

Not Realizing You're Done™

How to Recognize When Alcohol Has Already Won — Before You're Ready to Admit It

> **Read this first.** I'm not a doctor. I never went to school for any of this. Everything in here is my own story and what I've watched happen to people I've loved and lost. It is **not** medical advice, and it is **not** a treatment plan. Any medication I mention is something you'd have to talk to a real doctor about — I'm just telling you it exists because nobody told me. Think of this less like a program and more like a long, honest conversation with somebody who has actually been where you might be sitting right now.

Start Here, Even If You're Sure This Isn't About You

Let me guess why you're reading this.

It probably wasn't because you typed "how to quit drinking" into a search bar. People who type that already know. You're here because something feels off. You're tired in a way that sleep doesn't fix. Mornings are rough. People seem a little annoyed with you and you can't always tell why. Things that used to matter don't anymore. And somewhere underneath all of it there's this low hum of *something is wrong* that you've gotten really, really good at ignoring.

I'm not going to tell you that you're an alcoholic. I don't know you. That's not my call, and honestly it's not even the point of this.

Here's the point. There's a moment that happens to people like us long before we admit anything. I call it **Not Realizing You're Done™**. It's that stretch of time where the truth is already sitting right in front of you — where part of you already knows — but you haven't let yourself look at it straight on yet. You're done. You just don't know it yet.

I lived in that exact place for years. I was convinced — and I mean *completely* convinced — that nobody could function without alcohol. Not me, not anybody. I thought a sober life was a fairy tale other people told themselves. I never believed I'd see a single day without a drink in me.

I've now had exactly one drink in something like ten years.

I'm not telling you that to brag. I'm telling you because if you're where I was, you don't believe a sentence like that is possible for you. I didn't either. So I'm not going to ask you to quit anything today. I'm just going to ask you to *look*. That's the whole job here.

What You're Actually Going to Get Out of This

By the time you finish reading — and I'd bet money it happens before you even get to the last page — one of two things will be true.

Either you'll close this and genuinely feel lighter because, no, this really isn't your situation. Great. I mean that. That's a good outcome and you can stop worrying.

Or — and this is the one I'd put money on — somewhere in here you're going to hit a paragraph that stops you cold. You're going to think "*how does this guy know that?*" And that feeling, that little jolt of being seen for the first time in maybe years, **that's the whole thing**. That's the crack in the door. That's what nobody has ever given you because everybody around you is either too polite, too scared, or too checked-out to say it.

I'm none of those things. So let's go.

How the Recognition Framework Works

The **Not Realizing You're Done™ Recognition Framework** is built on a simple idea: you can't lie to all four of these at the same time.

There are four places the truth leaks out, no matter how good you are at hiding it. I call them **The Four Tells**:

1. **The Body** — what's happening physically that you've explained away
2. **The Secrets** — the stuff you do around drinking that you'd never say out loud
3. **The People** — what's happening to the people around you (and what they already know)
4. **The Empty** — the feeling underneath the whole thing

You might have a great excuse for any one of these. Everybody does. But when you lay all four down next to each other and look at them honestly — that's when it gets hard to keep pretending. That's the framework. That's all it is. Honesty across four areas at the same time.

We'll walk through each one. Then I'm going to hand you a tool to do it on yourself, in private, where nobody's watching and nobody's judging. Take your time. There's no rush and there's no audience.

You're Not Fooling Anybody (But Nobody's Telling You)

Let me start with the one that's going to sting, because it's the one that breaks the spell fastest.

You think you're hiding it. The drink before the family thing so you walk in already steady. The mouthwash. The timing of your trips to the store. The way you've arranged your day around when you can and can't. The mints. Topping off when nobody's looking. You've got a whole system, and you're proud of how smooth it runs.

I hate to be the one. They know.

They've known for a while. Your people aren't stupid. They can smell it, they can hear it in your voice, they can see it in your eyes and the way you move. The system you built that you think is invisible? It's about as invisible as a parade.

So why hasn't anybody said anything?

Here's the part nobody understands. Most people around you have no gauge for this. They've got no meter. They hear "oh yeah, he had a few too many again" and they file it under personality. *That's just Uncle Dan. Dan drinks. Always has.* They genuinely think it's normal, because to them, it's just who you are now. Meanwhile you're fighting a war every single day that not one of them knows is happening. You're completely alone inside something they think is just a quirk.

That's the cruelest part of this whole thing. It's not that nobody cares. It's that the people who care have no idea what they're actually looking at, and the few who *do* are too afraid of blowing up the relationship to say it out loud.

