

You're Addicted to YOU

**Why It's So
Hard to Change—and
What You Can
Do About It**

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Preface

I wrote this book because too many people believe that change is a matter of willpower. They believe that if people want to make significant changes in their lives, those with greater willpower will be successful. Those who fail to change do so because they lack something internally. They just don't have the drive or conviction to see their efforts through.

The truth is we are all capable of changing ourselves. The problem is we are constantly bombarded with recommendations on *what* to change, but never really taught *how* to make difficult changes. We are told what we should change by friends and family, bosses and coworkers, magazines and TV shows, but then we are left without guidance. Once we know what results we want, how do we go about ridding ourselves of the bad habits we have accumulated over the course of our lives, and how do we replace those old behaviors with the new, superior ones? This book will help you identify what change or changes you want to make in yourself, and then it will answer the question of "how?"

Early in my career I watched one of my employers send hundreds of managers off to leadership training. The participants raved that it was, "a life-changing experience," and spoke of the program in reverent tones. However, in the weeks and months following their return from the program, it was pretty clear that little or no change had taken place. They treated their staff the same way they did prior to the training. The same went for how they managed their work, talked about the business, responded to crises, and "led" their organization.

The company must have spent millions of dollars on this training effort and the participants claimed that it was worth every penny. Unfortunately, no one changed. I saw the same thing happen in my personal world. Friends wanted to change their work habits, how they ate or exercised, or how they communicated with their spouses.

They had the best intentions and strong motivation, but they almost always failed to make good on their plans.

I don't think these people lacked willpower or desire. I truly believe they all wanted to change and that they even knew what they wanted that change to be. They wanted to be thinner, healthier, more considerate of others, more diligent, or better leaders. They just didn't have a process to guide them through their change. The only advice they received was, "try harder."

This book gives you a concrete process with nine clear steps to help you make your change. It is born out of both my professional and educational experiences. As an executive coach, I have helped hundreds of corporate clients, business owners, salespeople, and various individuals make difficult changes. I've helped them make changes to their leadership style, the effectiveness of their communication and relationships, the control they have over their emotions, and many other areas. As an undergraduate student in psychology and then as a graduate student in organizational psychology, I studied personal change and resistance and learned how a clear and effective process can greatly improve an individual's ability to change.

I have watched real people succeed and fail at change and I have studied the topic at length. The conclusion I have drawn is that people need a new model for understanding how to change themselves. I use the concept of self-addiction—that people are addicted to their own behaviors. Being addicted to your behaviors doesn't make you a bad person. You may be an exceptional parent, spouse, manager, and/or leader, but even the best will sometimes struggle with change and improvement. We all have something we could change to make ourselves happier, more effective, and more fulfilled in life and in work.

Using the concept of addiction is not meant to equate the behavioral challenges I will discuss in this book with the hereditary, biological, and chemical challenges of drug or alcohol addictions. This book is not meant as a treatment for, nor in any way to make light of, those diseases. However, the concept of addiction is important because it puts personal change into a new context. This book honestly states how difficult change is and gives you a real path to create that change.

How should you use this book?

If you have read this far, then you probably want to either change something in your life or help someone else in their change. You may have a specific change in mind, or perhaps you know that you wish to improve yourself in some way but haven't yet figured out exactly what that improvement is. In either case, this book can help you make any change you want to make. You can use it on its own or to help you implement something you learned in another book. If you don't already know what you want to change, it will help you identify that. Then it will give you the key to answering the question of **how** to make that change.

This is not a traditional book that is meant to be read cover to cover in a couple of days. There are exercises throughout this book that ask you to stop, think, and take concrete action. I recommend that you complete these activities as you go. Sometimes you may feel the need to redo prior exercises and/or reread prior chapters. Change does not follow a single path, nor does it follow a consistent timeline. You may complete this book and reach the final stages of maintaining your change within a couple of weeks. Alternatively, you could spend months actively working on one change; it all depends on the strength of your self-addiction and the effort—the commitment and energy—you put into the change.

As you complete the exercises in this book, you will be asked to record various thoughts, commitments, actions, and observations. I recommend you record all these items in one location so that you can easily review them on a regular basis. You can purchase a notebook specifically for this purpose.

What will you find in this book?

