

# HABIT MASTER



***BREAK FREE*** from **unproductive patterns**  
in your work - and in your life!

# SCOTT GALLAGHER

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## CHAPTER ONE

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### The Language of Unwanted “Habits”

Although unproductive habits, avoidance behaviors, bad habits, destructive habits, chronic habits, thought patterns, disorders, compulsions and addictions have distinct meanings, this book takes a look at what they all have in common, so as to provide practices, principles and strategies to support organizations and people in living more productive lives, free from any or ALL unwanted habits - and regardless of their spiritual or religious beliefs.

This book is not intended to replace any addiction recovery program, 12 step or otherwise; but it can support such people in becoming ALL Addiction FREE.

The challenge for me in writing this book is “language.” In my effort to leave no one behind, sometimes, the language I use to describe your “unwanted habit” or someone else’s might build a wall between us rather than a bridge. Therefore, throughout this book, please mentally substitute the words that fit for you whenever you hear me talking about unwanted habits, behaviors, compulsions or addictions (and anything else that doesn't resonate). Because my intention is to speak directly to you, while at the same time reach out to as many people as possible.

I know that using language this way may risk “watering down” the meaning of these words. I realize too, that for some people, calling their unwanted habit, a “compulsion” or “addiction” would be judgmental and offensive.

I also deeply respect that for others, calling their compulsion or addiction a “habit” or “behavior” would be deeply insulting to them, minimizing the depth of their suffering, and invalidating the significance of what they had to go through, or are currently battling.

To be responsible for all of this this, I have added a chapter called **“The Meaning of Addiction”** that speaks more directly to those who identify more closely with the words “compulsions” or “addictions”.

Although rather technical and scientific, this chapter sets up my unconventional approach in dealing with the unwanted “habits” we define or label as being compulsions or addictions. This chapter could also be of tremendous value to those committed to “eradicating” the stigma attached to mental health issues, whether they be addiction related or not.

If you are someone who absolutely has to read every word of a book– even those sections that are boring – please don’t do that with “The Meaning of Addiction” chapter in particular. Like I said, it is very technical and scientific and may detract from you getting value from this book.

### **What type of unwanted habits am I talking about?**

Gossiping, complaining, worrying, blaming, people pleasing, giving unwanted advice to others, controlling others, negative thinking, putting people down. Could these habits also be addictions for some people? Could these habits cause addictions? In my experience, all people who consider themselves “addicted”, or possessing any form of compulsive disorder are also addicted to one or many of these unwanted “habits”. Something to think about.

### **One More Comment about Language**

When you hear me using such words like “drives,” “motivates”, “influences”, “causes” or “solution” in this book, I want you to know that I do not know THE Cause or have THE Answer. I definitely have an interpretation, viewpoint or perspective on that; but I really don’t know the truth.

My intention throughout this book is to shift the conversation – beyond “what causes” these habits or which solution or answer is “right or best” into how we

can serve the maximum number of people, in gaining more access to their power of choice.

Whatever your perspective on what the ‘causes or solutions’ are to unwanted habits, behaviors, compulsions or addictions, I want to honour not challenge or change them. Instead, I want to invite you into a different conversation by reflecting on what it might be that drives, influences or provokes US (and those we are concerned about helping) to hold on to any sort of unwanted thought or behavior pattern. And I want to clarify that I am not talking about outside circumstances that some people refer to as “triggers.” I’m talking about what is underneath driving us to be acceptable to being “triggered.”

At times, I will still use words like “cause” and “solution.” But when I do so, this will referring to a viewpoint on what might be influencing our thoughts, feelings, and unwanted habits, and what might assist us to reduce, prevent or move beyond them.

I will also frequently use the words “our” and “their” – as in “our” habits or “their” behaviors, etc. This is not to say that YOU have an addiction or unwanted habit, or to point fingers at someone else who does. My intention is always to be respectful and to use whatever terms fit for you. It’s to find a language that’s useful for anyone who reads this: those who want to work on their own habits, and those who want to help others, but without separating themselves from the people they (or we) are trying to help. Thanks for understanding.

### **A bit about my journey**

Before sharing with you my approach in transforming ALL unwanted “habits”, I want to tell you a bit about my own journey and the path I took in developing my approach. By sharing my story of the unwanted habits that seemed to control me for most of my life, you will see how I am no different from you - that what was possible for me is also possible for you and anyone you are concerned about.

Back in 1999, and while I was the president of a small corporate recruitment firm I founded called The Executive Network, I checked myself into a 28-Day addiction rehab facility to help me stop chain smoking cigarettes and marijuana.

Before I checked myself in, I had had many other “bad” habits and addictive behaviors. From the age of about six, I was ‘hooked’ on sweets and junk food. Around age 13, I was a compulsive masturbator. At 14, I became dependent on sniffing paint and varnish remover for a few months. In my mid-teens, I began smoking marijuana, getting severely drunk, and became dependent on amphetamines. In my first year of university, I smoked crack cocaine during the spring break and stopped (not forever) after getting arrested in a crack house. I experimented with a host of other drugs like ecstasy, speed, LSD, magic mushrooms, and heroin.

I also had socially recognized ‘addictions’ to pornography, sex, junk food and other activities, AND, looking back, it sure seemed that I was also addicted to complaining, blaming, worrying, as well as controlling, fixing and giving advice to others.

When I got out of treatment, I began attending a lot of 12-step meetings where I was encouraged to only talk about ONE addiction at each meeting – the one for which that fellowship had been set up to deal with. So in AA, I talked about my alcohol problem. In OA (Over eaters anonymous) I talked about food. In CA (Cocaine Anonymous), I could share about cocaine and other mind altering substances. And so on. Yet I KNEW that I had other issues I needed to deal with, and so did others. Almost everyone seemed to have multiple addictions, or to be substituting with other unhealthy habits.

Now don’t get me wrong, I totally see the value in having programs that deal with addictions separately, so we can relate to each other around what we perceive as being the common problem. However, by ONLY dealing with them this way, some

of us may not get to the root issues that underlie ALL of our unwanted habits and other addictions.

That's one of the reasons why in 2005, I founded a global-non-profit 12 step organization that deals with any and all addictions. Although this organization continues to expand and serve more and more people, I have not been actively involved in it, or any other 12 step fellowship for years.

### **An Unconventional Approach to Unwanted Habits and Addictions**

I spent literally thousands of hours studying and trying to figure out what caused my numerous unwanted habits and addictions, because I thought that if I knew the **cause**, then I could find the **solution**, or the **answer**, to my problems, but ironically, the more I focused my thoughts on studying my problem, the more energy and power I gave to my problem. *I sometimes wonder if I caused some of my Habits to become Addictions by thinking about them so much.*

The value I got from all this over-analyzing however, is that it led me to explore all the viewpoints I outline later in this book (and many more), and to the discovery that there's no general agreement on what these are. Some say the "Cause" is genetics, heredity, disease, environment, upbringing, socio-economic conditions (e.g. poverty), abuse, tragedy early in life, permissiveness, lack of willpower, resentment, choice, over-indulging in our habits, lack of Godliness... and the list goes on.

Similarly, for each different cause, people have different beliefs or perspectives on what the solutions are. So it's changing our DNA, finding a new drug to shift our brain chemistry, changing how we raise our children, preventing abuse, improving living & economic conditions, accepting a higher power, sharing our war stories, making amends, healing our resentments, being less indulgent, just saying "No," and so on.

Again, all of these are valid approaches and have their place. However, for me, the more I tried to find “the right” answer, the more confused and frustrated I became, and the more it brought me into conflict with other people’s views and practices.

In 2007, I began speaking to kids in schools about destructive habits and addictions. I was asked by various schools to come in and talk about a particular problem they were experiencing – such as drugs, alcohol, cigarettes or bullying, for example. But when I began talking with the students themselves, I found all different kinds of behaviors – some we’d call “addictions” and many we wouldn’t – I learned some things that helped me shift my thinking.

First, what we call them doesn’t matter as much as how people self-identify (i.e., what they call their own behavior). Second, what caused their behavior originally became less important than what was driving it now. And third, finding “the solution” shifted into finding anything that would help these kids feel better and healthier, so that they could freely choose how they wanted to live. And there isn’t just ONE way to do that...

In traveling to schools across the U.S. and Canada, from the Far North to the Deep South, the kids I met came from all kinds of cultures, backgrounds and belief systems. Schools ranged from “secular public” to Christian and First Nations/Native. Some kids were from “rich” families and neighborhoods, while others were from “poorer” ones. Some were considered to be “at risk” (because of their family or socio-economic backgrounds), but most were not. And the behaviors they were dealing with were across-the-board: pot smoking, bullying, drinking, smoking cigarettes, Internet use, gaming, TV, food issues, self harm, and many others.

As I delivered keynote presentations, and then worked with smaller groups of kids in follow-up workshops, I started to see the connections between my own



unwanted habits and theirs. I then reflected on the many “addicts” I’d worked with in my previous six years. What I began to see is that there were “negative” patterns of thinking, feeling, choice and behavior that seemed common to all of us. AND, that when we did these things, they seemed to drive us or make us want to engage in our unwanted behaviors even more.

For close to a year, I surveyed kids who came to my workshops – the ones I gave after my general assembly presentations – to find out what issues concerned them. And what I discovered was a total of 94 different problem behaviors! These included over-eating, anorexia and bulimia, bullying, cutting/self harm, sex, gambling, Internet and video over-use, plus the ‘standard’ ones like drugs, alcohol, cigarettes and bullying. And there were many more. (You can see the detailed statistics in an article I wrote which is available on my website for free ([www.powerofchoice.org](http://www.powerofchoice.org))).

Some kids saw their behaviors as addictions. Some called them bad habits. Others didn’t know what to call them. But whatever the issue, it was causing them mental and emotional anguish. They didn’t know how to stop or reduce these unwanted thinking or behavior patterns. And they were feeling powerless to change.

It was during this time I realized that I had to do something different to help these kids. The word “addictions” didn’t fit for everyone and neither did the 12-step approach. But more important to me than the language or process I used was the commitment that “No child gets left behind” (to borrow from a slogan recently coined in the US regarding policies and programs to upgrade the failing school system). I knew I had to develop something broader and more inclusive; something that would speak to ALL kids, teachers, counselors, and parents, and, more importantly, would *be highly effective*.

This experience changed not only how I worked with schools and kids. It began to reshape my whole way of dealing with unwanted habits, and addictions. It shaped how I approached staff training and how I worked with the teens and adults one-on-one and in families. It's an approach I've come to call "The Power of Choice."

This approach is so fundamental to who I am and all the work I do, that "Power of Choice" is the only Canadian trademark I have ever owned – and I even named my company after it. Power of Choice Wellness Inc is a training and development corporation that delivers Habit Mastery & Power of Choice programs customized for individuals, teams, organizations, and special events.

When custom delivered in schools, it gives kids simple steps and options for choosing new habits, behaviors and ways of thinking, so as to turn around or replace their negative patterns and habits. When I leave each school, adult and youth participants then practice these over a 28-day period, with the help of "buddies" and a peer support group.

The Habit Mastery & Power of Choice Programs drew on any and every path, process, or practice that I had found useful in my own life, from books by experts to personal development seminars and principles from the 12 steps. The key was that they had to be acceptable to any school system and accessible to every child or adult who came, regardless of their history or beliefs. My approach wasn't to counsel or to try to solve their personal problems, alter their spiritual beliefs, change their family situation or improve their living conditions. It was to give them choices about how to think, feel and act (i.e., things they had control over) plus healthier habits they could practice on a daily basis.

What I discovered – kids, educators, parents and myself – was that that these new habits helped participants shift their behaviors in new and more positive directions. People of all ages say that they did less of their old behaviors as they

developed healthier habits, and they felt happier and freer as a result of the program. Educators (teachers, school counselors or principals) reported improvements in self-esteem and “connectedness” with other students. Even some parents shared stories of how kids changed in totally unexpected ways, including sharing personal issues or making apologies for things they had done.