So I'll say it, because I've got nothing to lose by being straight with you and everything to gain if it lands: **you are not fooling anybody except yourself.** And the second you really absorb that — the second you stop spending energy on a disguise that was never working — something in your chest loosens up. Not because you got caught. Because you can finally stop performing.

Sit with this one for a second. What's one thing you do around your drinking that you'd be mortified for someone to find out about? Just name it to yourself. You don't have to write it down. The fact that there *is* one is the first Tell.

The Real Reason You Can't Just Stop

Now let's deal with the lie you tell yourself to feel okay: *"I could stop whenever I want. I just don't want to right now."*

You've maybe even proved it to yourself. You did a dry weekend once. Made it to Wednesday that one time. White-knuckled a couple of days and thought, *see, I'm fine, I'm in control.* And then it came back, and you told yourself you *chose* that.

Let me tell you what was actually happening, because I ran this same experiment on myself about a thousand times.

You try to stop. It works for a bit. Then the wheels come off and you drink again. And here's the killer — now you feel like garbage about yourself for failing. So you drink to deal with the feeling of having failed. Which makes you feel like more of a failure. Which makes you drink more.

That loop right there? That's not weakness. That's not a character flaw. That's not you being lazy or broken or a bad person. **That loop is the disease.** That's literally what it looks like from the inside. People keep waiting to find the willpower to break out of it, not understanding that the loop itself is feeding on every failed attempt.

I went to rehab three or four times. Jail programs two or three times. Actual jail seven or eight. You think I didn't *try*? You think I lacked motivation after all that? I had all the motivation in the world and it didn't matter, because I was attacking the wrong thing. I kept going after the drinking. The drinking was never the actual problem. It was the *solution* to a problem I hadn't found yet.

Read that again. The drinking is your solution to something. Booze became your best friend for a reason. It was doing a job for you. And until you figure out what job it was doing, every attempt to take it away is going to fail, because you're trying to fire the only employee that ever showed up for you — without hiring a replacement.

That's why "just stop" is a fantasy. Not because you're weak. Because you're trying to remove the thing that's holding the roof up without putting anything else under it.

So what's the job it's doing? That's the next part. And it's the part that changed everything for me.

The Depression You Don't Know You Have

Here's where I'm going to tell you something that took me to my knees to learn.

For most of us, the drinking sits on top of something. Underneath the bottle there's a thing we've been running from the whole time, and for a huge number of people — me included — that thing is **depression**. Not the kind you're picturing.

Forget what you think depression is. I thought depression was sadness. Crying. Being weepy and dramatic. That's not it. That's not it at all.

Real depression isn't sadness. **It's empty**. It's feeling nothing. It's the lights being on with nobody home. You're not even sad — sad would be an improvement, sad means you still feel things. This is just miserable, flat, hollow nothing, day after day after day. And people who've never had it assume "depressed" means "sad," so they tell you to cheer up, go for a walk, count your blessings, pray about it.

Let me save you years. **You cannot exercise your way out of this. You cannot think your way out of it. You cannot pray it away or habit-hack it away or manifest it away.** I'm not knocking any of those things — they're good for plenty of stuff. But this isn't a mindset problem. Your brain has stopped making enough of the chemical that lets you feel okay. Serotonin. It's a plumbing problem, not an attitude problem. You can have the best attitude on earth and still be running on a brain that physically isn't producing what it needs.

And here's the connection nobody draws for you: **alcohol works on the empty**. For a couple hours, it fills it. It's the only time you feel something close to okay. So of course you don't want to give it up — it's the one thing standing between you and the void. That's not addiction being greedy. That's a drowning person holding onto the only thing floating.

When I finally understood this, everything reorganized. I wasn't a weak guy who loved booze too much. I was a sick guy self-medicating an illness I didn't know I had, with the only medicine I could buy without a prescription.

Here's how I tell when somebody's pushing back on this just to argue. When somebody tells me I'm wrong about all this, I ask them one question: *"How's your depression going? How'd you get rid of it?"* And almost every single time, the person arguing either never had it, or still has it and hasn't beaten it. The people who've actually been in the empty and climbed out? They don't argue with me. They get quiet, because they know.

I'm going to be straight with you about my own answer, because I told you I would be. For me, medication was the only thing that worked. Period. I started taking something for depression — figuring I could keep drinking while it fixed my head — and it takes about three months to really kick in, so that became my excuse to keep going for a while. But once it kicked in, something I never expected happened, and I'll get to that in a minute because it's important and it might matter for you.

The point of this section isn't to diagnose you. I can't and I won't. The point is this: **if drinking is the only time you feel okay, you should at least ask whether there's something underneath it.** That question alone — just *asking* it — is more than most people do in a lifetime.

