

# FAST COMPANY

## THE PERILS OF BINGE-DRINKING, CONFERENCE HOOKUPS, AND OTHER SLEAZY WORK-TRIP BEHAVIOR

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If you've ever been to a downtown bar after work to blow off some steam, you've probably come across a particular specimen of barfly known as the Sleazy Business Traveler. You know the type: he's the dude sitting at the bar in a suit with his tie undone, knocking back one too many beers, and shamelessly picking up the ladies.

While there is plenty of anecdotal evidence that people engage in questionable behavior while traveling for work, a risk management company called On Call International decided to gather some hard data about exactly what business travelers are up to. Using Google Consumer Surveys, they queried more than 1,000 business travelers anonymously and the results are not pretty: 27% of business travelers admit to binge drinking while on business trips and contrary to popular belief, they aren't all male. While 33% of men admitted to overdoing the alcohol, 24% of women confessed to doing the same. A full 11% of respondents also said they have picked up a stranger at a bar while on work-related travel: 14% of men and 8% of women. And these are people who were willing to be honest in a survey.

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According to On Call International's Chief Security Officer, Jim Hutton, this survey offers his company a better insight into the context of business travel to help mitigate some of the risks involved. "I've encountered so many situations where business travelers find themselves in dire straits because of the choices they've made," he says. "They've involved getting injuries that require medical assistance or getting so lost that they needed to be transported away from a location."

These kinds of episodes have a negative impact on the business traveler in question but they can also adversely impact their employers. Companies must abide by Duty of Care laws, which hold them accountable if something happens to one of their employees while they are traveling for work. We often don't hear about extreme examples of business travel gone wrong, partly because companies bring in risk management experts and PR teams to clean up the mess afterwards. "There is clearly an element of brand reputation protection here," he says. Companies also have a spectrum of disciplinary actions for their unruly employees which includes, in the worst cases, firing them.

Hutton recommends that companies discuss these risks with employees rather than ignoring them. Yet he acknowledges that these conversations can be tricky, since organizations don't want to be seen as dictating employees' behavior.

"They don't want to be the moral police; their employees are going to make adult decisions and most of the time, they will make good decisions," he says. "But it is still good practice to educate employees to make them aware of the environment in which they are traveling, the dangers involved and what those risks look like from the company's perspective."