

**Roots of America in Recovery:
Stories of Strength, Hope, Experience, and Success in the
Workplace**

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Abstract

This essay is a brief narrative and contains excerpts of several interviews the writer conducted three years ago at a workplace in Houston, Texas. Venturetech's owner, Larry Keast, is sympathetic to recovery issues in the workplace. At the time of the interviews he was in the process of setting up a website, www.americainrecovery.org, dedicated to spreading the word that recovering individuals can make quality contributions in the workplace. He encourages businesses and individuals to self-organize in the effort to work together to build healthy communities.

¹ www.americainrecovery.org is a Texas 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting healthy workplaces that provide an atmosphere of motivation and respect for recovering individuals. It is a no-charge hiring website which allows job seekers and employers to find each other.

Introduction

Many in the field of substance abuse are calling for meta approaches to recovery from alcohol or drug (AOD) problems. The acceptance of recovery in workplace cultures is a “meta” step to reducing stigma and marginalization of individuals with AOD histories. This story emerges from one businessman’s concern for individuals who are alienated from community by choice, circumstance, and addiction. The setting for the study is a specialty manufacturer of oil well drilling equipment in Houston, Texas. The concept for America in Recovery grew out of management inspiration and practice at Venturetech, a company that manufactures hydraulic drilling machinery for drilling oil and gas wells. This workplace has a long history of success in employing recovering individuals and bringing them back into the workforce. America in Recovery was officially born there four years ago. Venturetech’s lessons provide a model for organizations considering working with recovering individuals; and illustrate the feasibility of working with them in a supportive manner in business settings.

Venturetech is a private enterprise started 26 years ago in a Houston garage to serve the oil drilling industry and is an unlikely place to find concern with rehabilitating recovering alcoholics, addicts, and individuals with troubled pasts. The lessons that can be learned by studying this company’s experiences can guide others who are interested in supporting recovery in the workplace and beyond. Venturetech exemplifies how a company can remain financially successful and thrive while helping individuals sustain their recovery by using the workplace as one component of community and social support.

From Venturetech to America in Recovery

I spent a little over a year with the staff and crew at Venturetech, interviewing and helping to file the documents for getting non-profit status for America in Recovery, an organization founded by Venturetech owner Larry Keast. I was doing management research at the time and read about their operation in the newspaper and wanted to interview the staff and employees as part of an organization motivational study for organizational learning. (At that time I was not involved in any type of recovery issue). Larry was kind enough to let me study his organization. He let me know that he wanted to develop a separate non-profit entity to act as a conduit to spread the word that recovering individuals make productive employees. He had been employing individuals in recovery for several years at Venturetech, a for-profit manufacturing company, and it was working well. He wanted to do something more to increase awareness of recovery issues in the workplace and thought that a website like www.Americainrecovery.org could help spread the word that recovering people need to be working and doing meaningful work rather than being separated from society. He was putting the website together when I met him and I offered to help do the filing of the forms with the State of Texas.

The following story is about Venturetech, a few of the people who work there, and how the concept of America in Recovery emerged from these experiences. It is inspired by a concern for describing the attributes of for-profit work places that provide an atmosphere of motivation and respect for recovering individuals.

To prepare myself for this study I began to read recovery literature. The main questions, which occurred to me while doing this story was: Can work serve the recovering alcoholic or addict in what Denzin (1988) terms “an expanding social world...the world of recovery” (p. 18). How large is the recovery community? Is it

merely the folks that meet together in mutual support groups like AA, NA, or other emerging recovery movements? Or does it encompass a larger sphere of activities? What are the factors that propel businesses and organizations into roles of transformative community members? Most of us spend 50% of our waking time to work. According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) of people with alcohol or other drug problems, over 75% are employed. If we spend so much time at work, doesn't it make sense that the workplace is congruent to recovery? What makes a work place congruent to recovery?

Some of Venturetech's policies are counterintuitive. They don't maintain a policy of testing and screening for AOD. Instead, management shows keen awareness of the need to verbally check in with individuals daily to make sure they are OK. Talking about feelings and problems is encouraged. Often during breaks individuals talk openly about their addictions and challenges to recovery as if they were at a mutual support AA or NA meeting, rather than in a workplace. Lunch meetings are scheduled once a month for motivation, sharing, and honoring of specific employees. Typically, more than one-third of the company's employees are in recovery.

