

THE DRINKER'S

MANIFESTO

CHEERS TO A BETTER DRINKING CULTURE

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First Edition

BETTER
DRINKING
CULTURE

THE DRINKER'S
MANIFESTO
CHEERS TO A BETTER DRINKING CULTURE

To our friends who founded the movement,
for the tribe who now owns it.

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FOREWORD

I was drunk the first time I learned about Better Drinking Culture. Technically, I was sober *at first*. It was June 11, 2015, in Grand Rapids, Michigan. A trusted friend and respected mentor invited me to a new beer-and-food pairing event that he conceptualized with the polite request for my feedback about what I thought worked and what didn't. That event just happened to be the first time BDC formally organized in public since quietly launching a few months earlier.

When I walked in, the first thing I noticed was that at every brewery's station there was someone pouring beer who was wearing a different colored T-shirt that read BETTER DRINKING CULTURE. The name alone piqued my interest. I was intrigued.

I spent the next couple hours immersing myself in the experience so that I could make good on my promise to advise with recommendations. In the meantime, I exhausted all of my comped drink tickets. On my way out, now intoxicated, I felt compelled to stop by the BDC merch table. I can't remember who I talked to—you can probably guess why, but I asked the guy to tell me about Better Drinking Culture. His response—BDC's mission—cut straight through my buzzed-up, fuzzy state. The first thing out of my mouth: "Where were you when I was in college?"

I graduated from Michigan State University in 2001 with a bachelor's degree in English and a minor in binge drinking. I have the literal scars to show that I put too much time into "studying" for the latter. The day after I walked across the stage to accept my diploma, I spent the afternoon in the emergency room having my right hand stitched back together because I smashed a half-gallon of liquor while wasted at my own graduation party.

Just about every regret or moment of shame I have that has made it too painful to look myself in the mirror was conceived at the bottom of a bottle that I had no business emptying. I have lost my balance and stumbled to the edge countless times, somehow barely dodging my own rock-bottom.

Fast-forward to the fall of 2016. I got an unsolicited

email from BDC's co-founder, Camden Brieden, who found me through a TV show I created about the craft beer scene. He introduced himself, and wrote, "I would love to connect to learn more about the projects you're working on, and share some ideas and a vision I have that could lead to some shared opportunities." I still can't say with certainty who I talked to from BDC the year prior—it very well could've been, and probably was, Cam. What are the chances?

I took Cam up on his offer, and we met for lunch. He ordered a water, and I ordered a beer. We clicked. So much in fact that he invited me out to lunch again three weeks later. I didn't realize in that moment that I was walking into a final job interview. Toward the end of our meal, he casually asked me about what my drinking was like in college. While recounting one of the many stories I wish I could take back and rewrite, I started tearing up from pulling the scab off an old, painful wound. He sat there across from me as I was trying to regain my composure. He nodded with compassion as if he understood what I was saying better than I did. With as much sensitivity as one person could embody, Cam gently asked, "Would you like to take over leading BDC?"

I wrote *The Drinker's Manifesto* from the point of view of Better Drinking Culture. However, I wrote it *to* who I was in college, to everyone I've drunk too much with, and to the current generation of drinkers and college

students with the hope that they would feel empowered to pass down a drinking culture for future generations *better* than the one that was left for us. Better than the way it was left for my friends and me. And better than the way I almost left it for you.

When Cam asked me if I'd consider writing the *Foreword*, which wasn't part of our original plan because it would oddly be for the same book I also just wrote, I gave him the same answer I did when he trusted me to run BDC. I couldn't *not* do it.

I'm human, and still make mistakes, but I care and I try. Believing in a better drinking culture and walking it out are not synonymous with perfection, but with love, intent, and grace. We're not in this alone.

I sincerely hope that this book does for you the same thing it could've done for me.

Now, go be awesome.

Jason Ley, CEO
Better Drinking Culture

PREFACE

Hello. We're Better Drinking Culture. You can call us BDC. *The Drinker's Manifesto* is a culmination of our desires to build a better drinking culture for ourselves and our friends. Our hope is that—if we develop a greater respect for what we drink, we can deepen the respect for our relationship with alcohol.