I’ve continued developing this “Habit Replacement Approach” in my work with adults, children, and families as well. And what I’ve found is that the results are both impressive and, at times, quite dramatic.

The reason I share all of this – I actually didn’t intend to put it in here – is that my obsessive search for the “common cause” and “common solution” for all unwanted habits led me to see the profound value and gift of never finding it. It led me to see countless dimensions to the meaning of the word “choice.” It led me to see how honoring people’s choices is my access to giving and receiving unconditional love and acceptance.

Shifting away from “one cause” and “one solution” approach has helped me become more effective in coaching others. It’s helped me become less dogmatic in my own approach, and more open to discovering new ways that work. It’s changed the way I see and speak about unwanted habits and addictions. And it’s given me “access” to working with almost anyone, any age, and with any habit. And I owe it all to the kids I originally worked with in schools. They gave this to me. They opened my mind. They taught me that I did not know.

## **We All Have Unwanted Habits**

Whatever unwanted habits you are dealing with personally – or see someone else in your life dealing with, I'd like to ask you to put the thing we're doing, what we call it, how severe it is, and how it affects our life aside for a moment and ask you this;

Don't we all habitually do, say or think things that aren't the absolute best for us; things that hurt us or others; things that our higher self – conscience, soul or better self – does not really want us to do or does not feel good about us doing? Yet we habitually do these things, think these things, or say these things anyway. So could having unwanted habits simply be part of being human?

What kinds of unwanted habits am I talking about? Anything that has us avoid something we don't want to deal with. These habits might include negative thinking, worrying, obsessing about other people, blaming, complaining, being a control freak, excessive use of TV, computers, internet surfing, texting, or cell phone use; excessive shopping and hoarding, overworking or working at jobs we hate, but we do to survive. (I know, many of you might not think of "working at jobs we hate" as a habit, but it could be), bullying of others; compulsive giving of advice to others. Any "busy work" or "mindless" activity that keeps us from doing what we really need to do. Food related habits, such as over-eating, under-eating, or eating things we don't think are good for us. Of course, unwanted habits could include any of the traditional compulsions or addictions like: excessive drinking, sex, smoking, drug use or gambling.

## **What Do All These Habits Have in Common?**

In thinking about preventing, reducing, or stopping unwanted habits and addictions, most of us – and within society as a whole – tend to think about

eradicating the *behaviors* or restricting access to the *substances* people are using because we see them as “the problem” – like smoking cigarettes, doing drugs, drinking alcohol, gambling, or over-eating junk food.

For me, it’s not the behavior and their effects that I pay attention to, it’s what might be driving them underneath. Because if we can get at that – the shared causes that lead all of us to engage in unproductive or destructive behaviors, then we can start to unlock and prevent every kind of unwanted habit through common practices and principles. And then, truly no one will get left behind.

## CHAPTER THREE

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### The Power of Thought

“The significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them.” - Albert Einstein

Before saying anything about the power of thought, I want to remind you that I don't know the “TRUTH” about anything. Really. I don't. Everything I have said and will say are merely perspectives I offer for your consideration. I don't believe these perspectives are the truth. They are just points of view to look from that may or may not empower you. If it doesn't feel right, I ask that you honor your feelings and honor yourself by not believing anything that does not feel right to you, no matter who says it. Trust yourself. Dean Karnes, Marathon runner said “Listen to everyone. Follow no one”. Great words to live by.

I'm sure no expert on the bible, but it seems to imply that “thoughts” (in the form of words) are the root of all creation.

*"In the beginning there was the Word and the Word was with God, and the **Word was God**. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men."*

The “**Word was God**” could be interpreted as “All things were made by Word (thought); and without Word (thought) was not anything made that was made.”

In my work, I ask people to consider the possibility that words are the source of creation, both the creation of the wanted stuff in our lives and the creation of the unwanted, which would include our wanted and unwanted habits.

I was once diagnosed with ADHD and am going to do a little ADHD rant which I do often when speaking but try to contain in my writing with the help of editors. I often talk about the power of honoring your word which for me includes honoring and being responsible for the creative power our words have on others too. i.e. when we hear people say “sticks and stones may break my bones and names can never hear me,” that is a powerful viewpoint on the power of words when you are around people that use words abusively or with such negative destructive force whether intentionally or not, it is powerful to believe that what they say won't hurt you. For me, I don't know the internal beliefs of anyone, or how easily they are influenced by what other people say so I try to be responsible for how other people may be giving my words more power than they give their own. It's not easy and I am definitely not even close to being a master at honoring my word at this level but I am working on it. Ok, ADHD rant over!

This leads to the question: how could our thoughts lead to unwanted habits and addictions ? Could our unwanted habits be a function of our unwanted thoughts?

### **A possible connection between thoughts and unwanted habits**

I've heard it estimated that we have between 50,000 and 75,000 thoughts a day, and that 75% or more of these are negative. Every day, all day long, we have thousands and thousands of negative or self-limiting thoughts. “I'd like to have my own business, but I could never do that. I'd love to date so and so, but I could never ask him/her out. I would really like to try a new sport (or run a marathon), but that would be impossible for me. I wish I could stop this habit or addiction, but I've tried that before and nothing has ever really worked. I hate this job. I am too old. I am ugly. I am stupid. I wish my spouse would change. I'm such a failure for not being able to change my habit. I hate myself. I'd like to but I can't...”

So where did those thoughts come from? Our parents? Friends? Society? Are they new and fresh and continually changing – or are we recycling the thoughts we had

yesterday, last month, last year, or many years ago? Do you feel a sense of possibility and aliveness as you think about each day – or are you feeling stuck or frustrated because it is your belief that change is not really possible?

It would seem that most of us share a core belief (which we think is “the truth” – that something is fundamentally wrong with us. This belief can express itself in many different forms. We may believe that we're not *good* enough, don't *know* enough or don't *do* enough (e.g., “I’m lazy”). We might think that we don't deserve to have what we need or want. Or it could be the belief that we are unlovable or unacceptable, or that other people won't love and accept us for who we really are.

Our minds create more negative thoughts to reinforce core beliefs formed earlier in life that "something's wrong with you" in some way: “I'll never have enough money.” “I'll never be happy in a relationship.” “I can't do work that I really enjoy.” “No one will ever pay me for that.” “Change is not really possible for me.” (Or whatever those core beliefs are for you) And the more you keep listening/telling yourself these thoughts, the more they seem like "the truth" for you.

Beneath our unwanted habits, behaviors, compulsions or addictions, I’ve noticed these kinds of thoughts and beliefs. This is perhaps why so many of our attempts to break our habits are so ineffective.

We try to change the outside behavior instead of dealing with what's going on inside. The same is true when we want to help others change their habits; we often try to "motivate" them in ways that actually make them feel worse thereby reinforcing their negative and disempowering thoughts of “not being enough,” leading to more feelings of guilt, shame and hopelessness.

Paradoxically, even while believing we are 'not enough', we may be high achievers. We may hold the highest standards for ourselves, or always try to be the best at whatever we do. The 'over-achieving' habit may be an attempt to disprove the underlying belief that we are 'not enough'. But our best efforts



never seem to be enough to quiet these negative thoughts for good. And it's this conflict within us that contributes to our gnawing feelings of discomfort, discontent or emotional pain.

Arnold Washton, Ph.D., and Donna Boundy, M.S.W., describe this problem perfectly in their book *Willpower's Not Enough: Recovering from Addictions of Every Kind*;

Part of having an addictive “dis-ease” means that we hold certain contradictory beliefs that set the stage for inner conflict and struggle – such as believing simultaneously that we are not enough and that we *should* be perfect.”

[Thus] ...A faulty belief system lies at the root of addiction. This belief system... embraces the idea that it is possible to be perfect, that the world should be limitless, that our image is more important than who we really are, that we are not enough, and that externals (people, drugs, and other things outside of ourselves) hold the “magic” solutions to life’s problems.

And what if the Cognitive Behavioral Therapists (CBT) are correct when they say **Thoughts Cause Feelings**? If 75% of our thoughts are negative and thoughts cause feelings, then logic would have it that 75% of our feelings are also negative. Is it any wonder our society is so desperate to escape these uncomfortable feelings, that we’ll even turn to destructive habits or addictions to do so?

In fact, this reminds me of my experience in the 12 steps where I used to teach a particular passage out of the big book of alcoholics to anyone and everyone that felt they or someone they cared about might have an addiction problem of any sort.

The passage was actually written by the late Dr. William D Silkworth. When describing his observation of the “alcoholics” he worked with, he stated “they are

restless, irritable, and discontented unless they can again experience the sense of ease and comfort which comes at once by having a drink.”

I would have the person I was working with substitute the word “alcohol” for any habit or behavior the person was having a problem with and ask them this “Is it your experience that most of the feelings you have on a day to day basis could be described as being “restless, irritable and discontented” ?

To this question, people would say “YES” without hesitation. I would then ask “is it your experience that your habit, behavior, compulsion or addiction gives you a sense of “ease and comfort” compared to how you were feeling just before you engaged in that habit, behavior, compulsion or addiction?”

Every single one of them would say “YES” - and I mean even those who considered themselves addicted to cutting, abusive relationships, hair pulling, anorexia, bulimia, controlling others, work. I mean this applied to everyone. It did not matter what the “addiction” was, across the board, their unwanted “habit” was giving them a feeling they were looking for.

This had me wonder if all addicts (and possibly even most people) are actually addicted to a feeling that could be described as “ease and comfort?” A single word for that could be “peace.”

Could our negative thinking be one possibility of what might be causing this overwhelming lack of peace in our lives?”

### **Our Mini-Exercise**

So how do you begin to change your thoughts and core beliefs? Start by becoming aware of them.

1) Take some time and think about what you believe to be "true" in your life right now about:

- Your body and your health

- Your financial situation
- Your work/job
- Your primary relationships
- Yourself

(Tip: This is not a test and there are no “right” answers. Whatever comes to mind is fine.)

2) Are you experiencing any recurring problems in any of these areas that seem like they're "the truth?"

3) Think about, and write down, what you would like to experience in each of these areas of your life instead.

4) Does what you'd like to experience seem possible – or impossible? That's a belief too.

5) Watch for any habitual thinking you have about any of these issues over the next 24 hours.

This exercise will give you some insights into how your thoughts and beliefs could be shaping what you think is true about your life.

## The Power of Meaning

We've all had difficulties or problems in our past that might "predict" how our future will turn out. It's statistically predictable (though not inevitable) that we will grow up to be poor after being raised in poverty. It's more likely we'll become emotionally or physically abusive if we experienced abuse in our own childhoods. There's a strong probability that we will have problems with alcohol if our parents were alcoholics. And if our parents struggled with money, we probably will too.

Upbringing and environment are significant influences on how we grow up. But our past may "predict" but it does not *determine* our future.

My past *was* a good predictor of my future, that I would be unhappy in life. And it would be easy to blame my Dad, my Mom and past events for what happened to me; in fact, I did that for many years. And the blaming only served to lock in my unwanted behaviors even deeper. What I choose to see now is that (as a viewpoint that is not the "truth") it was actually MY thought and behavioral choices that shaped how my life turned out.

Neale Donald Walsch said: "We're the cause. And until we get that, we're never going to evolve."

As human beings, we are continually interpreting the meaning of our life experiences. Someone smiles at us, and we think we're loved and appreciated. Someone yells at us, and we think we're bad or guilty of something. Some people see the good and the bad in balance. But for many of us, our interpretations are mostly negative.

This can show up in many ways. We focus on the negative things people say or do instead of the positive. We anticipate the worst. We blame, complain, and worry a lot. We invent reasons or excuses to justify why our life isn't working the way we want it to. We then feel powerless about changing our circumstances and behaviors. At the root of this thinking is the belief that circumstances, other

people and events have more control over our lives than we do. We are not 'at cause' – they are.

