

## **Navigating Sobriety in the Dental Profession: Building a Supportive Community**

Sobriety is a challenging journey for anyone, regardless of their profession. In the dental industry, where the pressures of patient care, precision, and maintaining professional standards are high, the battle with addiction can be particularly daunting. Dental professionals, including dentists, hygienists, dental assistants, and others, often face unique stressors that can lead to substance abuse. Unfortunately, the support systems available to these professionals are often limited, leaving many feeling isolated in their struggle. This is where initiatives like Sober Life Rocks play a crucial role, offering a much-needed lifeline to those in the dental field seeking sobriety.

### **The Unique Challenges Faced by Dental Professionals**

Dental professionals are entrusted with the health and well-being of their patients, a responsibility that can be both rewarding and overwhelming. The demands of running a practice, meeting patient expectations, and staying up to date with evolving techniques and technologies create a high-stress environment. For some, the pressure to perform flawlessly day after day can lead to burnout, anxiety, and ultimately, substance abuse as a coping mechanism.

Consider a dentist who juggles a full schedule of patients, manages a team, and ensures that their practice meets all regulatory requirements. The constant need to deliver results can be mentally and physically exhausting, pushing some to seek relief through alcohol or drugs. Similarly, a dental hygienist who spends long hours focused on patient care may turn to substances to unwind after a demanding day. These scenarios are not uncommon, yet the challenges faced by dental professionals in maintaining sobriety are often underrecognized.

### **The Fear of Seeking Help in the Dental Profession**

One of the most significant barriers to seeking help for addiction is the fear of stigma and judgment, especially in a profession where precision and trustworthiness are paramount. Admitting to a substance abuse problem can be seen as a sign of weakness or incompetence, which can have severe consequences for a dental professional's career and reputation. The fear of being judged by colleagues, losing one's job, or facing disciplinary action from licensing boards can prevent many from seeking the help they need.

Moreover, the lack of tailored support systems within the dental industry exacerbates these fears. While dental professionals are often highly skilled in their craft, they may find themselves without a structured pathway to recovery, making it difficult to take the first step towards sobriety.

### **A Personal Story: Overcoming Addiction in the Dental Field**

For close to a decade, I was a single mom juggling a demanding career running a dental education department at a large corporation. My time was scarce, and my finances were tight, so my drinking mostly happened at home, where I'd pair my love of cooking with a bottle of wine—always for one. Business trips and open bars were the rare exceptions when I drank outside of my home, but I was careful to keep my drinking private, believing it was my way of coping with life's stressors.

As things began to unravel, I finally decided to get sober, but I quickly realized I was going to need help. My home had become my personal bar, so I had no safe space to retreat during those early, difficult days. I turned to Alcoholics Anonymous, desperate for change, and threw myself into the program. I was terrified that someone would find out my secret, but I did everything I could to embrace the program: I got a sponsor, attended daily meetings, and participated in sober activities, slowly building a community of support. Over time, I formed deep connections with people from all walks of life—former homeless individuals, sober bikers, and hardworking blue-collar folks—who welcomed me and my kids into their lives. They supported me through my struggles and celebrated my milestones in sobriety.

Despite this, I struggled to find role models who understood the professional pressures I faced. My job required attending networking events, "wine and dine" business meetings, and social functions where alcohol flowed freely. My AA community's advice to have an "exit plan" didn't always apply to my circumstances. I often felt isolated, unable to discuss my career goals or challenges with my sober friends who were focused on making ends meet. The absence of role models who could relate left me feeling isolated in both worlds.

## **The Importance of Tailored Support Systems**

The experiences of professionals like this highlight the need for comprehensive support systems that address the specific needs of those navigating a career and sobriety. Sober Life Rocks was created to fill this gap, offering a supportive community and resources for dental professionals who may feel out of place in the traditional recovery landscape.

Sober Life Rocks is built on the belief that sober professionals should be celebrated and supported. The community within Sober Life Rocks is designed to be inclusive, addressing the needs of a diverse range of dental professionals.

## **What Sober Life Rocks Offers to Dental Professionals**

Sober Life Rocks provides a range of resources and support options tailored to the unique needs of dental professionals:

1. **Community Support:** One of the most valuable aspects of Sober Life Rocks is its strong sense of community. Participants are connected with others who understand the

specific challenges they face in their professional lives. This peer support can be incredibly powerful, helping dental professionals feel less isolated and more understood.

2. Confidentiality: Recognizing the fear of stigma and judgment, Sober Life Rocks prioritizes confidentiality. Dental professionals can join without worrying about their struggles becoming public knowledge. This safe space allows for honest and open communication within the community.

3. Educational Resources: Sober Life Rocks provides educational materials and monthly expert series focused on addiction, stress management, and coping strategies. These resources empower dental professionals with the knowledge and skills they need to navigate their sober journey successfully.

4. Relapse Prevention: Sober Life Rocks provides daily emails emphasizing the importance of relapse prevention, offering strategies and tools to help dental professionals maintain their sobriety in challenging environments. This includes learning how to identify triggers, develop healthy coping mechanisms, and build a strong support network.

## **Bridging the Gap**

Now at 19 years sober, I am finally comfortable sharing my journey in all parts of my life. Together with Laura Nelson, we founded Sober Life Rocks to bridge the gap between the support available to dental professionals and that available to other high-stress professions. Addiction is not confined to any one profession and the need for support is universal. Whether someone is a dentist, a hygienist, a dental assistant, or another dental professional, they deserve access to the resources and community that can help them thrive in their sobriety.

Sober Life Rocks also challenges the notion that only licensed dentists warrant specialized support for addiction. It promotes the idea that every individual's struggle with addiction is valid and deserving of attention. By fostering an inclusive environment, Sober Life Rocks ensures that no one feels left behind in their journey to recovery.

In a world where addiction is often stigmatized and misunderstood, Sober Life Rocks stands as a beacon of hope, reminding us that everyone in the dental profession deserves the chance to achieve sobriety and live a fulfilling, healthy life. This organization not only fills a critical gap in the support available to dental professionals but also creates a community where sobriety is celebrated, and professionals can find the guidance and understanding they need.

You can learn more at [www.soberliferocks.com](http://www.soberliferocks.com)

*Margy Schaller is the COO and Co-Founder of [Sober Life Rocks](http://www.soberliferocks.com). Her goal is to build a community where no one feels alone at business events, regardless of what is in their cup. She also runs [Laser Pointer Presentations](#) where she coaches business owners and experts who want to knock it out of the ballpark*

*when they get on a stage. Most recently, she has launched Speaker Skills Academy, a monthly program that teaches practical and high-impact speaking skills in a collaborative environment. She is the author of two highly acclaimed books, [Write A Killer Talk](#) and [Formulate A Winning Presentation](#). On a personal note, she enjoys time with her family, traveling the world, gardening and watercolor painting!*