If this were a non-profit recovery organization, these features would not be unusual, but Venturetech is definitely a for-profit corporation that sells technical equipment and services to the oil and gas exploration industry. This intentional active compassion is a product of the owner's design and vision for his company. It is reinforced by two of his managers, John Jordan and Mark Langford, both drug abuse counselors in recovery.

Both have an open door policy and employees frequently use their services in times of crises. There is an undercurrent of hard love beneath the compassion. Mark talks about testing and screening, "No drug tests here. You're hired. It is a unique deal because anyplace could be dangerous but this place could be real dangerous if people were using. We've found out that there are people here who can sniff out others using drugs."

Recovering people know better than anyone if peers are in relapse before they even use. They are concerned when someone shows up and isn't "acting like himself" that day. If this occurs they will ask, "what is up or what is going on with you today?" If they determine through conversation that a person is using or high, the person will be sent home. This parallels the early Synanon model, when the members of the group would confront other members who continued to use. The Venturetech model is direct and respectful. Mark remembers, "One of the guys just couldn't hide the fact that something was wrong. (He was using again). So I brought him upstairs (Upstairs is a lounge with stuffed chairs and a couch. It looks like a middle class living room. If employees need to talk, they often go there) and I spent about an hour telling him about my experience and flat out telling him about some of the things he was doing and probably thought clever...The excuses were so out there but to him they made sense."

If this becomes a repeated pattern, the company will give him several chances and counseling before considering termination. Although it is a compassionate workplace, there is also a tendency for management to be openly blunt in terms of asking what is going on if something seems wrong, helping the employee with motivational interviewing, and being tough when necessary. The company gives each employee a copy of "Straight Talk," the rulebook for working at Venturetech which contains clear company policies. A few "terminated" employees have returned to work after completing rehab.

Most of the individuals interviewed have used substances since early adolescence. They are very animated when talking about when they were "out and running," describing the time when they were drinking, using, and getting high. My interviews

seemed to reinforce their notions that they had landed in a fair and safe place after the exhilaration of running had waned and desperation had set in. The individuals that I interviewed were grateful that they caught themselves in time. Many had survived suicide attempts, shootings, and repeated scrapes with the law including prison time. They accept their pasts; and see the need to move on. They demonstrate a respect for each other and engage in a spirit of cooperation. Often the established workers will take time to show the newcomers skills like setting up work, welding, or machining. One newcomer remarked that in previous places he had worked the employees were very competitive and would not share skill secrets.

Venturetech's founder, Larry Keast, a mechanical engineer and graduate of the University of Texas, has close cropped gray hair and a keen intensity when he talks about his work. He greets you with, "How *are* you?" and you immediately know that he is deeply interested in the answer. He reflects, "I consider myself a business man first, then an inventor and machine design engineer, and I am a good one. Our product line leads the world in this technical niche of power swivels." He is understandably proud of his organization, which competes with large conglomerates. It is a pleasant surprise to discover altruism in the rough and tumble world of the oil patch. Larry has also been involved for years in supporting other non-profits. He thought it was time to create one from his own experience. I asked him how the idea for America in Recovery began. He replied, "It was about the time I hired John Jordan. He came to work for me and we both had a long background in 'The Program.' I always wanted to have a way to make a difference and wondered how we could do that. This has evolved."

The following are excerpts from interviews with Larry and some of the people at Venturetech. They tell a partial story of this organization and how it works toward recovery. Hopefully, some of these concepts can be used in other organizations interested in becoming recovery friendly.

INTERVIEWS

Chris: What was going on at the time you hired John?

Larry: Things were dead slow. I was losing a mechanic. A drug counselor, a mutual friend of John's and mine called and said, 'John's wanting to get out of this business; you can't make any money doing this.' I knew that was true. 'He's got a lot of background as a roughneck; you might want to talk to him.' OK, I might need somebody, but I need a roughneck like I need a hole in the head. In this industry we laugh and say, 'A roughneck can tear up a steel cannonball with a rubber hammer.' But, John came over anyway and I thought this guy has a lot of snap. He is a lot more than a roughneck; he is a mechanic. (When Larry calls someone a "mechanic" it is a high compliment. The machines they build are a complex conglomeration of stationary diesel engines, hydraulic transmissions, and electronic controls. Many of the critical components are manufactured in house). At the time I didn't know how smart he was but I put him right on...and his people skills, needless to say, were good because he was a drug counselor; he's listened to nine miles of stories from people doing all the wrong stuff with their lives. He has been a tremendous asset because of his skills on running drilling rigs and his ability to motivate people. He has the ability to work safely in the shop and to show other people how to work safely and productively. He is a blue-collar guy. His management approach is

straight forward and practical and if somebody is not doing the job he will tell them so...he is going to leave it clear what he wants done.