In the following pages you will find answers to three main questions:

1. What is a self-addiction?
2. What are some of your self-addictions?
3. How do you conquer these behaviors?

The strategies that are proposed in this book for how to conquer these behaviors are broken down into three parts: Raising Awareness, Building Support, and Taking Action.

Raising Awareness

This section is the foundation for your change. It begins with understanding your current behaviors and identifying your self-addictions. It then guides you through realizing the impact of your behavior on you and those around you, which leads you to the critical step of making a powerful commitment that will drive the behaviors to make you successful in your change.

Building Support

This section helps you identify and draw strength from a network of people who will support you in your change efforts. The value comes not just from surrounding yourself with people who will support you, but in clearly defining how each of those people can support your change. Bringing others in and engaging them to help you will make your change efforts far more effective. The Building Support section provides you with strategies that will help you find, develop, and maintain effective support relationships.

Taking Action

This section presents three types of actions that you can use to make your change: one for practicing new behaviors, one for reminding yourself to avoid engaging in old behaviors, and one for reviewing your progress. The routines you create will provide a consistency of action that will help you conquer your self-addiction.

To better understand these processes, you are introduced to *The Talker*, *The Pushover*, *The Worker*, and *The Critic*. Each of these individuals has gone through his or her own change process to overcome self-addiction. These characters are composites of many

people I have known as clients, colleagues, friends, and family. Of course, I'd be lying if I said that the characters didn't also have a little of me in them. However, they are not intended to depict anyone specifically; rather, they are intended to give you a glimpse into some of the experiences people can have as they work to change themselves. I hope you find them illustrative, encouraging, and even motivational. Most of all, I hope they help you develop the confidence, strength, and know-how to make your change.

Finally, you are introduced to a gentleman I met when he became my client. I have since come to consider him a friend. He is a recovering alcoholic and a strong proponent of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). I share bits of his story, not to equate alcoholism with self-addiction, but because we can learn valuable lessons from the success that AA has had over the years.

I wrote this book to provide a process to help people change. Just think what you could do with a system that guides you to identify valuable changes you need to make in your life, make those changes effectively, and then sustain them over time. I truly believe that anyone can change, and I wish you luck in making your change journey exciting, rewarding, fun and, most of all, successful.

Noah Blumenthal
December 2006

P. S. As you read this book, you can also join the change community online. Share your success stories, challenges, tips, and lessons you've learned in the Virtual Partners Forum at www.YoureAddictedToYou.com.

Understanding Self-Addiction



Questions to get you started:

What is self-addiction?

What are your self-addictions?

Renee calls herself a New Year's Health Nut. In early January she is a regular at the gym, but knows that by February she will have forgotten her New Year's resolution to stay in shape, given up on her exercise crusade, and disappeared from the gym until next year.

Denise is a self-proclaimed "control freak" whose behavior hurts her personal and professional relationships.

Jonathan is an engineer-turned-manager who constantly points out the errors and problems in other people's work. His inability to provide positive feedback is turning his team against him.

What challenge do Renee, Denise, and Jonathan face? They are each addicted to themselves.

What does it mean to be addicted to yourself?

People use the word addiction to describe a variety of behaviors and conditions. There are alcoholics and shopaholics. There are drug addicts and sex addicts. There are compulsive gamblers and compulsive shoplifters. People say they are addicted to food or fitness, chocolate or basketball. But what does it really mean to be addicted to yourself?

There are many different addictions, some of which (alcohol, drugs, gambling, etc.) can destroy people's lives. This book is not meant to be a substitute for treatment of clinical addictions. The addictions I discuss in these pages are behaviors you exhibit on a daily basis. They are your habits and routines. They are the actions you take with your coworkers, your spouse, and your children. They are the behaviors that come out when you are angry or hurt or nervous or unsure of yourself.

These behaviors come out in all areas of life. Someone criticizes you and you turn silent. Perhaps you know that you should try to understand and work to improve, but you are addicted to your silent, cold response. Another time your spouse leaves the kitchen a mess for what seems like the tenth time this week. You may know that yelling about it won't help the situation or your relationship, but you do it anyway. When you go into work you find several co-workers congregated in an office complaining about the new marketing strategy. Maybe you realize that you're only making the situation worse by joining in, but it feels so natural you can hardly help yourself.