The Recognition Inventory

Okay. You've heard me run my mouth for a while. Now it's your turn, and this part is just for you. Nobody sees this. There's no score that makes you "officially" anything. This is the **Not Realizing You're Done™** framework turned into something you can actually do.

Go through all four Tells honestly. Not how you'd answer if your spouse was reading over your shoulder — how you'd answer at 3 a.m. when you can't sleep and you're being honest for once. Fill it in with a pen. The act of writing it makes it real in a way that thinking it never does.

The Recognition Inventory – Tells #1 & #2

Date: _____

TELL #1 – THE BODY

- Do you feel sick, shaky, or off in the mornings until you have a drink or two? Yes / No
- Has your tolerance gone UP over the years (need more to feel it)? Yes / No
- Have you ever had a drink specifically to stop feeling bad rather than to feel good? Yes / No

TELL #2 – THE SECRETS

- Do you hide how much you actually drink? Yes / No
- Do you have a "system" (timing, mints, hiding spots, drinking before events)? Yes / No
- Is there something you do around drinking you'd be ashamed for anyone to know? Yes / No

The Recognition Inventory – Tells #3 & #4

Date: _____

TELL #3 – THE PEOPLE

- Have you lost or damaged relationships, jobs, or things you valued? Yes / No
- Have people close to you brought up your drinking, even once? Yes / No
- Are there people who avoid you, or who you avoid because of this? Yes / No

TELL #4 – THE EMPTY

- Is drinking the only time you feel okay, or close to it? Yes / No
- Do you feel flat, hollow, or numb more days than not (not sad – empty)? Yes / No
- Have you tried to stop, succeeded for a bit, then gone back and felt worse about yourself? Yes / No

Fill in every line honestly with a pen, then look at all four Tells together — not one at a time. The framework isn't about any single "yes." It's about the pattern across all four at once.

Here's how to read what you just did. Don't count it like a quiz. **Look at the shape of it.** If you've got honest "yeses" sitting in three or four of those Tells at the same time, that's the picture. That's not me telling you what you are. That's *you* finally seeing what's been true for a while, laid out where you can't un-see it.

And if you only had a couple scattered "yeses"? Then maybe you really are okay, and now you've got the peace of mind of having actually checked instead of just worrying in the background. Either way, you did something almost nobody does: you looked.

If looking at that filled-in page made your stomach drop a little — that's not a bad sign. That's the most honest moment you've had in a long time. Stay with it. Don't reach for anything to make the feeling go away. Just let it be true for a minute. That feeling is the door opening.

Why AA, Rehab, and Willpower Keep Failing You

Let me get ahead of the thought you're probably having right now: *"Okay, fine, but I'm not doing AA, I'm not going to rehab, and I'm not interested in any of that."*

Good. I get it. And I want you to know that your resistance to all of it is not you being stubborn or in denial. A lot of it makes complete sense.

Let me go through why these don't work for the person I'm talking to:

AA asks for a level of commitment, surrender, and public sharing that most people in the *Not Realizing You're Done™* stage are nowhere near ready for. You have to stand up in a room and announce it. If you haven't even admitted it to yourself yet, that's a bridge ten miles too far. There's nothing wrong with AA — it's saved a lot of lives. It's just not built for the person who doesn't know they're done yet.

Rehab is expensive, it's scary, it blows up your whole life for a stretch, and here's the thing nobody says — *rehab only works if you actually want to quit*. I went three or four times before I wanted it. You can't outsource the wanting. No facility installs it for you.

Willpower fails because, like we already covered, you're trying to remove your only coping tool without replacing it, while a brain-chemistry problem keeps the engine running underneath. Willpower against biology is a losing fight. You will lose it every time, and then you'll blame yourself, which feeds the loop.

Do you see the pattern? **Every one of these requires you to already want to quit.** And wanting to quit requires you to first realize you're done. That's the step that comes before all of it. That's the step everybody skips, which is exactly why everything keeps failing.

You were never failing at quitting. You were being handed quitting tools before you'd done the recognizing. It's like being handed a parachute before you've admitted you're on the plane.

This is also the part where a lot of people quietly let themselves off the hook — "*Well if nothing works for me, why bother.*" No. That's the loop talking. Things work. They just work in an order, and you've been starting in the wrong place. You're now standing in the right place for the first time.

The Crack in the Door

So what *is* the first real step? Not the giant leap. The crack in the door.

I promised you I'd tell you what happened when my depression medication kicked in. Here it is. I was taking **Wellbutrin** for the depression, fully planning to keep drinking. And once it took hold, the urge to drink — the *need* — just... wasn't there the same way anymore. I wasn't white-knuckling it. The impulse that had run my entire life quietly lost its grip. It wasn't willpower. The thing underneath got treated, and the drinking lost the job it was hired to do.

