

You're Addicted to YOU



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

Noah Blumenthal

An Excerpt From

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

by Noah Blumenthal
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Part I

Raising Awareness

In this section, you create a Circle of Awareness to increase the information and knowledge you have of your self-addiction. The Circle of Awareness forms the foundation of your efforts to change. You may have already identified specific behaviors you would like to change, or you might need help figuring out what those behaviors are. Whatever your situation, it will be valuable for you to take steps to raise your awareness of not only what your addictions are, but how they affect you and those around you and what commitments you need to make to see the process through to completion. You will go through three steps to raise your awareness and surround yourself with the information you need to break your self-addictions.

Step 1 Identify Your Self-Addictions

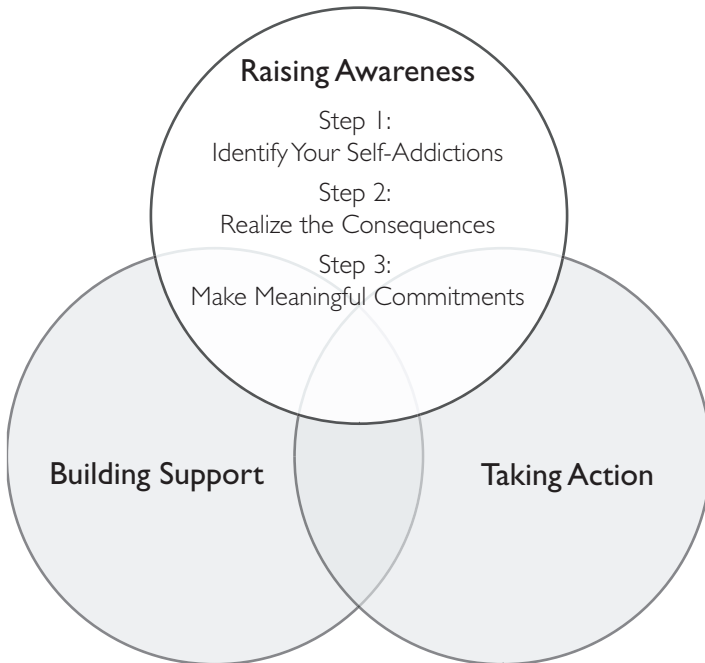
Identify your self-addictions and select the one you most want to work on now.

Step 2 Realize the Consequences

Increase your understanding of your own actions and their impact by looking at the outcomes of your actions.

Step 3 Make Meaningful Commitments

Make meaningful acknowledgments of your self-addictions and powerful commitments to realize the changes you wish to make.



Circles of Strength

Step I

Identify Your Self-Addictions



Questions to get you started.

What are the behaviors that get you in trouble?

What are your key self-addictions?

I recently started working with two new clients. The first, Nicholas, was very excited about the coaching opportunity. He knew that coaching was in vogue and it made him feel cool. However, he had no real idea of how he wanted to use the opportunity. In fact, Nicholas struggled at the beginning of our work. I asked him a lot of questions and got lots of silence in return. It took a few sessions for him to figure out his goals for the coaching. Nicholas faced the formidable challenge of discovering the changes he wanted to make, personally and professionally.

The second client, Carmen, knew exactly what she wanted to do with our coaching time. She told me that she was completely preoccupied with how other people viewed her. At home she was constantly trying to keep up with the Joneses and maintain an image of perfection. At work she ingratiated herself to everyone and

was incapable of taking any risks for fear of making a mistake and looking bad. She was ready from the first moment we sat down to charge into these challenges.

If you are like Nicholas, this chapter will help you to think through your opportunities for change and identify what you wish to work on for the remainder of this book. If you are like Carmen, this chapter will give you a chance to reflect on your change and ensure that you are on the right track. Even if you think you know exactly what you need to change, it is possible that you have missed the mark on what behavior would really be most beneficial for you to develop. What you think is important for you to change may be exactly on track, or it might be minor compared with other issues you face.

Whether you are reading this book because you know what you want to change or just because it seems interesting to you, this chapter will help you identify your core self-addictions that you will work on throughout the rest of the book.

How can you discover your self-addictions?

It's now time to identify the behaviors that you most wish to change. What are your self-addictions? What are the behaviors that have been so difficult to change in the past? What behaviors have hurt you at work? What do you do that gets you into trouble with your spouse? What do you do that frustrates you and leaves you kicking yourself for days? Perhaps you kick yourself too much and that is the addiction you wish to break. Whatever your addictions, now is the time to identify them and take the first steps towards changing.