Whatever the behaviors are that you wish to change, you may not feel like an addict. You are certainly very talented in many ways and may be an exemplary parent, spouse, leader, and friend. Perhaps you are on the verge of being a perfect ten, if only you quit being so accommodating, paid more attention to your kids, or did a better job of delegating. We all have ways that we can improve ourselves.

Have you ever wondered why self-help is one of the fastest growing industries? Why are there so many books to help people change themselves? Is it that people have so many things that they

want to change, or is it that we are simply not very good at changing? At the time of this writing Amazon.com had over 170,000 listings for “diet.” Yet, we certainly are not a particularly thin nation. There were over 120,000 items under “leadership.” Walk into any corporate executive’s office, and you are bound to find a handful, if not dozens, of leadership books. Imagine what work would be like if all of the corporate executives in the country actually practiced half of the leadership skills described in the books they read.

Why don’t these leadership and diet books work? Because they provide new behaviors and supply wonderful ideas, but they don’t help us address our addictions to our behaviors. We have had our behaviors shaped, molded, and reinforced thousands of times over the course of our lifetimes. We have been conditioned to act in a certain way when faced with certain types of situations. We can’t simply come up with something better and turn off the old behavior. It takes time to unlearn the old behavior and to learn to replace it with a new one.

Steven is a learning and development professional who works for a Fortune 500 company. He is also a recovering alcoholic. When I asked him how long it had been since his last drink, he replied, “Every day is a new challenge.” He wasn’t being vague; he was telling me that it didn’t matter how long it had been. The power of the addictive behavior is so strong that if he isn’t vigilant every day, it could come back to overwhelm him. Later he shared with me that it had been 17 years since his last drink. Your behavioral addictions may not take a lifetime to overcome. However, the example of alcoholism presents a valuable lesson that a deeply ingrained behavior doesn’t change overnight.

The fact remains that you *can* change. Whether you are trying to change something for the first time or you are struggling with something that you have tried to change many times in the past, you can make the change you desire. People have difficulty with change because they don’t know *how* to change. They know what they want to do, but they don’t know how to adjust when they get into situations that bring out their bad habits. The truth is that you can change if

you have an effective plan for how to do so. This book is dedicated to helping you lay out that plan and break your self-addiction.

What are some common self-addictions?

Self-addictions appear in every area of life. You may wish to be a better parent, a better spouse, a better leader, or you may wish to make changes for your own sake, so you can be a better person. In some cases, you may wish to eliminate a behavior that you feel harms you (e.g., controlling behavior). In another situation you may want to begin a new behavior (e.g., regular exercise). Unwanted behaviors may occur in your interactions with others (e.g., yelling at people), or they may occur when you are alone (e.g., criticizing yourself).

Maybe you already have an idea of an area in your life that you wish were different. If not, the checklist on page 5 might help you identify some areas where you'd benefit from change. This exercise is not meant as an opportunity for you to catalogue all the things that you wish to change. Do not get down on yourself if you share many of the behaviors on the list. Instead, focus on those areas you most wish to change now. Also, do not feel restricted by the items listed. Feel free to add your own.

This exercise should start to give you a sense of where some of your self-addictions may lie. Step 1, *Identifying Your Self-Addictions*, is dedicated to exploring more fully what your self-addictions are and what you most wish to change.

For now, it is important to simply understand that a self-addiction can be any behavior that is used inappropriately. You may even notice that some addictive behaviors are flip sides of the same coin. For example, telling others what to do and doing what you are told can both be self-addictions and illustrate that self-addiction isn't so much about the behavior itself as it is about the inappropriate use of the behavior.

For every addictive behavior listed, you can construct situations in which that behavior makes sense. You can create circumstances in which the behavior is a good and maybe even the best course of ac-

| Exercise Identify Self-Addictions | |
|---|---|
| Identify the three most important behaviors you wish to change now. | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Working too much (or too little) | <input type="checkbox"/> Speaking before you think |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Criticizing others | <input type="checkbox"/> Thinking too much before you speak |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Criticizing yourself | <input type="checkbox"/> Poor eating habits |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Giving too little positive feedback | <input type="checkbox"/> Being unhappy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Saying “no” | <input type="checkbox"/> Exercise habits |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Controlling others | <input type="checkbox"/> Spending too little family time |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Being defensive | <input type="checkbox"/> Being pessimistic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Getting angry | <input type="checkbox"/> Being over-organized |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Showing emotion | <input type="checkbox"/> Needing to be right |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Crying | <input type="checkbox"/> Being helpless |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Being silent | <input type="checkbox"/> Having the last word |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yelling | <input type="checkbox"/> Being negative |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Deferring to others | <input type="checkbox"/> Telling others what to do |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pushing your opinions on others | <input type="checkbox"/> Doing what you are told |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Being too risk averse | <input type="checkbox"/> Not listening |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Taking too many risks | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |

tion. Of course, you can also invent situations where the behaviors would have negative, or even disastrous effects.