Now — big honest caveat — that doesn't happen for everybody, and Wellbutrin is for depression, so it's mainly relevant if there's depression underneath your drinking. But I tell everybody about it, because nobody told me, and it changed my life by accident.

There are also medications made specifically for the drinking itself. **Naltrexone** is one — it's designed to cut down the cravings and it makes stopping a lot easier for people who genuinely want to stop. I've had friends take it. The ones who wanted to quit, it helped a lot. The ones who weren't ready? It did nothing, because you can drink right through it if you don't give it a chance. That's not the drug failing. That's the wanting not being there yet. There's at least one other medication in this same family too — point being, these tools exist and most people have no idea.

And then there's **Antabuse**. I'll be honest — I've never taken it and I wouldn't recommend it as a first move, but I'm not going to leave it out. It makes you physically sick if you drink — throwing up, miserable, the works. It only works if you want to quit, because otherwise why would you take something on purpose that makes you sick? But you should at least know what it is and what it does.

Here's a simple way to think through where you might start. Remember — every one of these starts with a doctor, not with me.

Finding Your Crack in the Door

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Is there emptiness/depression underneath the drinking?
├─ Yes → Worth asking a doctor about treating that first
│   └─ Treating the root may ease the urge (it did for me)
│       └─ Start by naming it to ONE person you trust
└─ Not sure / mainly the drinking itself
    └─ Do you genuinely want to stop right now?
        ├── Yes → Ask a doctor about anti-craving options
        └─ Not yet → That's okay. The goal today is
                    recognizing, not quitting
    └─ Either way → The smallest real step is one
                    honest conversation with a doctor
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Notice the smallest step at the bottom. **One honest conversation with a doctor.** That costs nothing but the conversation. You don't have to walk in and announce you're an alcoholic. You can walk in and say "I've been feeling empty and flat and I think something's off." That's it. That's the crack in the door. Everything else can come later or never — but that one conversation is a door you can open this week.

Now I have to show you the other direction this road goes, not to scare you, but because most people genuinely don't know how far it travels. When the money runs out and the sickness sets in, people start drinking rubbing alcohol. Mouthwash, for the alcohol in it. It's cheap and it keeps the sickness away. I'm not saying that to be dramatic. I'm saying it because somebody reading this is closer to that than they'll admit, and somebody else needs to know that's where the train is heading if nothing changes. The disease doesn't have a bottom that it politely stops at. It takes everything until you're alone with a version of yourself you can't stand.

That's the choice, laid out flat: you quit and you live, or you keep going and it takes the rest of you. When you finally see it that plainly, it's kind of a no-brainer.

What To Do With This

I'm not going to pretend reading something fixes a life. It doesn't. But you've done something real today, so let me tell you how to not waste it.

Today: Don't do anything dramatic. Don't make a big declaration. Just keep that filled-in Recognition Inventory somewhere private and let it sit with you. Let it be true. The worst thing you can do right now is rush to drink the feeling away — because that feeling is the most useful thing you've had in years.

This week: Pick the one smallest thing from the crack-in-the-door flowchart. For most people that's one honest conversation — with a doctor, or with one single person you trust. Not a confession. Just a crack. "I think something's wrong and I'm tired of pretending it isn't."

Going forward: Notice how often the things in here start showing up in your real life now. The Uncle Dan at the party. The friend you can suddenly see clearly. Your own mornings. That's the framework doing its job — once you can see the Four Tells, you can't un-see them. That awareness is permanent now. You can't go back to not knowing, and honestly, that's the whole gift.

Let me say one last thing, friend to friend.

I lost my brother to this. I've buried friends. I've watched people I love avoid me like the plague because they're not ready to hear what you just read. I've been in the room you might be in right now — the one where you're convinced this is just who you are and it's never changing. I was more sure of that than I've ever been of anything.

I was wrong. Dead wrong. And the proof is that I'm the one writing this to you, sober, ten years on, instead of being one more story somebody else tells.

You might not be done yet. Or you might be done and just now realizing it. Either way — you looked today. That's more than I did for years. Hold onto that.

You're not weak. You're not a lost cause. You're not fooling yourself anymore, and that's not a loss. That's the beginning.

> **One more time, because it matters:** I'm not a doctor and nothing in here is medical advice. Every medication I mentioned — Wellbutrin, Naltrexone, Antabuse — is a real thing that real doctors prescribe, and the only safe way to explore any of them is with an actual medical professional. If you're ever in crisis or thinking about hurting yourself, please reach out to a crisis line or emergency services right now. The world needs you in it. I mean that.