We wrote this book because we were sick and tired of waking up feeling like crap and regretting what we did the night before—if we even remembered it. Our lives can either be joyfully enhanced or completely obliterated when we drink. Our culture has historically glorified the over-consumption of alcohol. More

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We wrote this book because we were sick and tired of waking up feeling like crap.

than just encouraging us to drink, our culture *expects* us to—a *lot*.

This widespread, normalized phenomenon has contributed to influencing people to misuse alcohol because drinking is promoted as cool, fun, and harmless. These messages can be found embedded almost anywhere alcohol is present—some of which are more subtle than others, while many are blatant and shameless. Too many of us have learned the hard way after putting ourselves or someone else in harm's way. When we come to the sobered-up realization that getting wasted leads to an onslaught of negative consequences, we find out that the path to social acceptance that our culture is selling us has a false bottom.

Yet, a better way of drinking is rarely, if ever, promoted with the same enthusiasm.

So, we decided to do something about it. We ignited a movement to set the example for the next generation. We're intent on leaving this place better than how we found it. We wanted better for ourselves, and we want better for you.

Before we go any further, we want to tell you how

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Yet, a better way of drinking is rarely, if ever, promoted with the same enthusiasm.”

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We're intent on leaving this place better than how we found it.”

Better Drinking Culture got here. Camden Brieden, BDC's co-founder, has a story. It just so happens to be the prelude to BDC.

Back in high school, a classmate once told me, “You're going to look back at your life and wish you partied harder.” We were at a typical house party: no parents and tons of cheap alcohol. And, like every other party I had been to, I was the only one not drinking.

Although most of the people I knew in school drank whenever they had a chance, I was really fortunate that my friends and I shared a mutual respect for each other, including our decisions to drink or not drink. My choice to not drink was heavily influenced by my family, specifically my mother who, at that time, was struggling with her relationship with alcohol.

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What I quickly learned was that everyone had a story.”

Growing up in a family negatively impacted by alcohol was not easy. Sharing this openly with my friends? Much harder. But, I cared deeply about my mom and learned as much as I could about the science of addiction. Once I fully understood that addiction was not a character flaw or weakness, but rather a complex condition of the brain, I was better equipped to share my story with my friends. What I quickly learned was that everyone had a story about how drinking too much had negatively impacted their life or the life of someone they knew. Stories of

regret, lost memories, weekends wasted, relationships ruined. The list almost doesn't have an end. And most of them on the spectrum of "I cannot believe I did that last night" are often hidden in plain sight.

*We discovered a common thread through sharing these stories: **Nearly every negative consequence related to alcohol was the result of drinking too much.** It wasn't alcohol alone. It*

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Nearly every negative consequence related to alcohol was the result of drinking too much.”

was drinking too much of it. And then came the big idea! If we choose to drink better, all of these negative experiences would never happen in the first place.

So, I invited the same group of friends who shared their stories with me back into the conversation. We sat down together over drinks (some with alcohol, some without) and drafted a manifesto of what a "better drinking culture" looks like. We built a simple website, shared our stories on it, printed some shirts, and planted a flag firmly in the ground for what we believed to be a better way. It didn't take long before people from all corners of the globe started sharing their stories with us, repping BDC shirts, and spreading the love with their friends. It was honest, authentic, simple, and sincere.

Looking back today at my life, I don't regret not partying "harder." I had an absolute blast in high school and college.

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I don't regret not partying 'harder.'”

I just did it without alcohol. Even to this day, I still haven't had a drop. Not one. I'm proud of my choice. Yours may be different than mine, and that's okay.

BDC was founded by drinkers and non-drinkers—by the very people who choose to consume alcohol as well as those who equally choose not to. BDC is not a campaign, it's a lifestyle.

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We're a movement of people who believe in something better, and everyone's invited.”

It's not a product of the industry or a university. We're a movement of people who believe in something better, and everyone's invited.

We *all* have a story. If it's not about us, it's likely about someone we know, someone we love, or someone we miss. And, all of our stories still share that singular underlying theme: *Nearly every negative consequence associated with alcohol is the result of drinking too much.* If we can educate and empower people to drink better and live healthier we'll be able to look back on our lives and tell the story of a life that we not only remember fondly, but one that we're proud of living.