Throughout the book we will follow the stories of four individuals who have worked to overcome their self-addictions. Karen, the first individual we will follow, works in customer service for a travel services company. She describes how the very behaviors that served her well in some circumstances were actually self-addictions because of how they hurt her in other situations.

The Pushover

I have always loved making people happy. Luckily, I found a job where I am expected to do just that. When people take vacations with my company, I want those vacations to be perfect. If my customers want

a particular dining experience, theater tickets, or a room with a view, I find a way to get it done. People aren't always happy when they come to see me, but I do everything I can to make sure that they leave happy. My job is to take care of people, and I do it pretty well.

I always thought this was a good thing until it sparked troubles for me at home. My husband and daughters have busy lives and lots of needs. I had gotten so good at saying "yes" to people that I didn't even realize how much it had crossed over into my home life. At work I got rewarded for saying "yes." The customers were happy, my boss was happy, and I was happy.

At home I got stuck with the lion's share of the family responsibilities. Every time my daughters needed me or my husband to do something, I was always the one who did it. When it was time for us to decide where to go eat or on vacation, or what color to paint the walls, I never got my choice. One day I realized that I was getting more and more frustrated and resentful toward the people who were most important in my life.

Unfortunately, I had become totally committed to my giving behavior. I don't think anyone intentionally took advantage of me. It was my own fault. For years I had consistently made my needs irrelevant.

Karen's giving behavior had become so ingrained that the situation did nothing to influence her actions. She was unable to identify when she should stick up for her own rights and desires rather than simply accommodate the needs of someone else. This accommodating behavior was a great benefit to her at some times, but a disadvantage at others. So, self-addiction can't be defined by the behavior alone. In order to better understand self-addictions, let's look at where they come from.

Where do addictions come from?

Addictive behaviors serve many purposes, but they all develop through the same four stages:

1. They provide or provided some positive benefit.
2. They become self-reinforcing.

3. They result in negative consequences.
4. You continue to engage in the behavior despite the negative consequences.

Positive Benefit

We become addicted to our own behaviors because at some time, for some reason, we benefited from our actions. Our behavior may have made us feel good about ourselves at some time. It may have boosted our self-esteem and raised our confidence. There are great reasons why our behaviors evolve. They help us to be happier, cope better, improve our performance, decrease our anxiety, or in some way enhance our perception of our lives. These are the reasons the behaviors begin and, if they ended there, they would simply be coping mechanisms, not addictions.

John developed his self-addiction because the behavior made him feel good. Here is how he describes the development of his addictive behavior.

The Talker

I love being around people and making people laugh, but it hasn't always been that way. I was kind of socially inept as a kid. Then I did a class play one year and it was really funny. With someone else writing the words for me I was able to play the part and capture everyone's attention. After that experience, I tried out for every play my school did. It was fantastic. There I was, this kid who no one wanted to talk to normally. But once the curtain went up, it was like I had a room full of friends. I think that the whole experience of theater really built my confidence, and that improved my ability to be social. I started to take the same approach to normal conversations that I had taken on stage—I had to be entertaining.

Getting attention gave John a boost to his self-esteem, which was fine in itself. It became a problem down the line, however, when

he needed this attention more and more to simply feel good about himself. That led to problems such as not listening to other people and monopolizing conversations.

There are two ways people benefit from their actions: the actions bring pleasure or take away pain. While John's actions benefited him by making him feel good, other people take action to remove some pain they feel in their lives. Many behaviors are grounded in helping you stop the pain you are feeling. Stopping the hurt can be a very useful action to help you get through difficult times. That's what happened with Susan.

