



# Making Excuses - Not Helpful!

By Dr. Linda Hancock

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Hancock has written a regular weekly column entitled "All Psyched Up" for newspapers in two Canadian provinces for more than a dozen years. Over the years, her readers and clients have said that they have benefited from her common-sense solutions, wisdom, and sense of humour. Dr. Linda Hancock, the author of "Life is An Adventure...every step of the way" and "Open for Business Success" is a Registered Psychologist who has a private practice in Medicine Hat. She can be reached at 403-529-6877 or through email [office@drlindahancock.com](mailto:office@drlindahancock.com)

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Sometimes people think that their behaviours are justified. Many believe that they shouldn't have to "fess up" unless they are "caught" doing something that they know deep down is not a good choice. Well, nothing surprises me anymore as I have seen over 8,000 clients and have heard probably every scenario possible as well as dozens of excuses for each.

Alcohol and marijuana are now both legal. This has caused some confusion in society especially for those who are in safety sensitive positions. They signed "zero tolerance" contracts with their employers and know the consequences that they will face if they have been using substances. Sometimes they are reported anonymously through Ethics Hotlines. They may self-disclose or be found out when the company does testing after an incident at the worksite.

However, not everyone is willing to take responsibility for a failed substance test.

Here are some of the excuses that I have heard over the years:

1. The lab messed up - Testing involves determining temperature of the sample, as well as the specific drug(s) and the amount in the person's system. Great care is made to ensure that this is done in a scientific and professional manner. Suggesting that there was a mistake is usually just wishful thinking. Also, testing rules out the possibility that you were just inhaling smoke from others in a small space.
2. I only tried it once - Minimizing the problem doesn't justify it any more than the criminally accused who states that s/he only raped the victim once.
3. It's not my fault - Accusing friends or family members who supplied the substance or encouraged you to take it ignores the fact that you always have a choice.
4. The company is being unreasonable - The reason that your job is classified as "safety sensitive" is that you have the obligation to protect yourself and others without unnecessary risks. You knew the expectations and consequences the day you signed the contract.
5. If it's legal then I should be able to use it - Alcohol is legal but that doesn't mean that you should go to work after or while drinking. Same with marijuana.
6. What I do on my own time should be my business - Marijuana can stay in your system for several days or even weeks. If you decide to smoke it during your day's off, you might regret it once you are back on shift.
7. I don't have a problem - I am not sure how a person who is suspended from work, unable to pay bills and having relationship problems because of their substance use can think this.
8. I have quit now and will never do this again - There is an old expression that says, "Desperate people do desperate things". Often, I hear statements and promises from individuals who just want the consequences to disappear.
9. In-patient rehab is not needed because I am not "that bad". Unfortunately, the person who fails the test is not respected for good judgement in this area. Other co-workers might be using more substances more often, but they haven't been "caught" yet.
10. I can't afford to be away from work for twenty-eight days of treatment. The good news is that because Substance Use Disorder is a recognized diagnosis, many employees have disability benefits that will help them financially during their leave.

I find it interesting to hear people state that they use drugs and alcohol to help them sleep, numb out, "chill", relax and change their mood. At the same time, they claim that while they are using substances, they can still be excellent drivers and alert employees.

Years of research and the development of legislation has led to policies and laws that are focused on reducing risk for citizens. Usually those who are caught disrespecting them in the workplace or behind the wheel do not have excuses that would justify their actions.

Excuses are usually just ways to avoid looking in the mirror and taking mature responsibility for making bad choices.