Chris: What type of management theory do you have?

Larry: Good question. You can hardly see yourself. Everybody can see you clearer than you see yourself. I don't really know much about the management theory part of it. I am just a practical guy.

Chris: Management schools often talk about Hewlett-Packard's style of 'managing by walking around.' I have noticed that you spend a lot of time walking on the shop floor.

Larry: I haven't heard that phrase but that is what I do. I go through the shop four or five times a day. I don't sit still...I am happy juggling the constant problems that arise in every area of the company including sales, finance, accounting, engineering, purchasing and production control.

Chris: Tell me about this building. Did you design it?

Larry: Right now we could walk right out on the shop floor. I have seen major corporations separate the engineering departments and that is just the dumbest thing to do. I don't even want the sales people separated from the shop floor. I want everybody to see where the products are at a given time. So, I designed this building that allows you to see from when you walk into the reception area all the way to the back of the shop. And the people in the shop can see the people in the office. They all see each other working on something. That breeds an understanding that isn't there when companies have the walls up.

Chris: How did you come up with the idea for America in Recovery?

Larry: It must have been in 2003; we were already doing it. It had just been me supporting John to hire people in recovery and he was happy to do that; he was in touch with people through AA meetings and so we were doing it. He said: "We've been hiring these guys with no skills and they've been learning stuff, we've been helping them, they've been helping us. Then we hired a few skilled people in recovery and things began to evolve. Then after another year or so of success, one day in the shower I said to myself, "You know if we are so successful, why can't we help other small business CEOs do this?" After several years, I realized one day we had started a program. What would happen in our country if we put a lot of these 'unemployable' people to work? We'd improve productivity, reduce crime and the need for prisons, and reduce dependency on welfare. The concept is turning our 'unemployables' into proud and productive taxpayers. He practices the theory that personal involvement by the small business owner in the recovery effort of others offers a better alternative than incarceration or parole and contributes value to the community through direct action. He comments stubbornly, "We don't need to make so many people convicts. Once they've done their time we ought to have some way that encourages them instead of discouraging them. The treatment community understands that treatment is a far better approach than incarceration."

It is ironic that the place where many recovering individuals spend most of their time is the work place; yet, so little emphasis is placed on actual recovery in this arena. The participants I interviewed did actually work some of the time during their using phase; however, this consisted of part-time and temporary employment supplemented by some with theft and drug dealing, and what some referred to as "running," an interesting term that I interpreted meant running to and from a lot of things, including the self. None were

able to hold a full time job for longer than three months during this time period due to addiction or incarceration.

John, the shop manager is in recovery and remembers the pre-hiring conversation with Larry regarding the lack of need for a roughneck at Venturetech:

John: I told him, 'I can also weld and do a few other things...he said OK come in; we'll talk.' He remembered my face from program meetings but didn't know much about me. Last thing he needed was a roughneck but I started as a trial to see if it was going to work out...we've been going ever since.

Chris: Larry tells me you are a good mechanic but I am guessing there is more to it than that. How long had you been working here before you had input into the designs?

John: Probably about a month. We were operating on a real small scale. They were in the design phase of all their new designs. They were in various stages and we communicated each day...they got to learn more of what I knew and I got to learn more about what they were trying to accomplish.

Chris: What was the first project where you felt like you made a difference?

John: I think it was our top drive design. They had most of it laid out on computer assisted design (CAD) but hadn't figured out how to adapt it to the derrick itself. The drawings they got from the derrick manufacturers weren't always the same and true as to what you find in the field. That is when they started pumping me for information. And we'd stay late at night sometimes and go over this and do the BS stuff. Tell war stories about the oil field and whatever experience we had. We did a lot of research. Larry likes to 'roughneck proof' everything. You know there is a lot of stuff that goes on out there where the drill rig is. They don't say things like: 'Oh, this is a nice piece of equipment;

we ought to take good care of it.' They are going to hit it and knock it around. Their only concern is turning the drill pipe to the right. The old joke is if you give a roughneck three steel cannonballs, he'll lose one, steal one, and break the other. That is pretty much my experience.

Chris: What is your biggest challenge here?

