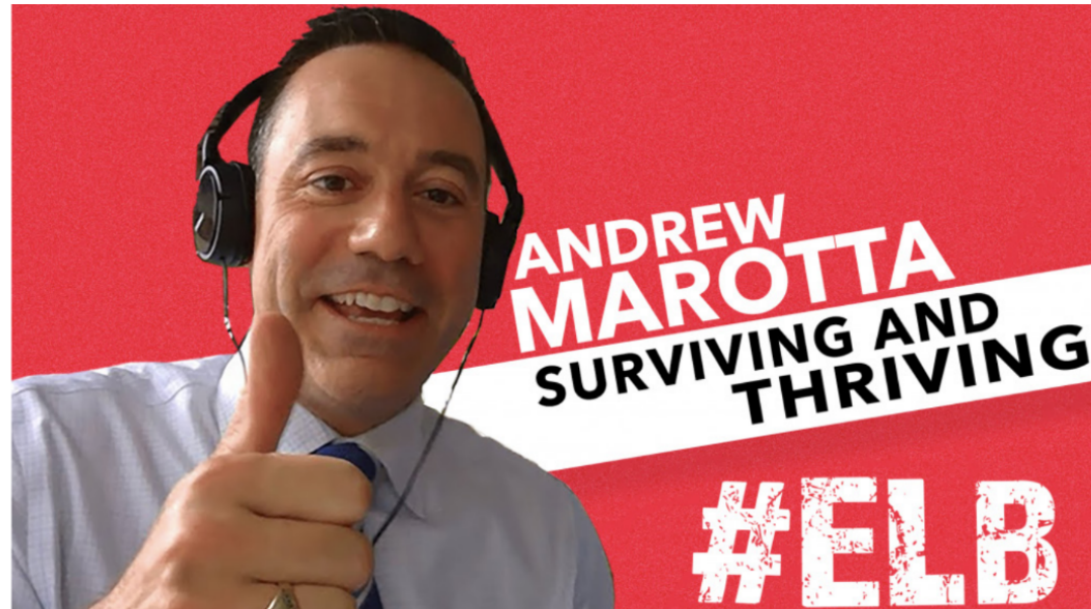
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