We’ve all made it towards the end of the semester with classes ending April 23rd and finals the following week. But for seniors there’s a mixed feeling of excitement and nervousness towards adjusting to adult life. Once commencement ends on April 29th, students are told to hit the ground running and find a successful job right away within their degree. This causes feelings of disorientation, being overwhelmed and confused as fresh undergraduates are roped into the “real world”. Some students may need to shift their habits from partying on the weekends to hone in on a consistent work schedule. Creating new habits as students adjust into the workforce deal with maturing as they navigate alcohol and other substance use.

Hey, I’m Zachary Plisko. Welcome to episode 11, the season finale of, “In the Mix”. A podcast provided through the Alcohol and Other Drug Services here at Grand Valley. On the last episode of the season, we’ll discuss the college to workforce transition and the use of substances post graduation.

First, we’ll discuss the cultural transition from schooling to work.

The independence and growth is often what attracts young adults to college. Achieving a degree in a field you want to study, having a space to yourself and building your identity through clubs and social activities all play a role in growth over college. As students make it to senior year, discussions need to be made about the workplace expectations versus the classroom setting. It’s an intimidating transition as students are exposed to a cultural transition.

Think about feedback. In college it’s mostly consistent and clear through professors. They’re the ones who lead the class with a syllabus, assignments, and tests. Everything is organized on purpose to ease a student through learning. The grading system is utilized to standardize students’ clarity of work.

As for feedback in the workplace, there’s more depth to it. Employees strive to work together and establish trust. This helps set the tone of future conversations to accept them and put in personal suggestions. It’s difficult to accept feedback as there’s other personal interests of doing something a certain way, but a communication channel is needed to create a productive work environment.

Another aspect of college versus the workplace is relationships. Students build social networks through school, clubs and jobs. All students share a common ground of being exclusive to the campus community. Students then bridge off to find others with similar interests. This ease of community allows students to have mutual groups of friends while subconsciously avoiding those who aren’t similar to them.

In the workplace, relationship building occurs differently. People may or may not like each other because of the lack of similarities, but people must come together to continue productivity. People will interact with each other majority of the time, so it’s not surprising that some may grow sick of each other or, on the other hand, create long-term friendships. Sometimes it’s more complicated where a manager or supervisor befriends an employee. This creates an unbalanced power dynamic where the manager or supervisor favors the friend. This causes an unfair work environment and tensions may grow amongst other employees. Overall, workplace relationships can be hard to navigate versus college.

Last point I’ll touch on is accountability. In college, groups bond through social means, so there’s no set expectations on how to act or treat others because the norm is set within the group on how to treat each other no matter if it’s partying, doing homework together or at club meetings.

At work, mistakes may have consequences. Not only do you have to worry about personal performance and productivity in the workplace, but also there’s others to please or hold accountable like a team, the boss and the organization. Everyday, there’s a set expectation to carry out a job effectivelyIf the bar isn’t met, job reputation is questioned amongst other workers.

After breaking down expectations of school versus work, we’ll discuss the influence alcohol and other substances may have in the “real world”.

School brings daily stressors that creates conflict between school, clubs and work demands which may expose the use of alcohol and other substances as a form of a getaway or decompressor. These stressor can happen in the workplace too. Having too much to accomplish at work or employee conflict are stressor where substances are used after the workday as a notion of peace.

College has a notion that it’s a place for young adults to experience liberation and enhance their adult-like freedom through substance use. Students strive to enhance their mood or sociability through substance use. Often it results in weekend partying where there’s no repercussions besides the usual procrastination on an assignment or possibly missing class.

Despite this, the workplace begs to differ. The environment tends to be more chill. Not overusing substances but using them in moderations. Think about when going out to a bar. As a college student, the limits are free where dancing, overdrinking and enjoying the night with the expectation of using LakerLine to head back to campus is all in play. With full employment, these weekends turn into a decompresser. No longer is it dancing, constant drinking, but instead a drink here or there and sitting at a table or bar sharing details about the work week with a fellow employee or two.

We have the power to make individual choices when using substances. Think about alcohol. We choose what to drink, how much to drink and where. Again, we want that sense of community with others and open a communication channel through the social enhancer of alcohol. However, this isn’t always the case. Peers may influence others to drink even though someone doesn’t want to. Refer to episode one of, “In the Mix,” where I discuss how peer pressure can influence a student to drink.

When it comes to the “adult life”, again drinking comes with moderation. If working the typical nine to five job, there’s a focus of getting the right amount of sleep and there’s a lack of desire to get drunk when the consequences like a hangover can hinder the workday.

If using substances, it may cause a struggle to find a job. Habits from college substance use carries over, but the transition to the work lifestyle doesn’t. The reliance of a substance proves difficult where the substance is needed to kickstart the day. College served as the place where freedom came with substance use. Repercussions were lighter where a hangover simply causes a lack of focus in class or lack of school work. The workplace servers are different where substances cause a loss of engagement in the long workday. This hinders the trust and reliability employees may have on a person to conduct their job effectively.

The money aspect is in play too. Episode seven highlights how spending money on substances overtime builds up and it blocks adults from reaching milestones financially like buying a house.

Something to keep in mind is companies do drug tests to ensure workplace safety. They’re conducted to minimize risks and dangers in the workplace and ensure a drug-free environment. Drug tests look into five categories of drugs: amphetamines, cocaine, marijuana, opiates and phencyclidine. If using substances each last a certain amount of time in the body that can be detected and cause a termination of a job.

Tests do vary when it comes to drug testing. There’s pre-employment tests where passing the test is a condition to gain employment and all job candidates will receive a drug test prior to being hired. The annual physical tests are conducted on a yearly basis, but employees are informed prior to testing. Lastly, there’s a for-cause and reasonable suspicion testing for employees that are showing signs of unfit duty of the job or there’s a documented pattern of unsafe work behavior.

That concludes the season two finale of, “In the Mix”. Remember transitioning to the workplace may prove difficult, but responsibility and moderation in drinking and using substances is key. Until next season, in fall of 2023, I’m Zachary Plisko. I hope listeners have enjoyed this season.