Neale Donald Walsch makes another powerful statement about this in his book *When Everything Changes, Change Everything*:

“Remember, the experience of happiness has nothing to do with a given situation. This is hard to accept because we are absolutely certain that it does. Yet there is no connection between external events and internal experiences, except in your head.

Your capacity to know joy is not connected to this one person or to that one place of employment for instance. You just think that it is. The Apparent Truth and the Imagined Truth are not identical. Ever.

Events do not have meanings. Events are events, and meanings are thoughts. Nothing has any meaning save the meaning you give it. And the meaning you give to things does not derive from any event, circumstance, condition, or situation exterior to yourself. The Giving of Meaning is entirely an internal process. Entirely.” *(Page 78 and 79)*

Viktor Frankl was an Austrian neurologist, brain surgeon and psychiatrist, whose specialty was helping people with depression and suicide. During World War Two, Frankl was sent to the Nazi concentration camps. He survived three different camps (including Auschwitz) for three years before being liberated. And after the war, he wrote a book called *Man's Search for Meaning*, in which he described his horrific experiences and what he learned from them.

Frankl was a careful observer of other prisoners. He had seen so many die, including his own parents, that he became able to predict when this would happen. The clue, he discovered, was when people, based on listening to their conversations, seemed to have no positive meaning for living any more.

Those prisoners who, despite their suffering and torture, still found positive meaning in life – for example, by helping others or having family to look forward to – seemed to have the highest probability of surviving. So to help himself, Frankl gave talks to other prisoners on how to survive in the camps. He also made up an empowering meaning for his own suffering - that the reason he was in these camps, witnessing all this horror, was so that he could write about it, to prevent it from ever happening again.

After the war, Viktor Frankl even created a new form of therapy he called “Logo Therapy,” based on this concept that man defines his own meanings and purpose in life. That we have the power to invent a positive meaning for any circumstance in life – including those that invoke unspeakable levels of pain, suffering, and yes, torture.

“Your worst enemy cannot hurt you as much as your own thoughts, when you haven’t mastered them,” said the Buddha. “But once mastered, no one can help you as much – not even your father and your mother”.

It is the meaning we give to events that determines the power they have over us, or we have over them. And this too is merely an interpretation – an interpretation that the power of choice includes our ability to choose meanings.

### **Master the Art of Making Meaning**

From Viktor Frankl, I’d like to turn to Adam Khan, the author of a book called *Self Help Stuff that Works*. Here's what he says about the way we think, in a chapter he calls "Master the Art of Making Meaning."

*“The meanings you make affect the way you feel and determine how you interact with people and circumstances. The interpretations you make about the events in your life have a significant influence on the amount of stress you experience in your day.*

*For example, let's say someone cuts you off on the freeway. And let's further postulate, just for fun, that your automatic interpretation is "What a jerk." The interpretation would probably make you upset, at least a little bit. But realize that it doesn't feel like you're making the interpretation "What a jerk." The way it feels to you is that your assessment of the person is obvious, and anyone in their right mind would make the same assessment in the same circumstances. But believe it or not, your interpretation was your own doing, and it wasn't the only possible interpretation you could have made.*

*The important thing about this is that your interpretations change the way you feel, and those feelings change the way you interact with the world.*

*The good news is: You're not stuck with the interpretations your mind makes automatically. You can come up with new ones. You wouldn't marry the first person you met after puberty, would you? You wouldn't take a job at the first place you saw a "Help Wanted" sign, would you? Well, you don't have to use the first interpretation that pops into your head, either.*

*In the example above, the possible ways to interpret someone cutting you off are virtually unlimited. How about this one: The person had unexpected car trouble and now is running terribly late to an important appointment. If the driver is a woman, maybe she's in labor and needs to get to a hospital now. If it's a man, maybe he was called at work and told his wife is in labor. Maybe his brakes went out. Maybe he's having heart trouble.*

*None of those interpretations are better than any others in an absolute way. But which one leaves you able to go on about your day feeling fine? Or, if it's a situation that keeps repeating itself and requires action, which interpretation will make you most effective at dealing with that situation?*

*Challenge yourself. Don't settle for the first interpretation that comes to mind. Say to yourself, "Okay, it might mean that...what else could it mean? What's another way to interpret this?" You will feel better, treat people*

*better, and handle situations better. Do you know what this could mean to you? You tell me.*

***Come up with alternative ways of interpreting an event.***

— Adam Khan

For more on Adam's book, ***Self Help Stuff That Works***, go to his Web site at [www.youmeworks.com/descriptionofbook.html](http://www.youmeworks.com/descriptionofbook.html).

### **We also give Meaning to Words**

*When you get that you add the meaning to life, there that is no meaning inherent in **anything**, that the significance you experience is a function of human interpretation, when you get this you are free, and therefore free to create. The key, of course, is being willing to be responsible for the mess you have created so far!* – Landmark Education (on FaceBook)

If we give meaning to events, we also give meaning to words. Yes we definitely have dictionaries and experts to draw upon as a resource but ultimately we are the ones that give meaning to words too.

I mentioned earlier that I have devoted two entire chapters later on in the book just for exploring the meaning of the word “Addiction.” Perhaps I should just have gone to dictionary.com and given you a definition from there; then again, maybe I should use the Oxford Dictionary instead. What do you think? Is one right and one wrong, or are they both simply different perspectives on the same thing?

If you take the time to read the more 'technical' chapters on “The Meaning of Addiction,” what you will see is that even top experts in the field fundamentally disagree on the meaning of this word, what causes it, and what the solutions are.

That’s why ultimately, after exploring what the experts say, I conclude by suggesting that once again there is no “right” definition – and that **YOU get to create the meaning of addiction!**



That may sound strange, since we normally look to “the experts” for what’s “right.” From my perspective, the real goal is to use any definition/model for addiction – that is aligned with YOUR truth, and supports YOU in dealing with it. Besides, no matter what definition/model you end up using, people will disagree with you anyways; so you might as well go with whichever one feels right to you.

The same applies for **whatever** kind of unwanted habit you have. Whether you call it a 'bad habit,' a behavior or compulsion, or something totally different, what's most important is not what you call it, but that you have options and choices about how to transform it that feel right to you.

### **Why do we keep our unwanted habits?**

Our habits may be giving us *feelings* that we want, or escape from the *feelings* that we don't want. Just like everything else, words have different meanings for different people but what I am talking about is the feelings in the realm of: *Comfort, relief, and peace*. When we engage in our unwanted habits and addictions, is it possible that we feel more comfort, relief, and peace, compared to how we were feeling just before we engage in them.

### **Do We Need These Feelings or are we addicted to them?**

Like I said, even people who do 'extreme' behaviors like self-harm and cutting (using razorblades to cut their skin) tell me the same thing: that it temporarily gives them a sense of peace, comfort and relief. That may sound strange, but here's how.

There was a girl in one of my programs who was "cutting" herself. She said that her mind is always telling her how much she hates herself, how much she hates her parents, and how much she hates her boyfriend – who keeps spending time with his ex-girlfriend and seems to like his "ex" more than her. When she thinks this way, her thoughts and feelings become unbearable and so she cuts herself.

"But why?" you may be asking yourself "What does that do for her?" Just like any unwanted habit or addiction, it interrupts her negative racing mind from continuing to think thoughts that have her feeling emotional pain inside. The cutting forces her to redirect attention away from her emotional pain onto her physical pain. The cutting gives her a welcomed distraction from her habitual thoughts, feelings and beliefs.

So what does that mean for the rest of us? Whatever unwanted habit you are doing, that you don't want to be doing - or not be doing as much as you are doing it, is actually giving you a certain degree of comfort, relief or peace - *compared to how you were feeling just before* doing it. This might not be true for everyone or every situation, but I invite you to consider it as a possibility.

### **Unwanted Habits in response to Unwanted Feelings**

Without our unwanted habits, we would experience more feelings that are the opposite of comfort, relief and peace. We might be anxious, angry or sad; upset or frustrated; afraid or feeling alone; feeling helpless or guilty. Whatever it is, when we are alone with ourselves and not distracted by our habits, we feel uncomfortable in our skin. And we engage the unwanted habit (or addiction) to temporarily escape our uncomfortable or painful feelings.

These feelings don't just happen by accident, however; and if thoughts cause our feelings, many of us (particularly addicted people) are thinking "negative" thoughts almost all of the time. Maybe we're telling ourselves that we should be better or we're not enough. Or we're judging people; we're criticizing our spouse, our children, our boss or co-workers, the President, Prime Minister or the government, even leaders on the other side of the world. Or maybe we're worried about our bills, our job, our mortgage or rent, about what's going to happen in the future or something we did in the past.

This is the "something's wrong" thinking I talked about earlier. When we focus on what's wrong in others and ourselves, these thoughts cause negative feelings and

emotional discomfort. By constantly worrying, being afraid or focusing on what we don't like about our life, or someone else's, we are continually making ourselves feel bad. And this is why we crave our habits and behaviors – to instantly escape the pain caused by the power of our negative thinking.

### **Choosing Thoughts for Physical Health**

Dr. David R. Hawkins, an internationally respected American M.D, has some deeply personal insights into the power of our thoughts and beliefs when it comes to our physical health.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Hawkins was a very busy and highly successful psychiatrist. People came from all over the United States to see him, and he built the largest psychiatric practice in New York with 50 therapists, a suite of 25 offices and laboratories, and over 3000 patients each year. By the early '80s, his practice was attracting patients from around the world.

At the same time as he was experiencing 'outer success,' Hawkins was also suffering from a huge list of illnesses. In his book *Healing and Recovery*, he describes some of them.

"From one end to the other, things were wrong," he writes. This included migraine headaches and many severe allergies. A tumour in his right lung, a form of tuberculosis. Another disease that impaired the flow of blood to his hands and feet, so he had gangrene in his fingertips as a result.

Hawkins also had hypoglycemia (low blood sugar) so severe that he could not eat sugar, sweets or starches; and hyperthyroidism (an overactive thyroid gland) which sent him into severe heart failure. In addition, he had arthritis and gout (problems with his joints). Pancreatitis and occasional gall bladder attacks. As well as multiple intestinal problems, including an ulcer for over 20 years and another condition that caused bleeding so bad he almost died from it.

Dr. Hawkins had many surgical procedures in hospitals to try to correct his problems, and was on multiple medications. Because of his many sensitivities,

there were also very few things he could eat safely. When he'd occasionally go to a restaurant, the only thing he could order was lettuce. Yet at the same time, he was 50 pounds overweight.

### **Choosing thoughts and Beliefs**

Then, over a period of several years, Hawkins began to work with his conditions from a deeper level. He questioned his own beliefs about illness and disease. He looked at his fears from childhood, his beliefs about guilt and sin, and attitudes like his own perfectionism. He also started to work with his illnesses by letting go of "resisting," cancelling his belief systems and surrendering to Divine will. And through this work (with some help from acupuncture as well), he was able to release or "disappear" ALL of his physical conditions.

Since then, Dr. Hawkins has devoted himself to finding out what causes illness, disease and pain within us, and to discovering ways of healing and recovery. He has also taught others to deal with their physical conditions using the same methods that worked for him.

Through his experiences and research, what Dr. Hawkins has concluded is this. "Events in and of themselves have no power to affect how we feel, one way or another. What does affect us is... our attitude, our point of view. The context and the overall meaning give the event [its] emotional power over us. ...We are the creator of the meaning and impact it has on us."

He then goes on to say that "Cause is on the level of mind, effect is on the level of body." "Self-healing... really depends on the reversal of the usual belief systems of causality. What we hold in mind manifests on the physical level; it is not the other way around."