There are three methods we will explore for becoming aware of your addictions:

- Contrasting with others
- Getting shocked
- Asking around.

Let's look at each of these in turn.

Contrasting With Others

Contrasting with others is simply recognizing some of the positive and admirable qualities in those around you and realizing that you would like to emulate them. That is what happened with me and my wife, Beatrice, when we first met. Beatrice opened my eyes to my own behavior because her behavior was so contrary to mine. We had been dating for only three or four weeks and were watching a baseball game in her living room. Ken Griffey, Jr. was up to bat and Beatrice was trying to impress me with her baseball knowledge. She said to me, "His father played baseball, too, didn't he?" She was referring to Ken Griffey, Jr.'s father who had indeed played professional baseball. At that point, I was duly impressed with her knowledge and was about to say just that. Before I had time to comment to that effect, she added, "What was his father's name?"

I looked at her with some surprise, and I said, "You want to know what Ken Griffey, *Junior's* father's name was?" She returned a blank stare. "That would be Ken Griffey, *Senior.*" Beatrice finally understood her error. What happened next was one of the most amazing things I have ever seen. She laughed. Not a chuckle or a short, embarrassed "silly me" kind of laugh, but a full-on, when-is-it-going-to-end, tears-running-down-her-face, please-make-it-stop-because-my-belly-hurts kind of laugh.

I don't think I had ever seen someone appear more comfortable with themselves or have more self-confidence than she seemed to have in that moment. She had no fear that I would think she was dumb, and why would I? I knew that she was extremely intelligent. None of that would have mattered to me if our roles had been reversed.

Had I made this same mistake, I would have constructed elaborate excuses. I would have told detailed stories about baseball and myself to convince her and everyone else that I wasn't stupid. I would have gotten angry at myself and beaten myself up for several days over it. I might have avoided seeing her for a few days just so that the mistake would become old news. All of this would have done little to erase the mistake and much to make me look even more foolish than did the original comment.

It wasn't until I really got to see my wife laugh at herself that I realized I was missing out on something. It was only through knowing her that I was able to understand and admit to myself that I was addicted to my own feelings of intellectual pride. I was addicted to the feeling I got from believing that others thought I was intelligent.

My need to be right and to look intelligent affected me in many ways beyond simply limiting my laughter. That I couldn't laugh at myself only made my own errors embarrassing for everyone present. Worse though was what my need to be perceived as intelligent did to me at work. In my first job, I rushed to provide the answers, to show that I was smart, sometimes shutting out my peers in the process. In my first managerial position I spent most of my time telling and very little time asking questions. This behavior made me feel good because it helped me to believe that my wisdom was useful and appreciated. However, it hurt my team members by minimizing their opportunities to provide input and develop their own solutions.

I had a problem and seeing my wife's carefree nature, self-confidence, and eagerness to laugh was the contrast I needed in order to recognize, understand, and admit to my self-addiction. Her comment about Ken Griffey, Jr. gave me the "Aha!" moment I needed to begin the exploration and see various other ways that this self-addiction was hurting me.

Contrast can best be described as seeing someone do something well, and having the flash of insight that this is something which you would like to improve in yourself. You contrast another person's ability with your own, and the contrast provides the inspiration. After that, it is up to you to continue with the necessary exploration to understand and admit to the addiction.

How do you find this inspiration? Inspiration is something that is just supposed to happen. It comes to you in a flash. In the movie *Back to the Future*, Christopher Lloyd's character was installing a new shower head. He slipped and banged his head on the side of the bathtub. When he awoke, he had a picture in his mind of the flux capacitor, the device that made time travel possible. He

was inspired by a mild concussion. Another famous, albeit mythical, knock on the head was Sir Isaac Newton’s. While sitting under the apple tree an apple fell and knocked him on the head. Voila! Gravity was discovered.

So what do you do if you don’t have the good fortune of being knocked on the head? I was lucky enough to be inspired by someone close to me. What if no one has stepped into your life to provide similar inspiration? The answer is probably that they have, but you just haven’t realized it yet. You absolutely can manufacture your own inspiration. You merely need to ask yourself the right questions.