John: Organizing the work and getting the equipment out on time...whether it's a new job or a service job. There are hundreds of components, new stuff being designed. Getting new and service units out the door involves eight or nine steps or tests...we just can't have three or four units sitting around, millions of dollars worth of equipment. It's the oilfield; the price of oil could drop tomorrow. We'd be stuck with it.

Chris: What about the way recovery is supported here?

John: In my situation I've been real fortunate because we have somebody who understands it and supports it. Other places I've worked, it is like, 'if you are that bad off you need to go someplace and take care of it and if we need you back we will call you.' I can talk to Larry about it. I can say, 'It's really getting to me, it's not just about the stress of the job.' I can go to him and say I am just unhappy. When I first started here, I was the only one in recovery but Larry had knowledge of it. He'll tell you straight up: 'I don't know how you guys feel. I've seen some stuff but I don't know what it would be like to want to use.' And he's just not interested in alcohol. He drinks half a glass of wine and gets sleepy and pushes it aside. Now that is alcohol abuse! I've been supported in my recovery here and its only gotten better over the years. Even the guys who are not in recovery here sense it. I put it out there and say this is who I am, and it's been talked

about. This is who I am and what I am trying to do. I don't have anyone coming up to me saying: 'Hey you want to go out and have a beer?'

Chris: Do you guys talk about recovery at work or during coffee breaks?

John: Some of us do. It's real interesting; it depends on what is going on in their lives. The guys in recovery will come up to me and say: 'I need to talk about something and we'll talk,' or someone will say: 'Hey, lets go to a meeting,' and no one will say, 'what meeting?'

Chris: You all go to the same AA meeting?

John: Yeah, some of us will get together and go to the meeting and then go get something to eat.

Chris: When you talk about recovery...what is recovery...what does it really mean to you?

John: I have my ups and downs. I used and drank for 24 years before I even tried to sober up. I made it seven years sober and then went out and got drunk. It's just a journey. It's my choice to live or die. It's about recovering from years of something. I didn't even know what was wrong with me. I didn't know I had a disease. I didn't know I could be a productive member of society. I just thought society was screwed up. So it is a recovery from a hopeless state of mind. I thought that was just the way I was, that there wasn't much wrong with it and if everybody would leave me alone then I'd be OK. But they are not going to leave you alone, especially when you're out drinking, drugging, and robbing and stealing. The state is not going to leave you alone. It's easy to go to a meeting and hear what you want to hear and cry what you want to cry about; the hard part is living it out in the world, the workplace, at home, and in public.

John learned to weld at age 16 in a half way house while he was getting his high school equivalency degree. John doesn't do professional drug counseling anymore but he is like a tough wise big brother, the oldest child who takes the heat for the others and finds out how to make the broken toys work again. The guys go to John with their problems and he will listen and then redirect them back to the job. If he has to kick ass he will. If he is wrong he will apologize. John talks to people and he's serious about listening and helping. He makes the shop floor move and is a soft-spoken but direct in his leadership style. *After six years of good work at Venturetech, John went back to drilling. He's now running a drilling company in Colorado.*

Mark was a recent hire when I did consulting work at Venturetech. He was a star quarterback in high school, got hurt, went to college, graduated from Texas Tech with a counseling degree, and developed a career as a professional magician (a childhood dream). Along the way he also developed a drug habit. It derailed his career and he wound up on the streets. He got help, completed rehabilitation, and a year later found Venturetech through a network of connections that Larry has developed with other local organizations interested in putting recovering people back to work. He is a certified counselor and because of his personality and where he has his desk, he greets everyone who walks in the door at Venturetech. Part of his job description is to listen to employees in their hour of need to dispense advice and encouragement. "It is a disease," he says of AOD dependence and abuse, "you have to respect it like a disease."

Mark is also computer literate and acts in several executive capacities to assist Larry in marketing and communications. He develops product brochures, manages HR issues,

developed a legal understanding of the non profit nature of America in Recovery, and we worked together for almost a year to interpret Larry's vision and to file the 501 (c) (3) papers with the US Government and the State of Texas. He also interviews new job applicants.

Mark interviewed Richard, a recent hire, and introduced him to John for a second interview. Richard talks about meeting John for the first time: "I had a friend who worked here but he wasn't showing up and he got let go. So I came by and put in an application. I told them if given the opportunity, I know I can work. Mark called John out from the shop. That was my first meeting with John. He walked me around the shop...that says a lot about this man. He could just as easily said, 'I'll call you if we need someone and let me out the door.

Chris: So he walked you around the shop?

