

## Zero tolerance?

**Level:** Intermediate +

**Time:** 90 minutes

**Summary:** This lesson is about a ban imposed by an international corporation on alcohol consumption during normal office working hours, whether this is acceptable and what consequences this could have on the completion of business deals. In this lesson, students:

1. discuss where business deals are usually made;
2. study a text on one company's zero-tolerance approach to the drinking of alcohol during working hours in the City of London;
3. explore the implications of statistics on drinking habits and compare UK drinking habits with those in their country;
4. discuss what they do in their own lunch breaks;
5. find out more about London's financial district.

**Materials:** One copy of the worksheet per student

**Group size:** Any

**Note:** This lesson plan for both pre-experience and in-work business students is based on an original article first published in *Business Spotlight* issue 4/2017.

### Warmer

The warmer encourages the students to think about the possible locations for business deals (a meeting room, the golf course, bars and restaurants) and where deals are most likely to be made.

### Key words

Students read the definitions and find the key words in the article. The paragraph numbers are given to help them. They can do this in pairs or groups and discuss their answers. When they have finished, they can read the words again in the context of the article.

### Key:

- |                        |                        |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. <i>ban</i>          | 8. <i>pint</i>         |
| 2. <i>embrace</i>      | 9. <i>infringement</i> |
| 3. <i>grievance</i>    | 10. <i>inhibitions</i> |
| 4. <i>disciplinary</i> | 11. <i>reckless</i>    |
| 5. <i>assessing</i>    | 12. <i>impulsive</i>   |
| 6. <i>taboo</i>        | 13. <i>liability</i>   |
| 7. <i>downing</i>      | 14. <i>alertness</i>   |

### Expressions

Students find and underline the expressions in the article, then match them to their meanings.

### Key:

1. *c*
2. *f*
3. *i*
4. *h*
5. *a*
6. *e*
7. *g*
8. *d*
9. *b*

### Understanding the article

Students use the expressions from task 3 to complete the sentences about the article. Once they have completed the sentences, they may look back in the article to check their answers.

### Key:

1. *the Square Mile*
2. *a bold decision*
3. *not least*
4. *a zero limit*
5. *zero-tolerance approach*
6. *in line with*
7. *public opinion*
8. *only part of the picture*
9. *buy a round*

### Discussing statistics

Students talk about the statistics and compare them to what they know, have seen or have read about the UK. They also discuss whether these figures are likely to be similar in their own country or culture.

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### Discussion

Students discuss the questions, adapting them if necessary. For example, if they work evenings or shifts, ask them to talk about the main break they take during their working hours.

### Webquest

Students research information about the City of London and discuss or present their findings.

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### 1 Warmer

Where might business deals be made?

In your opinion, where are they most often made?

### 2 Key words

Read the definitions and find the key words in the article. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

1. a statement that says someone is not allowed to do something (para 1)  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. completely accept something such as a new belief, idea or way of working (para 2)  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. a complaint about being treated in an unfair way (para 2) \_\_\_\_\_
4. connected with the punishment of staff members who do not obey rules (para 2)  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. carefully considering something in order to make a judgment (para 3)  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. not accepted as correct (para 4) \_\_\_\_\_
7. drinking all of a drink quickly (para 4) \_\_\_\_\_
8. a unit for measuring liquid; in the UK, it is equal to 0.57 litres and is a standard measure for beer that is sold in pubs and bars (para 4) \_\_\_\_\_
9. a limit on a person's freedom to do something (para 5) \_\_\_\_\_
10. feelings of being embarrassed or not confident that make it difficult to relax and do or say what you want to (para 6) \_\_\_\_\_
11. not thinking about the possible bad effects of your actions (para 6) \_\_\_\_\_
12. done suddenly, without thinking what the result will be (para 6) \_\_\_\_\_
13. legal responsibility (para 6) \_\_\_\_\_
14. the ability to think clearly and intelligently (para 6) \_\_\_\_\_

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by Julian Earwaker



**For a long time, no one had anything against employees enjoying a small glass of alcohol in their lunch break. Now, some companies in London's financial district have implemented a work-time alcohol ban. Does this mean the end of drinking during normal office hours? Julian Earwaker investigates.**

- 1 In February 2017, the insurance giant Lloyd's of London announced a ban on its office staff drinking alcohol during working hours (from 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday). It is a bold decision, not least because a look at the numerous bars, pubs and restaurants in the Square Mile will tell you that this is where many business deals are completed.
- 2 According to the *Guardian*, the internal memo to Lloyd's staff read: "Drinking alcohol affects individuals differently. A zero limit is therefore simpler, more consistent and in line with the modern, global and high-performance culture we want to embrace." It has been widely reported that half of all recent grievance and disciplinary cases at Lloyd's were alcohol-related.
- 3 There have been complaints from City workers about the impact of a zero-tolerance approach from an organization whose work involves assessing risk. One intranet post asked, "Will we be asked to go to bed earlier soon?" Nevertheless, Lloyd's joins other well-known companies that already have workplace alcohol policies, including the Royal Bank of Scotland, Ford Motor Company and Marks & Spencer. It is also in agreement with public opinion.
- 4 A recent workplace survey by the jobsearch site CV-Library shows that drinking is the biggest lunchtime taboo, while a YouGov survey in October 2016 found that a massive 74 per cent of respondents believe having a drink at lunchtime is wrong. About 60 per cent believed it was wrong even if taken with a lunchtime meal. A large majority suggested that workers should wait until 6pm before downing their first pint or glass of wine.
- 5 So what's wrong with doing business over a pleasant lunch and a glass of wine? Can't firms trust their employees to know their limits and to act responsibly? And are lunchtime drinking bans an infringement of employees' free time?