Who are the people whose actions motivate you, surprise you, impress you, or leave you on an emotional high? These people could be your friends, family members, and coworkers. You should consider the people you look up to, the ones you most admire. They could be people you know or public figures. They can be gurus in the field of leadership or fitness or parenting or marriage. They can be living or dead. The first step is simply to identify who these people are.

In order to identify the contrast, you need to recognize the behaviors you admire in them and then be truthful about your own behaviors in that realm. Consider the following examples.

Person I Admire	His/Her Behaviors	My Related Behaviors
Family–Eileen	Shows endless patience when people around her are slow to understand	Show frustration and annoyance toward others
Friends–Jeff	Dedicates self to necessary actions no matter how much he dislikes them	Procrastinate undesirable tasks and perform them casually
Coworkers–Kara	Takes risks and dreams big	Same
Gurus–Jack Welch	Is incredibly direct, honest, and fair in dealing with star and problem employees	Avoid directly confronting problematic behavior
Public Figures– Roger Clemens (pro baseball player)	Pushes himself and works relentlessly during off-season to come back strong every year	Slow down considerably during nonpeak work times

You may find that some of the contrasts are more important than others. For example, if this chart were yours, you might decide that the contrast with Eileen is deeply important to you and something you want to change. However, although you admire Roger Clemens's work ethic, you may not wish to emulate it. Perhaps you are completely at ease with your work style but still find his impressive. That's a perfectly acceptable and valuable outcome from this process.

Special Note: Starting with this exercise and throughout the rest of the book, it will be valuable for you to record your notes from the exercises in a single place so that you can easily review what you have done and see your progress along the way. I recommend that you keep a notebook specifically for this purpose.

Exercise 1.1 Find Contrast

Construct your own chart like the one on page 25. For each person who inspires, impresses, or surprises you, identify their behaviors and character traits that you most admire. Focus on things that they do or say or their demeanor, rather than characteristics of their fame, fortune, or position. It may help to ask yourself the following questions:

- How do I feel when I see him/her? Why?
- What does s/he do that gives me a feeling of awe?

For each characteristic that you identified in someone else, describe your own behavior in that area and specify how you are similar and/or different. Next, make a list of those behaviors you wish to emulate.

From this exercise you will begin to see similarities and differences between you and the people you admire. You will begin to see behaviors that you may wish to change. Later in this chapter we will look further at these behaviors and determine which one you want to work on as you read the rest of this book. First, let's look at our next method of identifying self-addictions: getting shocked.

Getting Shocked

As with contrast, shock comes from an interaction with another person, but in a very different context. You get shocked when someone tells you that you are doing something that isn't working. These shocks can be direct and specific, or they can be vague. Either way, the underlying characteristic is that someone sends you a message that your behavior needs adjustment. Darrell, a marketing executive for a retail clothing company, was shocked into an understanding of his addictions. Here is his story.

The Critic

I was surrounded by greatness, at home by my kids and at work by my team members. They were all interesting, fun, talented people. My kids' teachers told me how great they were. My boss and my colleagues raved about the people who worked for me. I had every reason to be happy with the people around me. Then, in less than a month, I got three wake-up calls, three painful wake-up calls.

I was in my office early when Alexis, my top performer, came to see me. She had been with me for a little over a year and had impressed everyone from the start. I thought she had a bright future in the company, but she came in that morning to give me her resignation. I was completely taken aback and told her as much. I told her I thought she was very talented and destined for senior roles in our company and she shouldn't leave since she had such a bright future here. Then the real shock came. She told me that this was the first time I had ever given her the impression that she wasn't completely incompetent. That was tough to take. So tough, in fact, that I blew it off.

Three weeks later I had an incident with my oldest son, Nate. It was report card time, and he had done pretty well. He had mostly A's with one B and a C in History. I didn't even think about it. I just dove right in and started asking him questions all about the C. How did that happen? How much was he studying? What was he going to do to bring the grade up? I guess I was pretty stern with him in the way I asked the questions, but he certainly got me back with my last question.

"Why didn't we know about his difficulties before report card time?" I said "we" meaning me and his mother. He told me that his mom did know. He asked her not to say anything to me because I always rip into him on the smallest things. Then he yelled at me. My son never yells at me, but he did then. I was so shocked I don't remember exactly what he said, but I remember the basic message: "What's the point? Why should I try when nothing is ever good enough?"

