

*Nick and Choose* { NICK ALTSCHULLER }

## WASTED EFFORTS

*How to be intoxicated, on the clock*



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LUNCHTIME IN THE FINANCIAL district. I've got a meeting with an important source. I show up early, place an order and wait. He slinks in, shakes off the rain and darts his head both ways, like he's about to dash across the Central Artery. "I want to make sure there's no one here I know," he says, peering down at the notebook to my left, and the martini to my right.

A few days earlier, I was slumped on a couch at the Four Seasons, trying to enjoy my first martini lunch. As usual, my timing was off. It was 1:30 pm on a Friday, and my visions of smarmy masters of the universe abusing expense accounts had materialized as a roundtable of young mothers. Highballs and cigars had been replaced by a fleet of \$600 strollers and a couple of put-upon nannies.

With the resurgence of craft cocktails and the popularity of *Mad Men*, the allure of the three-martini lunch has grown. Imagine a world where a Manhattan and a nap is good business, not grounds for dismissal. Its disappearance is often blamed on Jimmy Carter, who condemned the practice during his 1976 presidential campaign. Carter has always been known as a bit of a buzzkill. His opponent, Gerald Ford, called the three-martini lunch "the epitome of American efficiency." Ford was known to fall down a lot.

Looking for expert advice, I turned to *Improper* contributor John Spooner, who's worked in the Boston financial scene for decades. "It's like being in training," he said. "If your body gets used to it, you learn how to handle it." In the gin-soaked '60s, he explains, everyone went out for lunch, "and I used to think that if I had a drink, I'd dare get on the phone and pitch, whereas before, I wouldn't." Today, with the speed of business increasing and downtime dropping, Spooner says 98 percent of his coworkers eat at their desk, the lack of social lubricant leading to an office life both "less civil and less civilized."

Case in point: my lunchtime source's Blackberry perched next to my martini. We were at Brandy Pete's, a bar that opened at the end of Prohibition and in which the lunchtime drink special is now a "skinny" margarita. As we sat among suits slurping iced teas, my source—in his 20s and representing the newest

generation of Boston finance—explained why the three-martini meal is dead (or at least restricted to Europe). There's the financial liability. There's intense competition. Then, of course, there's perception. It's not that people don't indulge, they just save it for dinner, as "someone who drank at lunch could have a problem." I asked the waitress to chase my martini with a pint. "That's a much more common order," she said with a coy smile.

"I think she admires my bravado," I said. "Yeah, she probably also thinks you have no job," replied my source.

The following day I returned to the Four Seasons, and as I waited for another friend in finance and watched Toyota execs sip ice water, I knew it was time to kick off the training wheels. The Bristol Lounge had designed a new cocktail menu, and we were going to wade our way through. As inebriation took hold between rounds of tasty tangerine sidecars and something called "Pork Chops & Apple Sauce," I determined that our changing cocktail culture is just as much to blame for the demise of the martini lunch as our evolving business practices. Things are bigger and faster now, arguably better. But Don Draper could drop a project in the mail and knock off



early. Savoring the simple pleasures, his celebratory aperitif would be free of yogurt. There's a dignified afternoon tippie, and then there's bacon bourbon.

Regardless of the vehicle, I found alcohol slightly improved my focus upon my return to the office. It was mostly out of guilt, as I figured I was already drunk, so I shouldn't try to get away with slacking, too. My drinking partner reported that she multitasked her way through the afternoon. Of course, all plans for the gym were scrapped and replaced with more drinking, so, between the martinis and the Chesterfields, it's not hard to see how previous generations amassed so much cognitive heart failure. It's a difficult pace to maintain.

The following day I conducted an interview at Eastern Standard. I had something dry with a twist. She drank something dark and bitter. Leaving after a single, satisfying drink, I thought I'd alchemized the formula for happy productivity. Then I forgot my notebook on the bar, never to be seen again. \*\*\*

Send your stories and suggestions to [nick@improper.com](mailto:nick@improper.com).

*Impersonals*

## SOCK IT TO HIM

I THINK YOUR NAME WAS JOE: You were wearing a cashmere sweater at Clerys. Thanks for the Tequila Sunrise. And the gentlemanly arm to my hotel with my four friends, whom you blissfully ignored in your attempt to get some. In a rush on the way out? You left your socks. They're happily floating down the Charles. *Truly not yours*

**To the recent UPenn grad who tried to steal a cab from me at 2 am on Columbus Ave. on Saturday night:**

As our argument progressed, you asked me where I went to college. You wanted me to know that you went to UPenn, the trademark move of someone who's still immature enough to think that the rest of the world is impressed by how smart you were in high school. When I remained unfazed, you called me a lesbian, as though that were an insult. You might be "well-educated," but you're ignorant and rude, and the world doesn't look kindly on that combination. *I'd rather walk*

**To my windshield wipers:**

I really don't like you. Don't get me wrong, I used to love you, but when I need you the most, you abandon me. As soon as the weather gets cold or messy, you curl up faster than Lloyd Christmas encountering Sea Bass in a bathroom stall. I understand that you don't like the cold—I sure don't—but why do you clean every other part of the windshield except the part that is right in front of my eyes? It's like you're doing it on purpose just to piss me off. I can't wait to replace you.

*Getting heated*

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