### **Further Evidence – Hypnosis and Multiple Personalities**

Two good clinical examples of this, says Hawkins, are multiple personalities and hypnosis.

*Under hypnosis, a suggestion can be given to a patient that they are allergic to the roses on the desk, and that when they get up, they will get hives, a rash, and start sneezing... When the person wakes up from the trance, all of a sudden, they start to wheeze, get hives, and develop a rash. The body is responding to what the mind believes.*

*In cases of multiple personality, he says, research shows that: “The consciousness of one personality is adopted by the patient and [operates] within that body for varying periods of time.” “While that... personality is operative, the patient is subject to all the belief systems held by that personality. If that personality happens to believe it has an ulcer, a weight problem, allergies... – whatever it believes – while it is operative in the body, those physical abnormalities are actually brought into existence. ...[Yet, when] the other personality enters the body, because [it] has no such beliefs, the body promptly heals itself of all those illnesses.*

### **Our Mind is So Powerful...**

The key to healing or recovery, Dr. Hawkins says, is re-owning our own power to choose. This begins with telling ourselves, “It’s my mind that has been creating that. ...My mind is so powerful that if I believe such a thing to be true, it will make it happen.” However, he also says that “it takes a high level of awareness to accept that the mind has that much power.”

Giving an example from his own healing, Hawkins writes that he lowered his high cholesterol and blood sugar levels by cancelling his belief systems about them. He repeatedly told himself, “I am an infinite being... I am only subject to what I hold in mind. ...I hereby cancel it and refuse it.” Over a period of months working this way, his levels returned to normal.

We can turn around our own conditions, he says, by: (1) telling ourselves that it is only a belief system; (2) that we do not have to buy into it; and (3) by telling ourselves the truth, such as “I am an innocent being. I am no longer subject to that.” “The same power that undid us – our beliefs – can now work for us when

we consciously utilize the power of the mind,” writes Hawkins. “We are subject only to what we hold in mind.”

(Note: I highly recommend Dr. David R. Hawkins' books, which include *Power vs. Force* and *Healing and Recovery*. If you want to find out more about his work, see [www.veritaspublishing.com](http://www.veritaspublishing.com))

### **They Are Not the Only Ones...**

Viktor Frankl, Neale Donald Walsch , Adam Khan and David R. Hawkins aren't the only ones talking about the power of our thoughts, and the power we have to choose them.

Writer and businessman W. Clement Stone once said, "Whatever the mind can conceive and believe, it can achieve."

Personal development trainer Anthony Robbins says, “Nothing has any meaning except the meaning you give it.”

And automobile pioneer Henry Ford said, “If you believe you can do a thing or you can't, you're right.”

And, of course, the Bible talks about the power of belief. “Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”

And beliefs can work against us too: As Jeffrey Schaler PhD has said in his book *Addiction is a Choice*

*“Teaching people in treatment for addiction problems that they ‘don’t know they have a problem’ may create a problem for them. Teaching them that they cannot control themselves may convince them that they cannot control themselves. Teaching them to believe that ‘treatment’ is the only solution to their problem may persuade them that they cannot solve problems on their own. It reinforces dependency. Teaching them that addiction is all-or-nothing may influence them to believe they can never be anything other than sick. Teaching them they’re*

*powerless encourages them to act powerless. Teaching them they're powerless encourages them to act powerless. Teaching them that abstinence is the only way to control their addiction may make them think that whenever they are not totally abstinent, they are out of control. Then, when they do take the drug, they make themselves feel as if they are out of control. The middle ground of St. Paul's moderation in all things is denied to them."*

If our thoughts and beliefs really are that powerful (which is itself a thought and belief), how can we apply this to unwanted habits the power of choice?

## CHAPTER FOUR

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### Attracting, Releasing and Redirecting

I mentioned earlier that Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is based on the premise that **thoughts cause feelings and feelings drive all behaviors!** CBT is scientifically proven to be effective for the treatment of a variety of problems, including mood, anxiety, personality, eating, substance abuse, post-traumatic stress disorder, OCD, bulimia nervosa and psychotic disorders.

Many success principle teachers like Napoleon Hill, Brian Tracey, Jack Canfield, Jim Rohn, Tony Robbins etc, as well as the science of metaphysics, the new thought movement, the Law of Attraction, movies like “The Secret” and “What the Bleep do we know”? – to name but a few - share this same belief that **thoughts cause feelings**. They also suggest that “like attracts like,” that positive and negative thinking attracts other thoughts that align with, and reinforce the interpretations (meanings) that we make up. Our thoughts and beliefs cause positive and negative “physical results” or outcomes, respectively. These “physical results” include the physiological states we call “feelings.”

#### Like attracts Like

You don't have to agree with this perspective but you might want to consider it, and how it could be applied to unwanted habits specifically. See what feels useful to you. And remember, I am not encouraging you to believe or agree with anything. Trust yourself.

The thoughts we continuously think – whether it be about the past, present or future – will eventually attract “like” circumstances. Therefore, if our predominant thoughts or feelings are about a habit or addiction we desire to



engage in, or not engage in, that is what we will get more of. The same thing happens when we resist, fear or hate something: We get more of it. Why? Because what we focus our energy and attention upon, we empower and attract.

**Think about what you want the final outcome to be.**

If focusing on our problem(s) brings us more of them, to create a new outcome we redirect our mind towards what we actually *do* want.” Suppose you no longer wish to use alcohol and drugs, as an example. The new focus could be on what you would like your life to look like if you were “being clean and sober.” By habitually focusing on that image – the feelings, thoughts and experiences we will have when we are free of alcohol or drugs – then our thoughts will begin attracting those kinds of experiences.

**If you want to help keep someone stuck, focus on what they’re doing wrong. If not, stimulate their desire to focus on what they want...**

When we continually point out (or obsessively think about) what someone else is doing “wrong,” we are giving our attention, energy and power to it. Therefore, that is what we will probably stimulate in our thinking and theirs, and what we will both likely get more of. In order to support real positive change in others, look for what we believe others *want* to see in their behavior – and then “think, speak and influence” them to consider wanting more of that too. (Of course, this doesn’t just apply to helping others. It also applies to us!)

**To create lasting change:**

**First:** Don’t try to change or fix yourself. By focusing too much on your problem, you’ll only get more of it.

**Second:** Shift your focus. Think more about what you want, instead of what you don't. Give your energy – thoughts, feelings, words, actions – to what you want to experience and create.

**Third:** To help someone else, stimulate (and support) the same thinking in them by being the change in thinking you want to see in them.

### **Not What We're Used to Doing...**

When you think about it, these ideas go against what almost all of us, including myself, do whenever we have a “negative” habit. What it says is: Change doesn't come from trying to control our behavior, “break” our bad habit, or force ourselves to stop by criticizing, “guilting” or beating ourselves up. Instead, it comes through *releasing* our unwanted behaviors – by stimulating and growing the mental habit of focusing on what we want in our life; and then replacing our old habits with new ones that give us our desired experience.

These same principles are beautifully illustrated in a book from a totally different source, called *Whale Done*, by Ken Blanchard, Thad Lacinak, Chuck Tompkins and Jim Ballard. The book is about how professional trainers train killer whales to do those amazing feats at top aquariums. What it basically says is that the way to train a whale is not to focus or give any energy to what it is doing wrong, because it will simply ignore you – or eat you! The key is to focus on and acknowledge what it is doing ‘right.’ In other words, look for the behaviors you want to grow, then give the whale positive reinforcement when it makes progress in that direction.

Intuitively that makes sense, right? Yet this idea is hard for most of us to actually put into practice. Why? Because we've become so focused on what people are doing ‘wrong,’ as well as trying to fix or correct ourselves and others, that that's

what we give our energy or power to – and as a result, we get more of what we do not want.

The key to this approach is shifting our focus onto what we want, and away from what we don't want. By growing these thoughts, feelings and behaviors, they will gradually begin to replace what we are doing now (that we don't want) and give us the experiences that we seek.

### **Applying This to Our Unwanted Behaviors**

At the beginning of this section, I described the kinds of habits – of thinking and behavior – that I believe lead us into our unwanted habits and addictions: negative thinking, blaming and complaining, focusing on what's wrong, seeing ourselves as victims, seeking something outside ourselves to feel better, etc. If these are the habits that take us into our unwanted habits, then it becomes self-evident what habits we need to develop in order to move us in the opposite direction. Let me illustrate that.

One thought habit we have is *focusing on what we don't want*. It sounds so simple; but that's the thinking of people who are stuck in any kind of negative pattern, or resigned to something they don't want in their life. If you look at their thinking, they're generally focused on what they don't want. And if thoughts cause feelings, focusing on what they don't want causes them to feel how they don't want. i.e. restless, irritable and discontented, uncomfortable in their skin.

Take a moment and think about that for yourself. Think about an unwanted behavior or negative pattern you have in your life right now – whether it has to do with money, relationships, drugs, food or something totally different – is your thinking primarily about the “problem” you have? About wanting to end it, but being unable to, and feeling upset that you can't? That's the kind of thinking I'm talking about. So what would be the opposite of that?

Take a few moments now and focus on what you do want. I know your mind will probably resist doing that. But give yourself permission to imagine – even just for a few seconds – the kind of life you’d have or the way you’d feel if your life was so great that you would have no desire to engage in the behavior that’s concerning you now. Would you be happier and more accepting of yourself? Feel freer and more alive? And what might you be doing – getting out more, connecting with people, taking more care of (and time for) yourself? Would you be helping others, making a difference, growing new work, dating more, or entering a new relationship? (There are no right answers here, just the ones that are true for you.) Watch how you start to feel when you think about these things. But better yet, have someone else ask you these questions one at a time so you get really present to your answers. Don’t get stuck into just reading words.

After imagining that way for a short time, then what happens? Does something in your mind try to cut you off by saying, “Hey wait a minute, you can’t do that.” Or, “Dream on; you’ll never be able to have that.” Or, “This exercise makes me feel bad, because I can never accomplish my dreams.” If that kind of thinking pops up, don’t worry about it.

It’s simply the ‘old and comfortable’ part of your mind reacting to being taken out of its comfort zone. We’ll get into how to deal with that soon enough.

## **Honor Your Feelings**

What I’ve come to learn, after years of avoiding them, is that our feelings might be our soul or our conscience speaking to us. If we’re having thoughts or acting in the direction of what we don’t want – or if these are coming from a place of fear, desperation or scarcity – then we are going to feel bad. But that bad feeling is God, spirit or our conscience letting us know that we’re not on track with the life we really want.

Feelings themselves are neither good nor bad, although we label them that way. They're actually a gift; an opportunity to make a different choice. For example, if we're feeling restless, irritable, discontented or uncomfortable, as soon as we notice those feelings, it's an opportunity to say: "Hey, I'm off. Something I'm thinking or doing is making me feel bad. What would make me feel better, stronger or happier right now?" Through practice, the sooner we start to notice our "off" feelings, the sooner we can start to do something that makes us feel better. In other words, if we notice our uncomfortable feelings now, we don't have to wait our whole life (or until we get a serious illness, disease or accident) to change.

This awareness has become a key one for me. It's the way I've started to live my life. I'm certainly not doing it perfectly. Every day there will be times when I'm not feeling great, and have those moments, like everyone, when I'm feeling off. But what I try and do now is to pause and ask myself: "What am I doing or thinking about right now that has me feeling this way?" "Where in my life am I avoiding taking responsibility for the results I'm getting and do not like?" And when I get some clues into what that is, I sometimes make a decision to choose differently.

### **Like Magnets...**

Our thoughts and feelings are like magnets, on different levels or vibrations. If our thoughts (and feelings) are at a low vibration, like hatred, resentment or violence – "I'm upset with what the world's done to me, I hate this person, or I want to kick the \_\_\_ out of someone" – then we're going to attract into our experience more experiences and people that are on that vibration. Similarly, the more positive, energetic and loving/giving we are, the more we will meet people and situations that reflect this.