Richard: He sat me down and said this business has its ups and downs and nothing is guaranteed. We build stuff for oil companies. He introduced me to all the guys and I went to work. About three weeks later I had some personal problems. I always had a smile on my face and I stay busy. This particular week was real hard for me because I lost a close friend of mine. When I was younger, I used to be affiliated with gangs and what ever; it was this type of friend. We were childhood friends and my friend was killed.

Chris: Was that the result of a gang type thing?

Richard: Yes it had to do with gang violence. I was falling out of luck I thought. I didn't want to talk to anybody about it. I don't want them to look at me this way because of my past. I went to prison when I was eighteen and I had so many doors slammed in my face

trying to get a job. John told me. 'Look here man, everybody makes mistakes and some lives are different than others.' I was down and it stood out. He was like, 'What's wrong? You know you can talk to me. Whatever is going on with you, I care.' That said a whole lot to me. You care, I thought? (Surprise in his voice). I didn't know how to receive that. He said, 'Give me about 30 minutes and I am going to get Mark.' Mark has been to school for counseling and I never new that. I told Mark that my old gang friends say stuff like, 'What? You not real no more?' Mark said, 'You got all these things in your life and what you need to do is just line 'em all up. Prioritize your life by what is important to you.' First in my life are God, my wife, and my kids.

Chris: That comes before the old friendships?

Richard: Yes, and they were pulling on me.

This conversation was two years ago and during this time, starting out as a helper and a gopher, Richard has progressed to welder. His former gang banger friends still try to pull at him and he has had some struggles, but he is stubborn and values his work and relationships there. "People here said, 'You're a young man, you need a trade. We will show you.'

Profiles of other Venturetech workers include:

Dana, jack-of-all-trades and painter, waited on his own (not using for nine days, while severely addicted to crack cocaine) to enter a program prior to coming to work here.

During that time he had no outside support and was enmeshed in a negative culture where people around him were using regularly. He was motivated by his wife's recovery. She had recently been released from prison and completed a successful stay in a half way house in Houston. The people who ran that program offered to take him in if he could

stay straight for nine days, the period before the next opening. He had no support other than a few phone calls from his wife during that time but managed to do it. This seems to indicate that an event like an epiphany or “waking up” coupled with a social support system is a fundamental key to approaching recovery; yet, waking up is sometimes not enough by itself. Like some other approaches, there is a group social component here that pulls the recovering person along. *Dana became a productive and respected member of the team, and today is working in a well-paying job on a drilling rig in Colorado.*

Will was working in customer service, recovering from his addiction to painkillers and alcohol. Formerly he worked for a seismic drilling contractor setting down-hole explosive charges. He worked for years while using various concoctions of drugs and alcohol. “We traveled all over and normally we get drug screened every other day. You’re handling dynamite and all that. So, the safety precautions they took were pretty stringent.” A friend normally provided a trick bottle for him, which he kept in his pants for the regular and unannounced (UA’s) drug tests. One day he was caught without his bottle and he was fired. Things fell apart for him; he overdosed a couple of times and finally decided to try rehab one more time after a heart to heart discussion with his ex-wife. At this point Will was pretty sure his using lifestyle was going to kill him. He barely survived two overdoses and literally thought it was the end. He had two or three failed shots at going straight before but this time it took. After completing his recovery program, he made the choice to go stay in a halfway house in Houston, did odd jobs and found Venturetech through the grapevine after Larry hired another guy in recovery with Will as his helper to build a fence in his backyard. At the time of my interview, he was staying in an “alumni” house and sponsoring young people in early recovery. “You see

the new guys coming in, they have one set of clothes, no vehicle. They walk everywhere they go. A typical guy in this situation thinks he's at the end of his rope. He thinks maybe there might be a way to do it but when you look at the 12 Steps written on the wall in these AA meetings, it seems a pretty daunting task. You think there is no way I could do that. But a lot of other guys who were once really messed up look at the steps and say 'Look here; I did all that.' And when you go down there and help the new guy and the light goes on and he sees you and knows how screwed up you were but now you are happy. It gives them hope. It's just a neat thing. I am not sure what there is about it. It just gets you out of yourself." *After three years of customer service, Will is now Production Manager, running the shop, customer service, filling parts orders, and work scheduling.*

The hiring circumstances at Venturetech were interesting for most people and they told stories about how they came on board. Most of the people that I interviewed recalled that they were surprised to be hired because they felt that this company is high performing and that it would be difficult to get on here. They mention Mark's open door, the seriousness and compassion of John, and Larry's energy and vision for recovery. They feel like they work at a special place. Most displayed pride and enthusiasm for their craft. Many of these individuals have unique mechanical skills and became very animated as we talked about specifics in this area. Several talked about future plans beyond Venturetech and one left to pursue his "dream job" that he discussed in his interview. He left Venturetech to become a graphic artist.