The Worker

I don't think I was a particularly serious student when I got to law school. I made sure to prepare for class, study for tests, and write my papers, but I also made sure to go out and have a good time. There were people in my program who lived in the library, but that certainly wasn't me in the beginning. Then my father was diagnosed with cancer. When he got sick, I simply didn't find things exciting the way I had before. I would go out with my friends and everyone would be having a good time. All I'd be able to think about was how my dad had taken a chemo treatment that day or how he was getting weaker and weaker:

My only escape was studying. I could look through old cases or work in the library at school for hours. I could sit down and study all day without thinking about my father. That may sound callous, but I think it might have been the only thing that kept me sane during that time. My father got sick when I was in the middle of my first year of law school. I ended up finishing at the top of my class because of my father's cancer. I only wish he had been there to see me graduate.

As with John, there was nothing wrong with Susan's behavior when it first developed. It was an effective coping mechanism during a difficult time in her life. It was later that this behavior became problematic, when she used her work to escape from her family and avoid developing deeper relationships with her husband and children.

Self-Reinforcement

Behaviors that outlive their original purpose do so because at some point they become self-reinforcing. When the original purpose or reward for a behavior no longer exists, a new reward can arise from within. This internal reward is strong enough that it can sustain the behavior with or without the original rewards. So even though we may no longer feel the pain and get the praise we once did, those positive associations from our past are enough to reinforce within us that the behavior is good.

Consciously or unconsciously we convince ourselves that the behavior helps us and/or those around us. This pattern persists for long enough that the behavior is cemented in our natural routines. We perform the behavior without even thinking about it. It is our natural response. Even now, it is not an addiction. At this point it is merely a habit, something that is characteristic of who we are. It is only an addiction if we continue to use the behavior in the face of negative consequences.

Negative Consequences

Many behaviors that start out healthy turn unhealthy over time. Sometimes the negative consequences are internal, meaning that we create the consequences for ourselves. These could be physical or psychological and include:

- Stress
- Depression
- Self-criticism
- Self-doubt
- Excessive anger.

Sometimes the negative consequences are external, meaning that they relate to how others react to our behavior. Our behaviors may frustrate, anger, or humiliate those around us. These consequences may affect us in work and/or personal settings and could

range from small annoyances to enormous obstacles to our happiness and success. These external consequences could include:

- Poor performance reviews and/or consistently negative feedback at work
- Missing promotion and/or reward opportunities at work
- Shallow and/or unsupportive relationships
- Needless fighting
- Others ending or diminishing once-strong relationships with you.

Let's take another look at John and Susan and some of the consequences they suffered.

The Talker

I remember getting out of a meeting with my team that my manager had decided to attend. I was flying when the meeting ended; I thought it had gone so well. My team was totally united. We came up with some great ideas and everyone seemed to really like the outcomes. Afterwards, my manager called me into his office. I was expecting the best, but the first thing he did was tell me that he was disappointed. He said that during the course of the one-hour meeting he timed my floor time. He said my talking time was over 45 minutes. What's more, he said that I consistently cut off and talked over my team members when they tried to get into the conversation.

Then he got personal. It hurt a lot to hear, but I think this was what forced me to take it seriously. He said, "Look around. Haven't you noticed that you're wearing out your welcome? People don't want to listen to your 20-minute monologues anymore. It's not just with your team, either. Senior managers have talked to me about this. Your peers have talked to me. This is a real problem for you and you need to fix it if you have any hope of being promoted in this organization."

What John heard was upsetting and hurt him personally, but it also helped him considerably to understand the consequences of his

actions. When he looked around, he discovered that people who had previously been friendly towards him were always too busy to talk. Discussions would dry up when he arrived. John's behavior was shutting his coworkers out of conversations and alienating him from his own team.

The Worker

You would have thought that my first ulcer at the age of 32 would have been enough to clue me into the fact that I had created a less-than-healthy lifestyle for myself. In fact, it didn't even faze me. It was just one more illness in a long list that I had to deal with. It seemed that I was always sick: colds, flu, coughs. I figured if they weren't keeping me from doing what I always did, which was go to work, then they probably were nothing to worry about. No, I didn't figure things out for almost 15 more years.

Somehow, a couple of years after my father's death, I managed to break away from work long enough to meet someone and get married. I even had 2 kids, though I worked through both pregnancies, right up until the delivery. Then, about a year ago, my sister had a dinner party at her house. I wasn't being very good company. My mind was on a project that would be starting soon at work. I picked up a photo album so I could pretend that my mind was focused on something at least in the vicinity of the party.