For me, this explains why people who leave abusive relationships often attract the

same thing in their next one. Like a man attracting a new gal, someone they thought was perfect, who turns out to be abusive as well. And, why this often happens time after time after time. “Why does every single person I attract seem like my first wife?” he might ask. It’s that he’s still on that same vibrational ‘plane of thinking’ inside, and therefore attracting the same kinds of people and circumstances into his life. In order for real change to occur, there needs to be an ‘entire psychic change’ within. And what does that entire psychic change look like? You move from a thought life of blaming, complaining, and seeing yourself as a victim, to focusing on more positive thoughts and seeing yourself as being responsible for your life experience, and then creating what you do want.

### **True for All of Us...**

Like vibration attracts like vibration. And we’re all doing it. It’s a statement about humanity. Whether we believe it or not, we are always attracting people and experiences that are in alignment with the vibrational level of our primary thoughts and feelings.

This is also what keeps us stuck in our unproductive habits, self-limiting beliefs and addictions. Our conscious and unconscious thoughts keep drawing these experiences to us. It happens in so many different and unexpected ways that we think we have no choice; that we’re doomed to live that way or we’re powerless to change. But looked at from a larger perspective, it’s really just one of the ‘laws of life’ operating in exactly the way it’s supposed to.

So what does it take to shift the results we’re getting and the experiences we are attracting? It takes applying what I described at the beginning of this chapter: Start thinking about ‘the other way’— what it would be like to live without our unwanted habits. Think more and more often about what attracts you—feelings and experiences like personal freedom and power, prosperity and love, gratitude and how great people are, about all the new ways that life can be. Focus on the

positive aspects of life and eventually, as your thinking and behavior changes more consistently in those directions, you will attract those kinds of people and experiences that we really want.

Now then... it's one thing to say that. But I also know that from where you may be standing, that's a pretty major stretch. Right? In fact, it probably seems almost, if not entirely, impossible. So all I'm going to ask you to do is this: Please don't dismiss the idea entirely. Keep an open mind to it.

### **Two Keys to Change: Release and Redirect**

Most of us don't find it easy to change our thinking. It's kind of like the air we breathe; it's so natural to us that whatever thoughts come to us seem like "just the way we are." That's why shifting our focus from what's wrong, bad or negative about ourselves, our lives and our habits will take time and practice. It will also take some new 'habits of thinking' that most of us aren't used to as yet. So let me describe what I mean by that.

1) Whatever kind of habit, compulsion or addiction you have at the moment, it's there because you are actually holding on to it and won't let it go. I don't mean that in a harsh or judgmental way. You simply don't realize that by your continuous thinking about it, you're actually holding on to it.

The reasons you're holding on could be many. Perhaps you felt hurt at some time in your life and are using this habit to reduce the pain; or you developed a negative belief or image about yourself and this behavior helped you to feel better. Maybe your habit makes you feel so much better than you normally do, and you haven't found anything else to make you feel as good; or you feel so negative about yourself that you keep using this behavior to avoid those other feelings. I'll explore some of these later on, and give you opportunities to reflect,

reinterpret and let them go. However, what's important right now is that your continual thinking about your habit is what's keeping it with you.

2) In order to be free of your habit, you're going to have to let go of those thoughts and consciously focus on something that has nothing to do with your "bad habit," and has a higher vibrational feeling. However, you can't force yourself to do this. It has to be a 'free choice.'

3) "So how do I stop myself thinking about what I'm thinking about?" Well, you can't. When we try to stop ourselves from thinking about something, we're actually giving more attention, thought or energy to it. It's like the statement, "Try not to think of a pink elephant." By trying not to, you often can't help but do it.

And that's how we get stuck. By trying harder and harder, we get even more stuck. And that's insanity: Doing more and more of something we think will bring us a desired result, but doesn't. Yet we keep on doing it. In fact, with our habits it's not only NOT getting us the result we want, it's actually locking in our thoughts and feelings further, and creating the opposite experience from what we're intending. That's even more "insane."

4) So how do we shift our thinking? It starts with *awareness* and *noticing* what our thoughts are in the moment.

I'd like to illustrate this by one of my marathon experiences. After I got 'injured,' whenever I'd run I would start to experience some pain in my knee. As soon as I'd feel it, my thinking would be something like, "Oh shoot, it's there again." Or, "Oh \$()&%^, here we go again." I knew better; I was already somewhat aware of the power of our thoughts and beliefs. But it's the way our mind works. When we feel powerless, that's where our thoughts go – to our problem. As a result, I'd begin to focus on my pain again. And I would keep thinking that way for 5, 10, even 20



minutes – until some part of my mind would say, “I’m doing it again! I’m focusing on the pain being an injury. Enough already!”

The reason I tell that story is, it’s about awareness. My intention before running was to watch my thoughts, to see when I was focusing on the pain, and shift it when I was able to. But being a beginner at thinking this way, my mind kept forgetting. So that was my experience: I’d remember, then I’d forget. I’d realize what I was doing, and then I’d forget again. That’s what’s so crazy about our thoughts. You can be right in the thinking pattern that’s keeping you stuck, and not even know that you’re in it. But as soon as you notice it, you’re beginning to turn it around.

So that’s stage one: Watch it, notice it. Pay attention to whenever you’re doing your habit, or are thinking about it.

5) When you notice that you’re doing or thinking about your habit, use this as an opportunity to re-direct your thoughts onto something else, that is at a higher vibration.

Almost anything will work here. You could focus on your gratitude for something in your life, like your dog, your kids, your spouse or partner. In my earlier recovery days, I’d think about being able to help another addict. More recently, I have envisioned my book being read, or being in schools and teaching kids about unwanted habits. And when I’m running my marathons, one focus that works well for me is the thought of being ‘injury free.’

The key is to redirect our thoughts onto something we want or appreciate, instead of focusing on what we don’t want or on what upsets us. So it’s not saying to ourselves, “I’ve got to stop thinking about my problem, and here’s why.” It’s about choosing thoughts that actually make us feel better inside. Even if you don’t feel that way immediately, at least you’re moving in the right direction – of

putting your focus on something other than your habit, what you don't want, or trying to stop thinking about what you don't want. (Got that? <smile>) The more we give our thoughts in this positive direction, the more we begin to build our new muscles of thinking. And the more that will bring us positive experiences within.

6) It's also important, when you notice yourself choosing more empowering thoughts, to acknowledge yourself. We spend so much time thinking about what we're do "wrong" or trying to correct and fix ourselves, that acknowledging what's "right" is a significant step in creating this new mindset. Give yourself credit and appreciation for making progress. Just like the whales, you too need positive reinforcement. So start noticing what you ARE doing, instead of fighting yourself for what you're not doing.

### **We Can't Fight It and Win**

How many of us have ever tried to fight our addictive habit so we can overcome it? It seems like such a natural thing to do. We think that *need* to fight it – to have more willpower, to be better people, to somehow find a way to control our behavior – so we will win the battle over our habit or addiction. But does it really work? Logic would make us say "yes." But many experts say "no."

When we "fight addictions" or habits, we are actually giving them more energy. The more we think about them, the worse we feel and the more we keep fueling them and perhaps even causing them to persist. The same is also true on a societal level. Think about the "the war on drugs." That started back in the 1970s, but how's it going? Are there more drug problems or fewer since we declared war on it?

Now consider the ways we try to deal with our unwanted habits and addictions. Whether we are thinking about doing them or not doing them, the focus is still on *doing it* so we give it power. We worry about them and resist them. We scold,

criticize and beat ourselves up for doing what we're doing. We try to blame or guilt ourselves into better behavior. Or we have well-meaning people in our lives who remind us to "stop for our own good." In other words, they bring more attention to that which we want to stop and by doing so, unintentionally add more fuel to the fire.

So what's the result? We focus even more on the problem we want to get rid of. By giving it energy, it grows in our minds. This makes us feel even worse, so we do the behavior again and again to get the "peace, comfort and relief" we need, even though we know there will be consequences. And eventually we develop the belief that we are *powerless* against it. It's definitely a vicious circle.

Eckhart Tolle once said "One of the main tasks of the mind is to fight or remove the emotional pain, which is one of the reasons for its incessant activity, but all it can ever achieve is to cover it up temporarily. In fact, the harder the mind struggles to get rid of the pain, the greater the pain"

Consider the view point that it is not that we are powerless against our unwanted habits or addictions, it is that we are so powerful, our thoughts are so powerful that we are actually the one keeping the thing that is unwanted in our lives alive. By redirecting our thoughts (and actions) away from the unwanted behavior entirely, and more in the direction of what you do want and what makes you feel good, the energy you were giving the unwanted habit starts to lessen.

This is why I believe we can't "fight" ours or anyone else's habits and addictions and ultimately win. Yet that's what most of us are trying to do.

### **Seeking Outside or Growing Inside**

Earlier I said that when we engage in our unwanted habits and addictions, what we're doing is seeking outside of ourselves for something to make us feel better. That is, some kind of habit, substance, behavior or experience that will move us in the direction of the better feelings that we all want and need.

What I'm talking about now is shifting that source of "power to make us feel better" from outside to inside. In other words, starting to grow choices and habits of thinking, feeling and behaving will make us feel better from the inside out. I'll be the first to admit that it doesn't work overnight. But each step we take in that direction builds this experience within us. And it's these positive experiences that will eventually lead us to release our old habits, and replace them with new ones that make us feel better about ourselves and our lives.

**"Without a vision, the people perish."**

Frequently, when we think about something we don't want, we're actually not choosing our thoughts at all. We've just fallen back into our old, habitual ways of thinking – a sort of mental stuck-ness, where we keep running the same thoughts over and over and over. It's our unconscious programming. However, choosing our thoughts means focusing our mind (gently, but firmly) on what we *want* to experience within and in our life.

It's like the book title, *Think and Grow Rich*. That is a perfect title to describe how we can actively choose our thoughts – instead of letting them go automatically to what we normally think about, which for most of us is scarcity or not having enough. The idea is simple; however, it's the practice and mastering of it that seems so hard.

Let me give you another example to demonstrate what I'm saying...

**The Power of Not Choosing Our Thoughts...**

I was in Florida recently to run a couple of marathons. It was 80-degree weather almost every day, and just beautiful. It was my first holiday in a long time; an opportunity to be away from everything, to read a good book, and sharpen the saw. It was a perfect vacation.

At the end of my holiday, I drove to Tampa so I could return my rental car and catch my plane the next morning. Soon as I stepped into the airport, I got a cold. And on the flight home, I began to feel rotten. I also started eating all kinds of junk food, like potato chips, cola, chocolate; all the stuff I've told myself I don't want to eat. While I didn't make myself wrong for it – I just noticed it and kind of smiled at myself – because I knew what was happening and why.

My unhealthy food choices were impacted, and possibly caused by, the future I was living into.

When I was 'living into' the future of going to Florida, running marathons, experiencing the sunshine, the warmth, the beauty, and having time away, I was feeling great. I was eating well and taking care of myself. But when I got onto that plane and was heading home to mounting bills, "needing" to find more work, and no more marathons for over a month, I began living into a different future. Now my thinking was more like, "It's a cold winter there. My holidays are up. And I don't want to go. Why do I have to go home? I'd rather be here." I felt restless, irritable and discontented. And I wanted something to escape that – something quick and easy that would not require the work or discipline of choosing my thoughts.

The easy way to do that in the moment was to eat some junk food – and give myself a temporary 'feel good.' The more challenging way (though it didn't occur to me then) would have been to say to myself, "Okay Scott, what empowering thoughts could you create here? Now that you're going home, what kind of thinking could you choose that would inspire you?" Instead of that, my mind went to what I didn't want (to be going back home), or to what was easy, familiar and comfortable (like eating junk food). But I wasn't really 'choosing my thoughts' at all.