The first impression of this company's physical appearance is one of a very clean specialty machine shop with a large overhead crane that travels the length of the work

floor. Not all of the equipment is new. It is a traditional appearing manufacturing operation at first glance but it has several unique features. The interior of the building emphasizes airiness and openness displayed through glass walls between, customer service, the shop floor, and the engineering and executive offices. Even in the lobby one can see all the way into the shop. The structure is future oriented. Larry started the company in 1980 with no actual product and at times they did structural and hydraulic repairs to municipal garbage trucks just to keep the shop in work. Yet he still has a searching or venturing attitude toward new products and services and is currently developing larger and more powerful equipment.

Some of these individuals will be at other jobs in the future due to various causes: attrition, work slow downs, better opportunities, and change of interest. There is a transitory nature to the oil and gas related work force that parallels the restlessness of the energy markets. It is a cyclic industry. So, the stories of individuals in this study are not final chapters. Their stories go on, a collection of episodes that illustrate how things work for recovering individuals at this organization in a relatively short period of time, two to three years.

Conclusions and Lessons

This is an attempt to describe the phenomenon of recovering people doing meaningful work in the private sector economy. It describes past, present, and future events taking place in a for-profit small business atmosphere. It is not intended to reveal a prescriptive way of managing groups of people, nor is it a Rosetta Stone of a new management technique. Rather it is simply a short study designed to reveal what has

worked well in a particular location over a period of time and to describe the circumstances, markers, and patterns.

The study takes place in a small business environment. Its lessons may not be directly applicable to a larger corporate environment for a number of reasons, most of which are connected to philosophical and operational differences between small businesses and major corporations. For example, the owner in a small venture can decide how to manage group energy and distribute surplus profits. A corporate entity exists on the relationship between the operating team and the larger environment of stockholders. Yet, a large corporation must consider the cost of dismissing individuals from their ranks merely because of AOD problems, especially if there are other alternatives available. Some of the markers that I found at Venturetech that may or may not exist in other organizations:

1. A strong leader with a purpose and compassion
2. A primary purpose and strategy to be profitable with a secondary vision of giving back to the community by working with people in recovery
3. A well-run business with clear rules and vision
4. Strong line management team who share the vision
5. In-house counselors who are there for the employees
6. Imperative desire by management to engage each employee in conversation every day
7. Respect for recovery as one aspect of the diverse challenges, which occur in life

After a while, I got the feeling that I was interviewing men who were once young boys who had somehow jumped on the wrong train to somewhere and then figured out they needed to make a turn around. Now they were working their way back home and helping others do the same thing. This workplace with its strong sense of purpose and attention to the stories of the individual is an inspiration to what can be done through intention, practice, execution, and acceptance by the specific work culture. More than that, I saw that Larry and his people had developed a community where individuals care about each other, treat each other with respect, and accept the value of their mutual contributions despite troubled pasts and struggles with AOD. By calling these struggles what they are: drug addiction or alcoholism and accepting that many of us have these types problems and being open about them is a major step to long-term recovery. The acceptance of recovery in the workplace cultures is a concurrent step to reducing stigma and the marginalization connected to individuals with AOD issues. If we can also accept a universal commonality in shared purpose in an organization many differences fall aside. Most of us have various problems, struggle with depression, neurosis, minor or major addictions; yet, we can work on these and at the same time transform organizations. And it is interesting that we can work out an effective team with a random group of people “you’d pick up off of the street almost anywhere,” as Larry says. Mark reflects, “There is an unknown; it is hard to describe but there is a spirit going through here. After Larry moved into this place, he had his preacher bless it. That was before I got here and things just keep moving.”

Notes: For more information, please **do** not contact Venturetech, it is a manufacturing business and is not set up to handle requests for speakers or provide any consultative advice.

Please **do contact** America in Recovery www.americanrecovery.org for more information on how communities and organizations can work with recovering workers.

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In the three years since the interviews described in this article were conducted, Mark Langford has been promoted to HR Director at Venturetech and the company has grown from 18 to 42 employees.

Reference

Denzin, N.K. (1987) *The Recovering Alcoholic*. Newbury Park, California: Sage Publications.