Less than a week after that, one of my other top performers, Evan, came to give me his resignation. At first I thought that Alexis had taken him along with her, but the timing was just a coincidence. Evan had also been dissatisfied and had looked for and found a new job. When I asked him why he wanted to leave he talked about the opportunities in the new job, but I could tell he was holding back. So I asked him point blank, "Are you leaving because of me?" He still said no, but it didn't sound like there was a lot of conviction.

Then I asked him if I was tough to work for. That finally got him to open up. He told me that I made things tough at times. He said that I always saw the flaws. I always pointed out errors. I publicly ripped people's ideas apart and I never lifted people up. I never praised anyone. I never made people feel great about me as their leader or about themselves and their work.

All I wanted to do was to tell him he didn't know what he was talking about, except that he did know and so did my son and so did Alexis. I realized then that everyone else on my team and in my family probably knew as well. All this time I had been taking the people I respected and cared about most in the world and making them feel bad about themselves. I'd like to think that one wake-up call would have been enough, but three made it impossible for me to ignore.

When a shock comes to us naturally, it is like a bucket of ice water thrown in our face. Darrell's experiences opened his eyes to a behavior that he didn't even realize was there. Sometimes shocks come in exactly that fashion—comments from a respected source directly pointing out the addiction at play. These shocks hit us in such a way that we cannot ignore them.

Other times, the messages are not so direct. The source is not as trusted. Often we turn away these shocks that could do so much to help us if we were only receptive. We are able to do this because we are all endowed with natural shock absorbers.

Our shock absorbers are our defense mechanisms. They come in various guises, but they all serve to do the same thing, to diminish the impact of a shock to the system. Since shocks generally come as a realization that we are engaging in undesirable behaviors, our shock absorbers do their best to convince us that the situation isn't so bad, or that the fault lies elsewhere. Consider how often you've said any of the following things to yourself when confronted with your own undesirable behavior:

- Oh, she doesn't know what she's talking about.
- He's criticizing me? He should take a look in the mirror.
- I could stop this any time I wanted.
- Why is he making this into such a big deal? It's nothing.

Our defenses are set up to convince us we are in control, are good, and our behavior is justified. While this may all be true, the possibility remains that, good as we are and justified as our behaviors may be, they still may not be healthy for us. Our systems may need the shock.

Recognizing Shocks

In order to recognize shocks, you need to become open to your own imperfection. That may sound crazy. We should *all* be able to admit that we're not perfect. The challenge is being receptive when someone else says you're not perfect or when your emotions are running high. Whether or not it's warranted, when people receive criticism they frequently perceive it as an attack. Of course, sometimes it is, but that doesn't mean there isn't truth to it. At these times, you may go on the counterattack, become silent, or you may feign acceptance. Whatever your response is in the moment, you can benefit

from examining the criticism, whether constructive or malicious, and taking from it the kernel of truth that makes it useful.

The first step is to recognize the various ways that the shock can be delivered. Darrell's situation was easy. Trusted colleagues and family members walked right up to him and said, "Darrell, you are too critical." Unfortunately, every message isn't so obvious. While a shock can come from someone directly criticizing you or your behavior, it can also become apparent from the following:

- Someone avoids speaking with or seeing you.
- Someone gets frustrated with you.
- You get frustrated with yourself or beat yourself up over something you did.
- You get annoyed with someone else.
- You are ashamed of yourself.
- You get into a fight.
- You find yourself doing things or spending time with people you previously found distasteful or contemptible.

I'm not saying that every time someone criticizes you or you get into an argument that it is an indication of a self-addiction. However, these are good events to examine when trying to identify shocks. There are many different situations that can result in a shock to your system. The next exercise will help you recognize shocks you may have missed in the past and open you up to feeling new shocks in the future.

When looking for the shocks in your life, you are seeking the places where (once you recognize your own behavior) what you find surprises you. By its very nature, a shock is harder than a contrast for you to uncover on your own. The contrast you can discover by comparing yourself with people whom you admire. The shock can only be exposed by comparing your true self with the image of yourself you hold.

How do you know when your true self is at odds with your image of yourself? Usually your emotions flare up. They are trying to protect you from discovering that you are not who you think you are. You are not the person you want to be. These may be times in your

life when you are angry, frustrated, sad, ashamed, envious, furious, embarrassed, or aggravated. When are you critical of yourself or others? When are you downright mean? When are you at your worst?