## Choosing a Future to Live Into...

That reminds me of a story I heard some years ago, about how they catch monkeys for zoos.

Trappers take a small cage into the jungle, and inside the cage they place a bunch of bananas. When a monkey comes along and spots the bananas, it will reach through one of the narrow openings in the cage and grab one. However, because the banana is bigger than the hole he's put his hand through, the monkey can't get the banana out. No matter how hard he tries, he simply cannot pull his hand out while holding on to the banana.

When the trappers return, the monkey is caught in a dilemma. If he would just let go of the banana, he could pull out his hand, run away and be free. However, because he wants the banana so much, he won't let go – and is easily caught.

Our mind is a lot like that monkey – and our problems are like those bananas. We think about them and we think about them. We think about how to stop them. We think about what's wrong with us that we can't stop them. We think about what got us into them. We think about what others did to get us into them. And we think about trying to stop thinking about them... Yet all the while, we're still holding on to the 'banana.' No matter how hard we try, the *result* is that we keep holding onto our problems. However, the only way we'll ultimately be able to let the problems go is by letting go of that thinking – and focusing on being free. And that's the future we need to live into.

### **“Let Go and Let God”**

In the 12 steps, there's a principle called, “Let go and let God.” (If you don't believe in or agree with the idea of God, don't sweat it. Use another term that works for you: higher power, true self, inner wisdom, whatever.)

For me, what that statement reflects is the same principle I've been talking about here: Letting go of focusing on our problem. In other words, releasing our attachment to and thinking about it; letting go of fighting it or trying to change ourselves; and shifting our focus on to what we feel our 'higher will' is for us. It's also letting go of whatever we've done in the past and beginning to trust in the process. Like making amends or apologies. Being honest. Helping other people...

At their roots, the 12 steps are also about redirecting our thoughts and our actions in a completely different direction from our problem. In fact, that's even stated in the program. I've often heard it said something like this: *Have you ever noticed that, out of 12 steps, there's only one step that even mentions your actual addiction? It's Step One: to admit that you're powerless over your addiction.* The concept is that if you admit you're powerless over it, then you can stop fighting it. And your mind will start to let go of that banana...

Whether you want to use the 12 steps or not is up to you. It's useful for some people, though not everyone. All I'm pointing out here is that it uses some of the core principles to help people shift their thinking. By taking the focus off of our problems and redirecting our thoughts and behavior towards the future and the experience we want, we will develop new, healthier habits and create a more empowering life.

It's about both redirecting and releasing. That is, thinking about what we want AND letting go of what we're thinking about and doing now. However, like that monkey, many of us don't like to let go – even if the pressure to change, or the pain from the consequences of what we're doing now is great. That part of our mind likes what's familiar and comfortable. It would rather not change. It's uncertain what the future holds (especially if we're not actively choosing it). And it's afraid of letting go of what we're thinking or doing right now.

So don't force yourself... Instead, choose one area where you can begin thinking in new ways. Choose one tiny action you can do today to move in a direction you want to go. And begin there. Do it today, do it tomorrow, do it the next day... and soon it will become a new habit.

### **Letting Go of Negativity**

Here's another tip for recognizing the bananas that you may be holding on to.

Many people who experience unwanted or destructive habits have a lot of negative thinking going on inside, thinking that they're often not aware of. For example, they might focus a lot on what's wrong with other people. This could include blaming, complaining or criticizing others in their family, at work or in the world. They may frequently give advice to or try to fix others (or one person in particular). Or they may continually be trying to correct, improve or fix themselves.

If any of these hit close to home, just know that I'm not trying to point fingers at you specifically. Millions of people fit that description! Once again, it's simply like the air we breathe or the water we drink. It's part of being human. And most of us aren't even aware that we're doing it.

That's why we need to notice it – and realize the impact it's having on our life. Why? Because any frequent or continuous focusing on what's wrong (or "negativity") will fuel bad feelings within us. With that comes a desire to escape those feelings, by seeking for something that will make us feel better.

I'm not telling you to give up focusing on what's wrong completely, or that you should never have a negative thought. You're human. I'm simply saying that we all have a 'habit' of thinking that way. Can you see the value of developing a new habit – of choosing to see events and people more positively, acknowledging



others more often for the good they do, or looking at what's right in your life and being grateful? Would that be a habit worth developing?"

One positive thought alone isn't going to dramatically alter your feelings. But it's a *starting point*. It's one practical step you can take. And by doing it many times, it will grow that new habit or muscle within you. That's why each chosen thought makes a difference.

The same thing applies to our behaviors. I don't tell people to stop doing their habits or addictions, simply because I know that won't happen; it's not practical or realistic. They've been saying that to themselves already. Instead, I might invite them to start counting and observing their habit by asking themselves, "How often am I doing this today?"

That question brings the habit more to mind, instead of it being mostly unconscious. People get to see or notice themselves doing it, but without having to judge it. "Oh, there's one. And there's another..." Then if they want to, they can begin to take small steps towards the goal they want to achieve. "I'm smoking 100 cigarettes a day right now, and I'd like to stop smoking altogether. Why don't I start with smoking one less today?"

This approach is one of the things that helped me stop smoking. My program also included drinking water to replace the need to smoke, as well as doing a little exercise, and growing other new habits.

*Whatever your habit is now, think about what goal you would like to reach or where you ideally would like to be. Next, start observing and counting how often you do your habit. And after a few days, ask yourself: What ridiculously small amount could I reduce that by, today? Do that for a few days, then ask yourself that question again. Keep doing that and see what happens with your habit.*

## **Fearing the Future We're Living into Now...**

When I began marathon running and hurt my knee, I believed that it was a physical injury that would only get worse as I ran more. "Injuries always get worse. And eventually you're done," was the belief I held (without knowing it) in the back of my mind. And that's what was happening.

Whenever I would run again and feel that pain, the same thought reoccurred for me. "This is going to get worse. My injury is going to get worse." As I continued to run and the pain grew, I believed (again, mostly unconsciously) that eventually the injury would be so bad that the pain would be excruciating. And once again, that's what happened. The more I ran, the more painful it got. My mind began imagining that soon I might not be able to walk, let alone run. And that was the "future" I was living into.

One day during a marathon, a fellow runner was running past me. He looked over at me, in obvious agony – but instead of feeling sorry for me, he smiled. He then slowed down, moved in beside me and said three words: "It's only pain."

"It's only pain? You're \*#\*&%!\* right it's pain," I said to myself. Then I thought about it again: "It's only pain? What do you mean by that?" What came to me after that was this realization: "Yes, it's only pain. But it doesn't mean that I'm going to be more injured or unable to walk. It's just pain..." And in that moment, my thinking shifted and I began to look at my pain differently.

Now as I felt the pain, I would say to myself. "Hey, I feel that – but it's only pain. It's only pain!" Yes, my leg was still sore; yet the pain didn't scare me as much because I was no longer interpreting it in the same negative way. Soon I began to run 'into' it, to test what it felt like in my body. And I even began to laugh at it.

At one point along the way, I whipped out my cellphone and called my writer. “Hey, I’m in the midst of a marathon,” I said to him as I jogged along. “I’ve got this article I want to write. It’s going to be called, ‘It’s only pain.’” I then proceeded to tell him about my experience with the other runner, and what I was now feeling as I ran. Sure it still hurt. But as I talked to him I was laughing, even jubilant at times, because I realized “it was only pain!” We spoke for close to an hour, if I recall correctly – yet all the time I was still running.

When I completed the race, I was definitely still in pain. But I was also in perhaps the best psychological shape I’d been in for a long time. We later wrote an article about my experience. And after that, the idea of my knee pain no longer limited or scared me the way it had before. You can read that article on my website [www.powerofchoice.org](http://www.powerofchoice.org)

When that guy said to me, “It’s only pain,” he had interrupted or reframed my whole pattern of devastating thinking. Not only had my pain been getting progressively worse, but so had my thinking. In my mind I was suffering more, more and more. But when he said, “It’s only pain” and smiled, it shook up the meaning I had been giving to it and the future I was creating in my mind. I had been living into a future of devastation. And what he was effectively saying to me was, “Don’t do that. It’s only pain. It doesn’t have to mean you’re going to be injured or crippled. Pain is simply part of the process.” And from that moment on, I started becoming free of my injury.

***A belief is just a thought we keep thinking.***

— Abraham/Esther Hicks

### **Redirecting My Attention – Big Time!**

In the first marathon I ever ran, I remember reaching a point where I was in so much pain that I was barely able to walk. I was close to being last, and wondered if I’d even be able to finish. Then the people on the street, who were watching the

marathon, began cheering me on. And it blew me away. Eventually I got so filled with gratitude for them that my thoughts were no longer focused on the pain. These had shifted to gratefulness and love for the people around me. With that, the experience in my mind and body changed and I began to run again. For the previous half hour I had only been able to walk, and now all of a sudden I was running. And that's how I finished the race.

That was my first experience of consciously 'releasing and redirecting' while running, and it came without trying to do it. It just happened.

In my races since then, the experience of love, support and encouragement from my running buddies, the volunteers and the people on the street has become enormous. Every time, this experience of 'community' fills me up and helps me to finish each race.

What I now tell people who ask about my running is, "I don't really like to run marathons. I like to finish them." There are many things that contribute to that. I like the clear-mindedness I get along the way. And the physical exhaustion – that feeling of having given everything I've got – that comes after every marathon. But what motivates me most is the experience of community.

Yes, I still feel pain along the way and my body is sore after running for 6, 8, 12, even 19 hours in a row. But that's no longer what I focus on. Now what I think about is how I'm going to feel at the end of each run; the joy, gratitude and love, the feeling of being supported, encouraged and sustained by others.

These are the kinds of feelings that have helped me replace the 'high' I used to get from my addictions and unhealthy habits. I also get them from helping others – and that's why, at every chance I get, I work with kids in schools, with families, with adults one-on-one and with organizations. It's feelings like these that keep me running – and helping others – for many years to come.

## **To Sum It All Up...**

When you put all the pieces together that I've been talking about, here's what "attracting, releasing and redirecting" look like in practice:

First, notice your "habit" and see how often you do it. Notice your habit again, and watch your disempowering thoughts & feelings about it and yourself. Notice it again, but don't make yourself wrong. Notice it, and then start to focus on what's right.

Notice your habit, and begin to see how you've been living in a comfort zone. Notice it, and notice what meaning you've been giving to it. Notice it, and see what "future" your mind is living into. Notice it again, and think about the future you would like to create. Notice it, and take a few small steps in the direction you want to go.

Taking those steps is going to feel uncomfortable, because you're so used to thinking, feeling and acting in old ways. So notice that discomfort, and continue keeping your commitment to doing these new steps. Notice how you start to feel inside, as you keep your word to yourself, judge yourself less, and think of others more positively. Notice how it feels to begin creating the future you want. And notice as these start to become habits, and begin to attract new thoughts, feelings, people and circumstances into your life.

Next, notice what happens as you try other new behaviors, like possibly helping other people and connecting with community. Notice how the good feelings inside of you start to grow. Notice how you feel stronger and are beginning to enjoy the progress you're making. Notice how the desire to do more new things naturally comes up inside you. And from there, keep on growing....

## A Habit Replacement Program

I've often said that what I teach is really a "habit replacement" program.

You first notice the old habits that make you feel bad, those habits that are common to anyone who gets dependent or addicted to anything. Thinking negatively, blaming and complaining, and seeing yourself as hopeless. Not keeping your word to others and yourself. Eating junk food, feeling lethargic and doing whatever is comfortable. Looking outside yourself for something else to make you feel better. Even if you're not "addicted" to anything, many of these are the same habits that come with living an unsuccessful or unfulfilled life.