BDC's mission is to shift our culture's relationship with alcohol in a healthier and more positive direction—encouraging a lifestyle free from pain, harm, and regret. Because hangovers suck.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of *The Drinker's Manifesto* is to educate, empower, and equip anyone who decides to drink to do so better, and to encourage others to do the same.

To be clear, BDC is not anti-alcohol. As a matter of fact, many of us love a good drink and the camaraderie that comes with sharing a cold one with our friends. Nor is this book an endorsement to start drinking. If you're already there we'll never try to entice you with the pressure of, "C'mon, just one more!" Instead, we want you to have the wherewithal to make that decision for yourself.

We're here to support you on your journey, even if you stumble along the way. If this was a trust fall, we'd catch

you. You don't have to sign an oath in blood to live a healthier lifestyle. Don't let a misconception that you have to be mistake-free in your relationship with alcohol weigh you down. BDC doesn't "kick you out" if you have a rough night with the bottle. You don't have to carry the weight of yesterday's baggage. We'll never judge or shame you. Regardless of where you are currently and how much you (may or may not) drink, today is a new opportunity.

Better Drinking Culture is unique in that we are both drinkers and non-drinkers. You don't have to drink to believe in BDC. We're an anomaly like that, and we like it that way. We owe no allegiances except to ourselves. We're free agents of our own accord.

If you were to pull back the curtain on BDC, you won't find a major corporation pulling the strings. We're not a government agency or a political party funded by lobbyists with a hidden agenda. We're not a coalition that's trying to convince you that we're cool or hip. We're not your parents. We may not even be friends yet, but we are people who care.

BDC is reestablishing the rules of engagement for what it means to drink or to be a "drinker." We're setting the bar higher than it's been held for how we should respect ourselves, what we drink, and for a culture that wants to curate better drinkers. For us, drinking better

means drinking mindfully—a conscious approach to consuming. You've heard the saying, "All good things in moderation." We can get behind that. Essentially, we believe people should drink within their own personal limits.

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Drinking better
means drinking
mindfully.”

The Drinker's Manifesto is organized into three main parts: *Better, Drinking*, and *Culture*. *Better* lays the foundation for the reasons we choose to drink better, and how doing so can positively affect our health, relationships, and community. *Drinking* outlines practical ways to be mindful about yourself, what you're consuming, and the environment around you while you're drinking. *Culture* is where the shift happens. The decision to be a leader among your peers—a conduit for social impact and a voice for long-term change—is yours.

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personal limits.”

As you read this book, take into consideration the following. We're not making assumptions about where you've been in your relationship with alcohol, accusations about where you currently may be, nor criticisms for somewhere you're not. There may be times throughout this book when you roll your eyes at us. We know cynicism is a result of being influenced by skewed, unrealistic social norms. The pressure to do what's cool often overrides being compelled to do what's right.

Lastly, to be fair, this book is not intended for those with a serious drinking problem or a dependency on alcohol. For anyone who may be struggling with an addiction to alcohol or chronically misusing it, abstinence may be the only appropriate solution. If that's the case, we encourage you to seek professional help. Instead, *The Drinker's Manifesto* was written for an audience who is either curious about entertaining a lifestyle that includes alcohol or transitioning to adopt one that includes a more mindful approach.

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The pressure to do what's cool often overrides being compelled to do what's right.

drink bet•ter \ˈdriŋk ˈbe-tər\ v **1 a** : to drink mindfully (i.e., originating from a healthy state of mind, with clarity, and maintaining present-moment self-awareness) **b** : to drink in moderation (i.e., within one's own personal limits, not in excess or to the point of a loss of self-control)

#BECAUSEHANGOVERSSUCK

DRINK BETTER. LIVE HEALTHIER.

Started by a group of friends sharing their stories about alcohol, Better Drinking Culture has grown into a grassroots movement that is shifting our culture's relationship with alcohol in a healthier and more positive direction—a lifestyle free from pain, harm, and regret.

And this is their manifesto—a call to challenge our culture and inspire change.

BETTER
DRINKING
CULTURE

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