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## Don't drink, even if the boss does

August 14, 2010

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Want to make a good impression when dining out with a prospective boss? Then never, ever take an alcoholic drink.

Even if you're completely in control, research shows that simply holding a glass of wine or beer creates a negative perception, what professors Scott Rick and Maurice Schweitzer call the "imbibing idiot bias."

In a research paper presented at the annual meeting of the Academy of Management, held in Montreal, they described an "implicit association between alcohol and cognitive impairment."

It doesn't even matter is the boss or manager has chosen a glass of Merlot or beer, then offered it to the job-seeker or that the job-seeker shows no effect of alcohol. The negative association is so strong that, despite evidence to the contrary, there is a perception of impaired reasoning.

"Prospective job candidates largely fail to anticipate the imbibing-idiot bias," writes Rick from the University of Michigan and Schweitzer from the University of Pennsylvania.

"Candidates in informal interview settings follow the boss's lead, even when the boss chooses to consume alcohol. Our demonstration of a robust imbibing-idiot bias suggests that this form of mimicry is a mistake."

Why a mistake? "Consuming, or merely holding, an alcoholic beverage reduced perceived intelligence [even] in the absence of any actual reduction in cognitive performance," they say.

They have evidence to prove it.

In one series of experiments, 610 middle managers who read the transcript and viewed photos of a hypothetical job interview conducted at a restaurant indicated they would be significantly less likely to hire a candidate who ordered wine before dinner than one who ordered soda – even if the interviewer ordered wine first and texts of the supposed interviews were exactly the same regardless of what the candidate drank.

Needless to say, those candidates who ordered wine when their prospective boss ordered soda were "especially punished."

In another experiment carried out at a campus pub, MBA students were invited to conduct one-on-one interviews with undergraduates who needed "job-interview practice" but who were actually confederates in the research.

The interviewers were handed three questions to ask about the younger students' work background, answers to which the undergraduates had committed to memory. The undergrads drank either soda or a non-alcoholic beverage that looked like beer, taking a sip each time the interviewer asked a question but giving the same answers irrespective of what they were drinking.

Although most of the interviewers were drinking beer, they considered candidates to be significantly less worthy of being hired if they appeared to be drinking beer than if they were drinking soda. Once again, the supposed beer drinkers were viewed as much less intelligent than the soda-drinkers, even though the answers of both groups to interview questions were exactly the same.

Sometimes, it's just a nearness to alcohol that creates a bad impression. In yet another experiment, 176 adults were randomly assigned to evaluate either six alcohol-related print ads or six print ads for various supermarket items and were then shown a photograph of a young

man and asked for their “gut reaction” and to rate the subject intelligence and likeability.

These participants rated the photo subject as less intelligent (but not less likeable) after evaluating the alcohol ads than they did after assessing the neutral ads, with a less than 5 per cent likelihood that this difference was due to chance. In other words, “implicitly priming the concept of alcohol caused observers to view targets holding no beverage at all as less intelligent.”

That one glass of wine can be hazardous to your job health in any situation where you wish to manage impressions, Rick and Schweitzer believe.

“Consuming alcohol can diminish perceived intelligence even when it has no influence on actual performance,” they write.

“Unfortunately, people in a position to be judged largely fail to anticipate the bias. Taken together, the results suggest that what we drink may say more about us than we think.”

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