However, instead of fighting the problem or yourself, the second step is replacing these with habits that take you in the direction of Peace. Like being responsible. Being the creator. Not seeing yourself as a victim. Choosing your thoughts. Making apologies to people you've hurt. Making small commitments to yourself and keeping them. Even doing a minute of exercise or drinking a bottle-cap full of water each day... anything that takes you out of your familiar habits and comfort zone.

So, what's it like developing new habits? It's uncomfortable for a while, because you're doing things that you're not used to doing and your mind doesn't like that. Like noticing your habit when you'd rather not think about it. Starting to choose your thoughts, rather than letting your mind stay in its rut of worrying and complaining. But it's "only pain," right? It doesn't need to stop you. Even as you start doing the things you say you really want – like initiating new relationships, starting a new job, earning more money or being more successful – those can be uncomfortable too. It's easier to play it safe and not be rejected, than to initiate something new and risk failing or being different.

This is a journey of change. And what it's really about is this: Moving from whatever you've been avoiding – the pain and fear of the past, the unfulfilled life you're living right now, or the greatness you've always wanted but been afraid to look at – and heading towards the life you really want. Because if you're not living into that life, you'll eventually be looking for some habit or substance to make you feel better, and help you avoid listening to and feeling the restless, irritable and discontented feelings inside.

It's like the person who's in an abusive relationship. Inside, they know they shouldn't be with the other person, yet it feels too scary to be alone. So they justify or rationalize staying where they are. That doesn't mean they like it. But it seems easier or more comfortable than change.

That same fear of change is facing each of us, right now, in one part of our lives or another. Personal growth trainer and coach Bob Proctor calls it the "terror barrier." We'd rather stay where we are, with what's familiar, instead of moving ahead and going through our own terror barrier to the life we'd like to live.

I know that crossing that barrier is uncomfortable. It certainly has been for me. So what I've tried to do is develop the simplest possible steps that will help you get through it. Ridiculously small steps, of thought, feeling and action, that will bring you good feelings almost immediately, reinforce your new habits, and expand your desire to keep growing. And because I did it, I know that you can too...

### **Helping others in a way that works**

*"Love is the ability and willingness to allow those that you care for to be what they choose for themselves, without any insistence that they satisfy you." - Wayne Dyer*

Sometimes people call or come to see me about someone in their life who has a serious habit which they label an addiction. It might be their child or spouse,

another family member, a friend or co-worker. Hearing them talk, I can tell how much they want to help this person change. Yet what they're doing just doesn't seem to be working.

As I listen more closely, or watch them interact with the person they're concerned about, it becomes obvious what's happening. Underneath their desire to help, they're actually trying to fix or control the person they care about. As a result, the other person isn't feeling loved or accepted as they are. They're feeling pressured to change. Their resistance is growing. Both parties are feeling frustrated. And nothing much is being accomplished.

If any of this rings true for you, I'd like to share some insights into how you can be more effective in helping someone who's important to you.

### **Insight #1: It's Not YOUR Choice**

Let me use an example of parents and kids to show what happens. When an adult comes to me with their child, often the parent believes that they are the one 'in charge.' Their language and attitude sound something like this: "I know what's best. This is what my child should be doing. And I'm upset or frustrated that they're not doing it."

Here's what I need to gently keep telling them until they get it. "You actually have no control over your child. You think you do. You may even use your authority or power to get them to do what you want. But whatever they do is *their choice*. They might lie about it to get you off their back. They might conform to please you (though underneath they resent it). But the truth is, you have no power over them. They are going to do whatever they are going to do."

When we try to control someone else – especially a person who's hurting inside and exhibiting unwanted habits – we are actually contributing to their feeling worse about themselves. Our judgment or criticism adds to their negative thoughts and feelings, and makes them want to escape those even more. And the way they do that is through their destructive habit.



So here's the paradox. Out of love or concern for your child (or someone else in your life), you want to stop them from doing their behavior because it's having negative consequences. Yet your worrying, criticism and control are adding to their pain and bad feelings. So *your fear about what will happen to them* might actually be provoking them to do their habit even more! Strange, isn't it?

Now please don't misinterpret this. I am NOT saying that it is wrong to care about or be concerned for someone else. What I am saying is that there are better ways to help.

### **Insight #2: Most of Us HATE Being Controlled**

When you try to control someone who has a bad habit or an addiction, it sets off alarm bells inside them. (I know this from personal experience.) You see, we already KNOW we have a problem. We've tried our best to control it, and have failed. Your trying to fix us only reminds us of that; and being told what to do makes us even more sensitive and resistant. All this just locks in our behavior even more. And it becomes a vicious circle...

I've come to believe that the choice to change has to be 100% our own for it to be successful. That means nobody is trying to make us do something. There's no pressure, force, guilt, manipulation or intimidation behind it. So when we "authentically choose" new behaviors, it comes honestly from inside of us.

What I've found, time after time after time, is that when people are pressured to change they often relapse or go back to their old habits. But when people freely choose for themselves, there's a higher probability that they're going to succeed at developing new habits.

So what can you do to help someone make this decision for themselves?

### **Insight #3: Redirect *Your* Thinking**

When you criticize someone or try to correct their problem – or find yourself thinking about how bad it is – you are focusing attention on it. The more you do

this, the more you are going to attract thoughts and experiences that show you “how bad it is.” And the problem will grow in *your* consciousness as well.

To help them, what you need to do is make the same kind of shift I talked about earlier – from focusing on what you *don't* want to what you *do* want. And here again is how that works.

Whenever you notice yourself having negative thoughts about someone else's behavior, gently redirect your attention from what you're worried about to what you want to see. For example, begin to look for the positive aspects in the situation. See the good in what the other person is doing (like steps they're already taking to deal with their habit). Or try seeing their behavior as the best way they know how, at this moment, to make themselves feel better. You will know that you've shifted your thinking when *you* feel better inside.

As you do this regularly, your vibration and behavior will start to change. You'll become easier to be around. You'll say things that are more understanding. The other person will feel more accepted, and may start sharing what's going on for them. In both conscious and unconscious ways, your thoughts will begin attracting and creating what you want.

#### **Insight #4: 'Stimulate Their Wanting'**

This is a brilliant insight that comes from the work of Abraham-Hicks. When you want to encourage a new behavior in someone else, “stimulate the wanting of the other.” What that means is, help them grow the motivation and desire *within themselves* to go towards what they most want.

That doesn't happen by pointing out what they're doing wrong. This simply stimulates their thinking about what's wrong and what they don't want. So go the other way...

Look for behaviors in the other person that you want to support, encourage and reinforce. (It's like the whale trainers I described earlier.) Ask about what truly makes them feel good inside, what kind of life they'd like to live, and how they

would feel if they were. In helping them focus on what's positive for them, you'll contribute to raising their vibrations – and your own at the same time.

'Stimulating the wanting of others' is also what I do in my coaching. For example, I'll say to someone: "Just imagine that you don't have your unwanted habit or addiction any more. It's gone. Now what would you want? What would you want your life to look like?" If I were to just say, "Hey, drugs are bad. Don't do that," their logical response would be, "Yeah, but what am I going to replace them with?" That's why stimulating their desire for something better is so much more effective.

One of my 12 steps sponsors once told me, "I used to love heroin so much, I had to find something more powerful than that in order to stop. And I did. It's called God." What he was saying was that he needed a power even greater than heroin to make him feel better, and that's what worked for him. But what that 'higher power' or source of good feelings is will be different for each of us. It's whatever creates that "entire psychic change" within us that shifts how we look at, feel about and live into our life.

### **Insight #5: "What Makes You Light Up?"**

Here are a few more coaching tips, if you want to help someone you care about.

First, picture a different goal or outcome in *your* mind. Rather than stopping them doing something that they want, see yourself as helping them discover something they *want to do even more*. (Remember, we ALL want to feel better and more alive.)

Second, a good way to stimulate their desire is to be straight and honest with them. "Unless we can find a new life for you that is much more enjoyable than the pleasure and comfort you get from what you're doing now, you're just going to keep going back to it. So what I'd like to do – if you're willing – is to help you imagine a brand new future, one that would be so inspiring, and light you up so

much, that you'd be willing to go beyond your comfort zone to get it." (That's my language. Find what's true and inspiring for you.)

Third, another way to stimulate that vision is to help them reflect on the past, and remember their hopes and dreams. You could approach it this way: "If you were to look back in your life, was there a time when you started to feel more negative or resigned? Just before that, what were your dreams? Was there something you loved, that you gave up on? Tell me what you really wanted back then."

If you see their interest growing, ask: "Do you remember what it felt like when you thought that anything was possible? Like when you were going to start your own business... be an artist... or change the world?" (Use examples that fit for them.) "Are those dreams you still have?" (They might not be, since we all change. But at least it starts them thinking into the world of possibility.) "Do you still want that, or is there something else you would like to do?"

It's an amazing feeling to have a vision and go after it. Yes, it's painful if we don't succeed. But the real pain comes from giving up on our dreams, never finding them again, or not giving ourselves permission to live them.

Tony Robbins says, "Communication is the response you get." So if the other person clearly isn't connecting with what you're saying, try a different approach. "If these words don't mean much to you, what questions – if I were to ask them – would trip a switch inside you, light your eyes, excite your being and thrill your soul? You know what I'm talking about. You probably already have the question inside of you, but some part of you doesn't want to say it. I just want to help you open that door. What would you really like to do?"

Suppose the person opened up at this point and said, "Well, I've always wanted to own a yoga studio. Help people with illness. Make sure everyone has enough food to eat. Or help people earn more money to help their families." Whatever they say, *honor their response*. Even if you think it's impossible, encourage them. You asked – now they're telling you their truth. So ask them to tell you more.

The more you help them open up whatever they've been hiding – perhaps because they didn't think it was possible either – the more you'll be helping them take the first steps to releasing their habits or addictions, and living the life they truly want.

### **Insight #6: Be the Change You Want to See**

Another powerful way to make a difference with someone else is by looking at YOU.

I believe that we are like mirrors for each other. When someone is doing something that bothers us, it reflects something in us that we are uncomfortable with. Our reaction is usually to fix, change or control the other person. But this is actually a way of avoiding what's going on in us.

When I work with parents who are concerned about their kids' addictions, I encourage them to look at what's going on in their own lives. To consider, with full confidentiality and anonymity, what unproductive habits, compulsive behaviors or addictions of their own that they could be responsible for transforming. And then I teach them new habits that they can use for themselves.

Some people are quite shocked to find that their habit has to do with trying to dominate, bully or control others (especially their kids) – in order to gain a false sense of control in their own life. But this is very common. Many of us use fixing others as a way of avoiding being responsible for our own choices and actions. However, this is where our true power lies.

By reclaiming your hopes and dreams, and transforming *your* unwanted habits and 'powerless' thinking, you will become an authentic example for others. Ironically, you will also be making the biggest difference possible for the people you care about – when you shift from “fixing” them to growing and expanding yourself.

Ghandi once said, “Be the change you want to see in the world.” Well I like to adapt that by saying it this way: “Be the change you want to see in someone else.”

## CHAPTER FIVE

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### **An Interpretation of the Meaning of Addiction**

Some authorities say we've become a society full of compulsive thinking and behavior. From our "gotta get it, gotta have it" advertising to our obsessive focus on celebrities, our 'need' to phone, text, surf or watch videos *while driving* to our hunger for more food, energy, sex, entertainment or shopping – i.e. anything that will give us instant gratification, make us feel better, or escape pain or discomfort – many of us are caught up in activities that we are having trouble controlling.

These addictive or compulsive behaviors – or whatever you want to call them - are happening all over – in our schools, our workplaces, our homes, families and the media. And those who have responsibility for dealing with such issues – like parents, teachers, managers, doctors or counselors – are all having difficulty knowing what to do.

So which ones are actually addictions, and which are just bad habits? And does it matter? How much control or choice do we really have over our behaviors? And even when we feel "powerless," is there something we can still do to recover, change or develop healthier habits? Those are just some of the questions I'll be exploring in the pages ahead.