Exercise 1.2 Shock Yourself

Identify the situations in your life that most frequently bring out negative emotions or bring out the strongest negative emotions, then answer the following questions:

- What happened that caused me to act the way I did?
- What specific behaviors did I exhibit?
- What would I like to do differently when faced with similar situations in the future?

From your answers to these questions, identify any behaviors that you would like to change. Add them to your list from the Find Contrast exercise found earlier in this chapter.

If at this point your list of behaviors to change looks long to you, don't feel bad. Anyone who is honest during these exercises will admit to having flaws. It doesn't make you a bad person. In fact, recognizing that you aren't perfect and working to improve yourself makes you a great person. Whether your list is long or short, if you are unsure of what change will be most beneficial for you, there is one more excellent way for you to identify your own self-addictions.

Asking Around

If you've read this far, it is clear that you truly want to improve something about yourself. However, it isn't always easy to identify what change you want to make. Even when you do identify a possible change, how do you know that what you've selected is actually the best place to put your efforts? Many people struggle to identify the most important changes they could make in themselves and/or their lives. Sometimes people mistakenly select a change that isn't really important. Bringing other people in at this point in the process can help you to clarify what the important changes are for you and will get you started on the right path.

Do you ever look at the people in your life, your coworkers, friends, significant other or family members, and wonder why they do the things they do? Why is he so careless? Why does she beat herself up that way? Why is he so condescending? Why is she so angry all the time? Maybe you don't wonder why; rather, you simply wish your boss would be more supportive, your friend more positive, or your spouse more willing to stand up for herself. Most people do wonder about and wish for these kinds of things. This simply means that somewhere in your life, other people have probably had these same kinds of thoughts about you. Imagine if you asked the important people in your life the following questions:

- What do you really appreciate about me as a spouse/parent/manager/worker/friend/son/daughter?
- How can I be a better spouse/parent/manager/worker/friend/son/daughter?

These are simple questions, but they can have a great deal of power. You may learn something new. You may have to face something that you didn't want to admit to yourself. You may discover wonderful truths about yourself and how others perceive you. You may find the answer to what you truly want to work on through the rest of this process (Exercise 1.3).

You also may not get any meaningful answers the first time that you ask. These are unusual questions for people to hear. They

Exercise 1.3 Ask Around

Ask the important people in your life the following questions:

- What do you really appreciate about me as a spouse/parent/manager/worker/friend/son/daughter?
- How can I be a better spouse/parent/manager/worker/friend/son/daughter?

If you don't get a clear answer to either of these questions, tell the person to give it some thought and then ask again in a few days. From the answers you receive, identify any behaviors that you would like to change. Add them to your list from the other exercises found earlier in this chapter.

may be surprised by them. They may not really understand what you are asking or they may be uncertain about how to respond. As powerful as I think these questions are, I think they grow in power the second time you ask them. When you ask someone how you can be better, they may say they don't know or that you are wonderful the way you are. Don't let them off the hook. Tell them that you will come back in a few days to ask again. That will tell them that you are serious about the question and truly want their input.

It is extremely important at this point that you *don't panic*. You may see a lot of changes you would like to make. That's okay. Everyone who is truly self-aware should be able to build a list of behaviors they would like to change. You don't have to try to change everything at once, nor should you. For now, just be aware that there are changes you would like to make.

Levels of Awareness

This chapter helped you build awareness of yourself. It helped you to uncover and recognize those behaviors that might be holding you back. When you turn your attention to the changes you want to make, it is important to make choices so that the changes do not overwhelm you. Trying to undertake too many changes can create frustration and lead to the loss of all of the changes. For that reason, before you continue on to the next chapter, follow Exercise 1.4 to choose your course of action.

Exercise 1.4 Select a Self-Addiction

As a result of the exercises in this chapter, you've listed many behaviors you may wish to change. It's time for you to review the list and ask yourself the following questions:

- How does each behavior affect me now?
- How will each behavior affect me in the future?
- Which behavior change would have the greatest impact on my life?

Select just one behavior you wish to change. That will form the basis for your work throughout the rest of this book.

There is no formula for determining what is most important for you to change. Only you can ultimately decide what change is worth your time and effort. In the end, whatever you decide to change, that is the best choice for you at that moment. You are the one who has to be motivated for this work, so your decision is what's best for you. If you have made this choice, you have reached your first major milestone in the process. You're ready to take your next step and realize the consequences.

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