

Just Try It!

Last summer I studied and worked in Spain. One day after work, one of my Spanish co-workers invited me out, and I gladly accepted. To my careless surprise, I found myself in an ale-house. For many, ending a busy workday in an ale-house would be a welcome treat. But I entered the bar with dread. See, I don't drink alcohol. At all. The conversation that followed was all too familiar. I've had it countless times before.

"Trust me, you need to try this! It barely has any alcohol, you won't even taste it. Oh, come on, loosen up a little. *Just, try it!*"

Drinking might be the only context where I reject the motto "Try new things!"

I remember the "Just Say No!" campaign from elementary school. Do you? If only it was that simple. We learned to say no to a collective evil called "drugs". But, looking back, alcohol was never included in the lesson plan.

Instead, I realized the painful consequences of alcohol outside of the classroom by watching a role model struggle with alcohol abuse.

It scared me. I saw how thoroughly and easily alcohol could dominate your life. The downward spiral of pleasure distorted into need, and transitory

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relief transformed into tomorrow's shame. Always falling deeper into dependency and secrecy.

Even scarier, I found myself attracted to drinking. As much as I was terrified and hated alcohol, I admired its *power*. I wanted the total peace and escape it offered.

But I knew that was a dangerous path. So in seventh grade, at the age of twelve, I promised myself that I would not drink until I was twenty-one. I rationalized by then I would be mature enough to make decisions and drink for the right reasons, a pro at rejecting temptation and peer pressure.

I wrote an official statement in my pink, fluffy diary and signed it in cursive with heart-dotted "i"s. It was more than a little girl's ideal. It was a non-negotiable obligation, which would define me and my relationships, even more than I realized at the time.

I've stayed true to that commitment. But it has not been easy. It's come with a price.

Alcohol is such a large part of our life. Little did I realize, it only gets harder to refuse when you're older. Drinking becomes expected. Not just at college

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parties, but in the workplace when you go out for drinks with your colleagues, at home with a glass of wine at holiday dinners, and on a first date.

Think about it for a moment: imagine committing to sobriety for the rest of your life. Not a world without alcohol, only you. How would that change your relationships?

If you tell people you don't drink, they often classify you as: a.) No fun. b.) A recovering alcoholic or c.) Pregnant, congratulations! Thankfully I'm a hell of a lot of fun and fit in none of those categories.

I am not *against* alcohol. When my twenty-first birthday comes, I will probably start drinking. I hope that I'll be able to maintain a healthy relationship with alcohol for the rest of my life.

What strikes me as sad, is that abstinence from alcohol is such a difficult choice to make and keep. I don't mean that I face peer pressure every day, on the contrary, most of my friends *respect* my decision. Rather, I mean that sobriety is an opt-out choice. Alcohol is assumed as a given unless you say otherwise, and if you choose not to drink, you better be prepared with an

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explanation and the will power to defend your decision. When was the last time you had to explain why you *wanted* to drink?

I bring this up, not as a moral sermon, but as an observation of the culture we are living in. There's nothing wrong with enjoying a cocktail, but there's also nothing wrong with drinking water. It's not missing out. It's a choice.

To those who abstain, remember that while our decision might not be normal, it doesn't mean that we're weird. To those who drink, continue to enjoy but I encourage you to reflect why you're doing it. In anything that you do, it's certainly easier to follow the crowd, but make sure that it's your conscious choice.

And remember that it's my choice too.

Thank you.