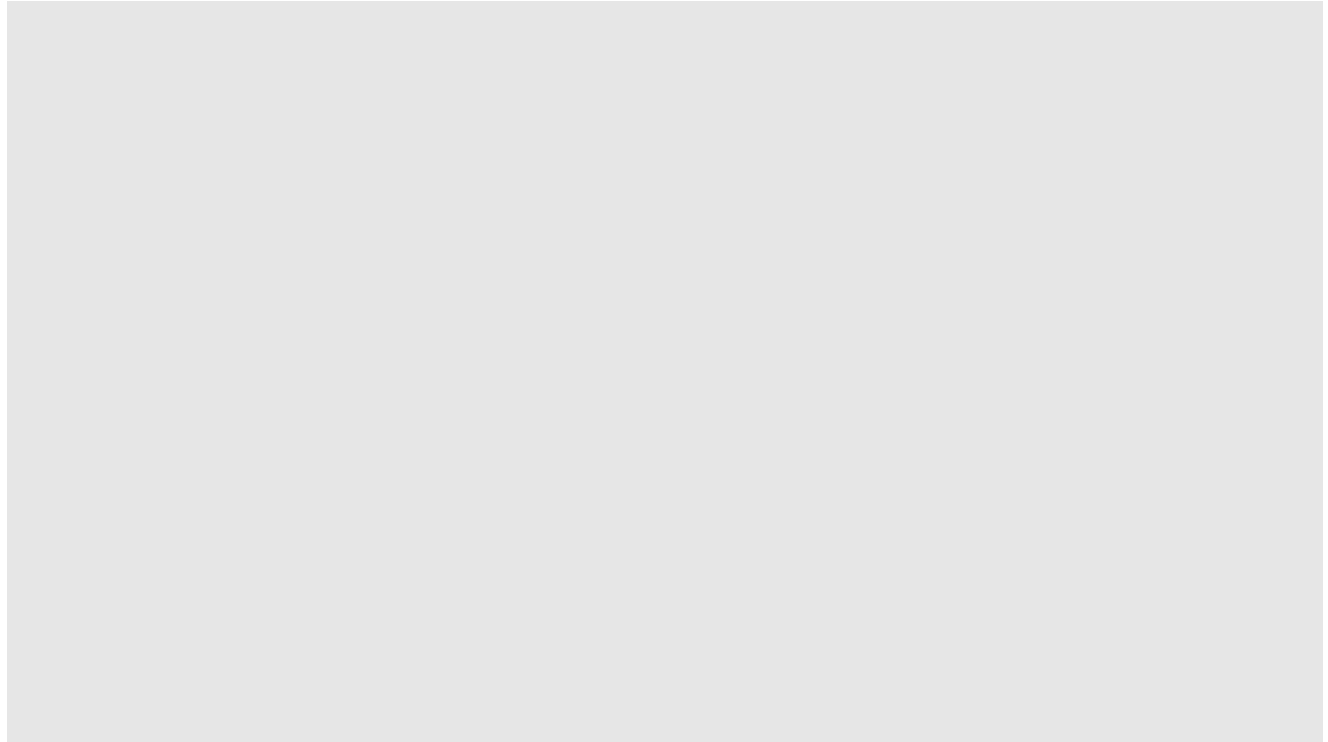


Opinion: How my father's decision to embrace sobriety changed lives

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On this Father's Day, I'm remembering the profound legacy left by my dad — a legacy that reminds us how the right support at the right moment can change not only one life, but many.

More than 30 years ago, my dad decided to stop drinking. A natural salesperson, he had worked for years in insurance and later in auto sales for a friend who owned several car dealerships. One day, his friend told him, "You have a drinking problem, and it's affecting your work." Dad said, "Ok, I'll quit drinking."

Knowing him, he probably could have quit on his own. But what made the difference was that his boss didn't just identify the problem — he offered support. He told Dad he could keep his job and his health insurance if he went to a 28-day treatment program. When Dad returned, his position would be waiting.

That moment became the pebble dropped in a pond, sending ripples that shaped my dad's life — and touched so many others.

His boss' decision may have come from friendship, but it was also a smart business choice. Dad was a skilled salesman and retaining him saved the cost of hiring and training a replacement. In return, Dad mentored new salespeople and filled in as manager when needed. Eventually, he managed the Ford dealership and stayed on for years after his friend's untimely death to help the family transition the business.

Because he was able to stay in the workforce, my dad lived a full life. He got to meet more grandchildren and even mentored them as great-grandchildren came into his life. But the impact of his sobriety went beyond our family.

Dad became active with Alcoholics Anonymous and learned that incarcerated individuals in his part of Illinois didn't have access to AA meetings. Dad helped start or restart AA programs in two state prisons and five county jails, recruiting volunteers to lead meetings.

When Dad passed, several people attending his visitation shared that they would not be alive today if they had not met him in AA.

A few years before Dad passed, I began working for the University of Missouri Extension and helped create the Recovery Friendly Workplace Missouri initiative. The green and purple logo here has become a symbol of hope and second chances. Many states have similar programs that encourage employers to support people in recovery — not only because it's the right thing to do, but because it's good for business.

We invest in maintaining our buildings and equipment to extend their usefulness. Shouldn't we do the same for people? Supporting employees in recovery not only retains talent but also builds loyalty and strengthens workplaces.

I didn't get involved in this work because of my dad. But I now see him as the embodiment of what's possible when people in recovery are given support, not stigma. The kind of second chance he received wasn't just an act of kindness. It was an act of foresight.

This Father's Day, I hope we'll honor fathers like mine — not only by remembering them, but by creating systems that reflect the values they stood for: resilience, generosity, and redemption. Because sometimes, the best way to thank a father is to continue the ripples he began.

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