At first it was nice. There was a picture of my sister and her husband with their kids and my son. I remembered they had taken him to a professional basketball game a while ago. Then I found another one of them with my kids at what looked like a barbecue at a park. I had always appreciated how close our families were and how much my kids really seemed to bond with my sister's family. The further I went in her photo album, the more I came across pictures of my kids with her family. I picked up another album and discovered the same thing.

It was one of the saddest things I had ever experienced. As I looked through my sister's photo albums, I realized how much of my kids' lives she had experienced and how little I had. The most frightening part of this experience was that in the middle of this epiphany, I

was still thinking about work. I still had that project bouncing around in my head. That was the moment for me. That was when I realized that I had to change.

While John was hurting himself at work, Susan was hurting herself at home. She was pushing her own kids out of her life. Your own behaviors and their consequences may not be as apparent to you now. However, we all engage in behaviors that result in negative consequences. These consequences may be small at first, but over time may grow into significant issues if not addressed. Just think about what your spouse, child, coworker, sibling, or parent would say if asked what they would like to change about you.

Continued Behavior

Continuing the behaviors that harm us is the most telling characteristic of self-addiction. We are an intelligent species. You'd think that we'd know enough to not do things that hurt us. Here then is the key characteristic of self-addiction: despite negative consequences for our actions, we continue to engage in the same behaviors. Why do we do this to ourselves? I asked myself this question regularly in the first couple of years of my marriage. Here is a typical dialogue that my wife and I would have:

[My wife and I are in the car. I'm driving.]

Wife: Do you know that you have to make a left soon?

Me: I know. *[said with a mildly annoyed tone of voice]*

Wife: Why don't you get into the left lane?

Me: Well, it's a good thing I have you to navigate for me.
[dripping with sarcasm]

Wife: What is your problem? *[said with more than mild annoyance]*

It was typically around this point in the conversation that I would realize that I was in trouble. A reasonable person would rec-

ognize the folly of fighting this fight. If I had even a shred of control over myself during these conversations, I wouldn't have continued them. Yet, my addiction to defensiveness would push me to respond.

Me: What exactly do you think happens to me when I'm alone in the car? Do you think that I drive around permanently lost and getting into accidents every three miles?

Now that felt good when I said it, but as an outside observer, you can probably guess that the good feeling didn't last long. My wife got angrier and, as a result, I became more miserable. Neither her anger nor my misery was surprising when it occurred. I knew what my actions would create. After all, I had played out similar scenes many times before. I was so addicted to my defensiveness that I continued to engage in the behavior despite the negative consequences that it created for me and for my wife.

Albert Einstein defined insanity as "doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results." Similarly, you could say that the definition of self-addiction is doing the same thing over and over again, knowing you'll get the same bad results.

Thankfully, I believe I am a recovering defensive-behavior addict. Like Steven, who despite 17 years without a drink considers each day a new challenge, I know that I need to remain vigilant, aware, and in control in order to keep these behaviors from creeping back into my life. Even if I could permanently eliminate all defensive behavior, there are plenty of other changes I'd like to make to myself. Each time I feel as though I'm on steady ground with one self-addiction, I recognize another that I'd like to change.

That is the nature of personal development. It is a lifelong pursuit. This book gives you the tools to develop and change yourself into the person you want to be. Of course, if you are going to take on this challenge, there should be some real rewards.

What do you have to gain?

Imagine if you became expert in adapting your behaviors. Think what it would be like if each time you said to yourself, "I wish I were better at that," or "I wish I didn't do that all the time," you had an effective method to change your behavior. Developing the skill to make those changes consistently and effectively would change your whole life.

Alcoholics Anonymous recommends three specific changes to prospective members:

1. Stop drinking.
2. Go to meetings.
3. Change your whole life.

Hopefully, you are not battling anything as challenging as addiction to alcohol and do not, therefore, have so great a depth from which to climb. In fact, you probably feel great about yourself and your life. Even so, you can still change your whole life and make it better than it already is. Personal development isn't an item on a to-do list that you can check off once it's complete. It is a lifelong endeavor to help you be your best self and live your best life.

This book offers a system to help you do three things:

1. Identify important changes that you would like to make.
2. Make those changes.
3. Sustain them over time.

Whether you are seeking ways to improve on a great situation or feel that your life is far from what you desire, your own behaviors play a critical role. Breaking your self-addictions and putting in place new, healthy behaviors will affect you profoundly at home and work, with family and friends. It will make you a better parent, spouse, worker, and leader. Breaking your self-addictions truly has the potential to change your whole life.