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In principle, a small alcoholic drink is no more damaging than a strong cup of coffee or a caffeine-rich fizzy drink. But experts say that alcohol is a "gateway" drug, in that one drink quickly leads to another. It lowers inhibitions, can cause reckless or impulsive behaviour and leads to tiredness, difficulty concentrating and lower productivity. Health and safety legislation places the liability on both employers and employees for keeping a safe working environment. Alcohol affects judgement, coordination and alertness, resulting in an increased risk of injury or mistakes. The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that up to 40 per cent of serious workplace accidents are alcohol-related.

Lunchtime drinking is only part of the picture. Research shows that alcohol-related harm costs England alone more than £21 billion (€25 billion) a year, including £3.5 billion (€4 billion) at the expense of the NHS and £7.3 billion (€8.6 billion) from lost workdays and productivity costs. Alcohol consumption in the UK is falling but as workloads and workplace pressure increase, along with worry about the potential loss of one's job, many people increase their drinking, reports *Safety & Health Practitioner*. A study by Norwich Union Healthcare found that 15 per cent of employees admitted being drunk at work in the past year; one in ten said it happened at least once a month. There's a gender difference, too – men are far more likely to have a drink during the working day and 40 per cent of men still think a lunchtime pint is acceptable.

Employment contracts and working practices cover non-work time and lunchtime, even if it's unpaid, reports *thenest.com*, meaning that any restrictions or policies relating to alcohol will apply during work breaks, too. The Lloyd's alcohol ban does not as yet apply to the many brokers and underwriters who do business with the organization so it is unlikely that the lunchtime trade in the City of London will be seriously affected yet.

Whether workers will be buying coconut water instead of a pint is perhaps becoming irrelevant: the average UK lunch "hour" is now just 28 minutes long and shrinking. One in four UK workers fail to leave their desk for lunch and only 17 per cent actually take a lunch break. That doesn't leave much time to buy a round.

**JULIAN EARWAKER** is a freelance journalist, prison writer-in-residence and book author.

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### 3 Expressions

Find and underline the expressions in the article. Then match them to the meanings a to i.

- |                              |   |
|------------------------------|---|
| 1. a bold decision           | a. similar to   |
| 2. a zero limit              | b. the district of London where many banks, financial institutions and other big companies have their offices |
| 3. a zero-tolerance approach | c. a choice that involves a risk  |
| 4. buy a round               | d. the views that most people in a society have about something   |
| 5. in line with              | e. used for emphasizing the importance of a particular aspect of a situation                                  |
| 6. not least                 | f. when absolutely nothing is allowed   |
| 7. only part of the picture  | g. not including all the most important facts about a situation   |
| 8. public opinion            | h. buy a drink for each of the people in a group  |
| 9. the Square Mile           | i. a strict policy of punishing people for even very minor offences   |

### 4 Understanding the article

Use the expressions from task 3 to complete the sentences about the article.

- Insurance company Lloyd's of London has its headquarters in \_\_\_\_\_ .
- Lloyd's made \_\_\_\_\_ to ban its office staff from drinking alcohol during normal working hours.
- The decision was controversial \_\_\_\_\_ because many business deals are completed in the City of London's bars, pubs and restaurants.
- Lloyd's decided to set \_\_\_\_\_ on alcohol after it was reported that half of all cases and complaints against employees were alcohol-related.
- Some City workers have complained about Lloyd's \_\_\_\_\_ to alcohol during working hours.
- Lloyd's say that the ban is \_\_\_\_\_ modern, global and high-performance culture.
- In general, \_\_\_\_\_ is in favour of a workplace ban on alcohol.
- However, the figures about lunchtime drinking show \_\_\_\_\_ .
- These days, the average lunch break is so short that employees hardly have time to \_\_\_\_\_ .

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### 5 Discussing statistics

Discuss the statistics below.

- Do you find them to be surprising in any way?
- Talk about them in the context of the article and the decision by Lloyd's to ban alcohol consumption by employees during office hours.
- Do you think Lloyd's were right to make this decision? Why?
- Should companies be allowed to say what employees may or may not do in their breaks?
- Are the statistics likely to be similar or very different in your country and culture?



#### UK WORKING AND DRINKING

- 37.3 billion in lost productivity per year due to alcohol
- 17 million working days lost each year through alcohol-related sickness
- 1/3 of employees have been at work with a hangover
- 22% of employees admit to making mistakes at work as a result of hangovers
- Alcohol was 61% more affordable in 2013 than it was in 1980

*Institute of Alcohol Studies, "Alcohol in the workplace"; March, 2014*

### 6 Discussion

- How long is your lunch break?
- What do you usually do in your lunch break?

### 7 Webquest

Find out more about London's financial district.

- Why is it also called 'the Square Mile' and the City of London?
- What types of businesses have their headquarters there?
- What famous buildings and places are found there?
- What are the names of its tube (underground train) stations?
- What is special about the City of London police?