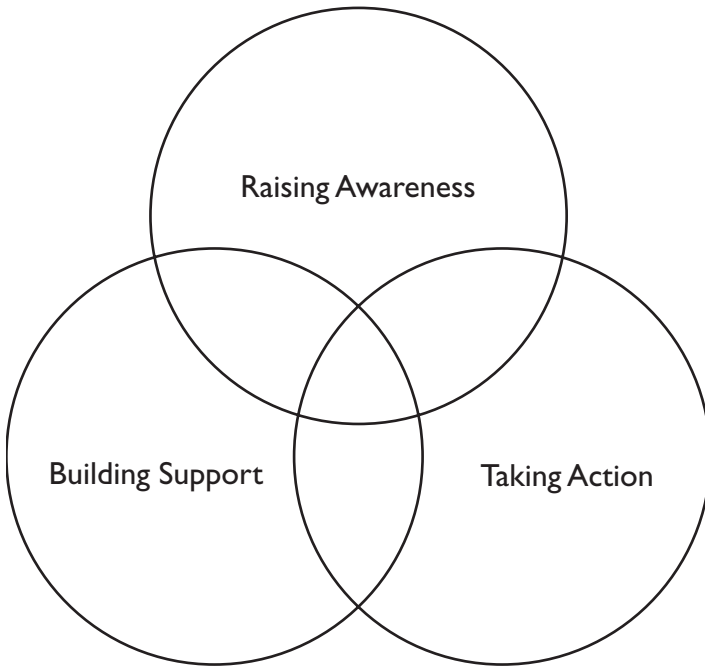
How are self-addictions broken?

The process for breaking self-addictions will take effort. There are diet books that trumpet “easy weight loss” and relationship books that talk of “easy marriage.” For every development topic there is an author who has written about an “easy” path. In reality there is no easy marriage, parenting, weight loss, or leadership. These all take hard work, effort, and dedication, and rarely are these changes permanent. Steven, the recovering alcoholic from earlier in this chapter, hasn’t had a drink in 17 years, but every day is still a new challenge for him. Change doesn’t happen overnight. That’s why the method for breaking your self-addictions may be simple, but it is not easy. That doesn’t mean you can’t do it. It just takes effort and a targeted plan for you to be surprisingly effective at changing your behaviors.

The challenge is this: addictions have a strong and powerful hold on you. In order to break them, you need to be even stronger. Unfortunately, your addictions aren’t just inside of you, they are all around you. Your behaviors result from a combination of who you are and how your surroundings push you to act. Over your lifetime you have tuned yourself to be extremely sensitive to any cues that push you toward your addictive behaviors. At the same time, you have suppressed or eliminated the cues that push you toward more beneficial behaviors.

In order to overcome this imbalance, you need to create an environment in and around you that cues your new behaviors. You need to surround yourself with an environment that rarely lets you forget about the change you are trying to make. You need to make it so that the cues for your new behaviors are regularly, if not always, in front of you. Only then will you have the strength to force yourself to continue to confront the addiction until you have truly broken it.

This book helps you develop that strength as you raise your awareness, build support around you, and take consistent actions. These are the three circles that make up the Circles of Strength model for change and make it possible to break self-addictions. All around



Circles of Strength

you there are cues that support your behavior or at least elements in your environment that allow your behavior to continue. You are surrounded by things that enable your self-addiction. When you build your Circles of Strength, you recreate yourself and your surroundings to support your new behavior and break the self-addiction.

Each of the next three sections of this book, Raising Awareness, Building Support, and Taking Action, will describe one of the Circles of Strength, and each section will contain three steps to build that circle. You will go through nine total steps to help you break your self-addictions, make the changes you want in your life, and become the person you want to be.

What if you face a clinical addiction?

Alcohol, drugs, and gambling are just a few of the clinical addictions for which there are highly effective treatment programs. If you face a clinical addiction, this book may be a useful supplement to a course of treatment. However, it is in no way a substitute for professional help. If these are the addictions you face, I encourage you to get help far beyond what I offer here. For more information on treatment programs for these and other addictions, please see "Help For Clinical Addictions" in the back of this book.