#### **There IS a *Lot* of Confusion**

When we talk about "addictions," we enter a world of great confusion. Why? Because even experts can't agree on what that word actually means.

Recently, I took an addictions course at a local college. (My skills in this field come out of my own experiences, decades of reading/self study, and working directly with addicts and people with destructive habits. So I thought it was about time to

get a little “formal training” in the field.) In the first chapter of the text book for my first class, called “Addiction Intervention Strategies,” it says, “...the terms “addictive” and “addiction,” and the related term “alcoholism,” will generally be avoided, because they have no agreed definitions...”

And that somehow did not surprise me...because in my reading over many years, I have seen exactly the same thing. From everyday people, self-confessed addicts, authorities and experts to PhDs and medical doctors, everyone seems to have a different perspective. Some see it as a disease. Others see it as a brain issue. Some say it's a choice, while others say it's not. There are many who say we're powerless, and many others who say we're not. Some experts suggest it is caused by abuse and neglect, others say its genetics and other biological factors, still others say it is caused by conditioning and other social-environmental factors.

If anything, it can leave one feeling a bit helpless – to know what's right, who to believe, or what to do!

That's why, in the next chapter, I'll be describing some of these different perspectives and views. What you'll discover, as I did, is that there isn't just “one truth” about addictions. There are many. What's more, the line between addictions and habits is not as black and white as one would think. Many experts see it more like a continuum, a spectrum. And these insights give us the opportunity to make more choices and conclusions for ourselves. There isn't just one way of dealing with our habits and addictions; once again, there are many.

I'd also like you to remember one very important thing. If all this “addiction” talk does not resonate with you, it is totally ok to skip the next chapter. While most of the authorities/experts I've quoted use the language of “addictions,” that doesn't mean I'm trying to convince you that you have one. That decision is ultimately up to you.



If the word “Addiction,” does have personal significance to you, then the next section will show you 1) the many different perspectives, and 2) the connections, among what the experts are saying.

If the word “Addiction,” does NOT have personal significance to you, you can still get value for yourself in the next section by mentally substituting the word “addiction” for whatever unwanted habits or behaviors you (or a person you are concerned about) is dealing with. See what fits for you, and what doesn’t. And I think you’ll begin to get a much better understanding – about why we do some of the things that we “don’t really want to be doing.”

## **What the Experts Have to Say**

I’d like to emphasize again that this section is very technical and won’t appeal to most readers. It was written out of my commitment to provide value to those of you that have an interest in intellectually understanding “addictions” at a deeper level. If this is not you, like I said, it is completely acceptable to skip this section entirely.

There are so many different views on what “addictions” are and what causes them that I decided to present some of the major ones here, so you can consider them for yourself. I also wanted to use (as much as possible) the actual words of the doctors, PhDs, researchers and pioneers who’ve written about them, so you’ll be able to see it through their eyes and experience – and then come to your own conclusions about what makes the most sense to you.

## **Addiction is a Disease or Illness**

One of the most prevalent ‘schools of thought’ about addiction in our society is that it is a mental, physical, or even spiritual illness or disease. Perhaps you’ve come to see it that way, or heard about it from others.

This perspective appears to go back to the 1930's, the founding of the AA movement, and the work of Dr. William D. Silkworth, then-Medical Director at one of the oldest hospitals in the U.S. treating alcohol and drug addiction. A pioneer in the field, Dr. Silkworth was invited by the founders of AA to share in writing his ideas about the causes and treatments of alcoholism – which they would then publish in their upcoming book called *Alcoholics Anonymous*.

“I do not... believe that alcoholism is entirely a problem of mental control,” Dr. Silkworth wrote. And in explaining more about what happens with chronic alcoholics, he said “We believe that the action of alcohol on [them] is a manifestation of an allergy.”

The authors of the “Big Book” (as those in AA often refer to it) then go on to say, “The doctor’s theory that we have an allergy to alcohol interests us.” Later in the book they write, “we have come to believe [that alcoholism is] an illness.”..an “illness which only a spiritual experience will conquer.” And thus the idea that addiction is an illness is at the core of the AA and 12 step movements.

Until the founding of Alcoholics Anonymous, many people suffering from alcoholism and drug addiction were essentially considered immoral, weak-willed, hopeless or untreatable. However, because of its remarkable success in helping alcoholics, AA, its 12-step program, fellowships and meetings, became the leading form of “treatment” used or recommended by treatment centers and hospitals. Its spiritual principles and approach were also adapted to treat a wide range of other addictions as well, such as narcotics (NA-Narcotics Anonymous), cocaine (CA-Cocaine Anonymous), food issues (OA-Overeaters Anonymous), spending (SA-Spenders Anonymous) and many others including AAA – All Addictions Anonymous. Today it is the most frequently used approach for dealing with addictions of all kinds. (And having been through it myself, I am deeply grateful for it.)

It's interesting to note that in 1960, Bill W., the co-founder of AA, clarified the AA movement's use of the terms disease and illness. "We have never called alcoholism a disease," he said, "because, technically speaking, it is not a disease entity...Therefore we did not wish to get in wrong with the medical profession by pronouncing alcoholism a disease entity. Therefore we always called it an illness, or a malady – a far safer term for us to use."

The illness or disease perspective on addictions has become commonplace, both within our medical system and societal thinking. For example, Dr. Alan Leshner, MD and former head of the National Institute on Drug Abuse at the U.S. National Institutes of Health, wrote an article called "Addiction is a Brain Disease" that "addiction should be understood as a chronic recurring illness that requires treatment." Similarly, Wilkie A. Wilson and Cynthia M. Kuhn, both Ph.D. neuropharmacologists and professors at Duke University Medical Center have written this about addictions:

"People have been using addictive substances for centuries, but only very recently... have scientists begun to understand in detail how the brain becomes addicted.

People often claim to be addicted to chocolate, coffee, football, or some other substance or behavior that brings pleasure. This is not likely. Addiction is an overwhelming compulsion, based [on an] alteration of brain circuits that normally regulate our ability to guide our actions to achieve goals. ...calling our love of chocolate or football an "addiction" not only trivializes the devastation wrought by addiction, but misses the point that addiction involves a hijacking of the brain's circuitry..."

While we're talking about Wilson and Kuhn, it's also useful to consider how they describe what happens with an addiction.

“[Addiction] overrides our ordinary, unaffected judgment. [It] leads to the continued use of a substance or continuation of a behavior despite extremely negative consequences. An addict will choose the drug or behavior over family, the normal activities of life, employment, and at times even basic survival. There are probably large numbers of people, with many different kinds of behaviors, who can identify with that description – even though some may not be “medically” recognized to have addictions.”

The authors also say: “No matter how much you like some drug or activity and how much you choose to involve yourself with it, you are not addicted if you can stop it when the consequences become negative for you.”

So do experts and authorities agree that addiction is an illness or brain disease? One would certainly think so, based on how it is frequently talked about in medical and treatment circles. However, not everyone sees it the same way. In fact, far from it.

In its “Fundamentals of Addictions,” the highly-regarded Center for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) in Toronto agrees in part, but not entirely. They write: “Many clinicians and researchers prefer to use the term ‘dependence,’ as defined by the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition* (DSM-IV)” – a book considered to be the ‘gold standard’ in the medical community – “as it is more precise than ‘addiction.’ Drug dependence, in the DSM’s terms, indicates the existence of a brain disease and is distinct from drug abuse, which may only indicate bad judgment.”

In reading the CAMH description, you may have noticed that the words “bad judgment.” This language suggests that we have some ‘choice’ in the matter – and opens the door to the many other perspectives about our addicted behaviors and

tendencies among those who work and write in this field.

### **Addiction is Not a Disease/Illness**

Stanton Peele, Ph.D., J.D. has been investigating and writing about addiction since 1969. A licensed psychologist, legal attorney, and practicing psychotherapist, he is the author of nine books and over 200 professional articles about alcoholism, addiction and addiction treatment.

In his first book, *Love and Addiction*, Peele began to revolutionize thinking on the subject by saying that “addiction is not limited to narcotics, or to drugs at all... Addiction is a pattern of behavior and experience which is best understood by examining an individual's relationship with his/her world.” Addiction, he says, is “a general pattern of behavior that nearly everyone experiences in varying degrees at one time or another... It is not essentially a medical problem, but a problem of life.”

Peele goes on to say that addiction is “frequently encountered and very often overcome in people's lives - the failure to overcome addictions is the exception. It occurs for people who learn drug use or other destructive patterns as a way of gaining satisfaction in the absence of more functional ways of dealing with the world.”

“Addiction is a way of coping with life, of artificially attaining feelings and rewards people feel they cannot achieve in any other way. As such, it is no more a treatable medical problem than is unemployment, lack of coping skills, or degraded communities and despairing lives. The only remedy for addiction is for more people to have the resources, values and environments necessary for living productive lives.”

“People are addicted when they pursue a sensation or activity relentlessly and sacrifice other life alternatives to this pursuit, and when they cannot face

existence without this one involvement. We know people are addicted by their behavior and experience: nothing else defines addiction.”

In another one of his books, *7 Tools to Beat Addiction*, Peele says: “Believing that alcoholism is a disease, that no one escapes the grips of heroin or cigarettes, that withdrawal from either is too horrible to resist, or that you are born to be addicted imbues your addiction with power and irresistibility that it does not need to have. The more you believe any or all of these myths, the more likely you are to remain addicted.”

### **Are We ALL Affected?**

If addictions are more than just a disease or an illness that affects a relative few – but are a way of coping with life and seeking better feelings – that suggests that many of us would have them. And that perspective IS widely shared. For example, Dr. Gabor Mate, a medical doctor who works with addicts in Vancouver’s “downtown Eastside” (one of Canada’s most drug-affected urban areas) writes:

“Addiction cuts large swaths across our culture. Many of us are burdened with compulsive behaviors that harm us and others, behaviors whose toxicity we fail to acknowledge or feel powerless to stop. Many people are addicted to accumulating wealth; for others the compulsive pull is power. Men and women become addicted to consumerism, status, shopping or fetishized relationships, not to mention the obvious and widespread addictions such as gambling, sex, junk food and the cult of the “young” body image.”

Dr. David B. Hawkins, clinical psychologist, therapist and counselor for over 30 years, believes that we are actually an addicted society and that socially-acceptable behaviors, such as working, eating, shopping and exercising, can take over and control our lives. He calls them “everyday addictions.”

“[W]e have found the addict and the addict is us. You and me. Our mothers, fathers, sisters and brothers. Our best friends and our worst enemies. Everyday addictions are commonplace, testing the rich and famous as well as the middle-class suburbanites. ...We’re a mishmash of cocaine addicts, cell phone addicts, food addicts, and gambling addicts. We overspend, overwork, shop too much, and become entangled in sexual [issues]. We’re addicted to innumerable drugs and activities that create a wide range of everyday addicts.

...Even worse, our culture, society, and perhaps even our churches enable our addictions. Refusal to talk about these addictive behaviors reinforces them. We’re a parade of addicts, and the extent that we admit that and talk about it is the extent to which we face the truth leading to freedom. Few are exempt from slipping into some form of addictive behavior, and fewer still are willing to face the full extent of their addiction.”

In their book, *Willpower’s Not Enough*, Arnold Washton, PhD, and Donna Boundy, MSW look at it similarly, but from a more societal perspective:

“It is now widely known that children growing up with chemically-dependent parents are at high risk for developing addictions themselves. But what we are just starting to realize is that growing up in an addictive society affect us all too – in many of the same ways.

In fact, it may be all but impossible to grow up in our present culture and not acquire at least some vulnerability to addiction. That’s because the addictive personality traits (an emphasis on image, cravings for power and control, denial, dishonesty, just to name a few) are increasingly reflected in society’s values and trends. And it’s a self-perpetuating process. Certain trends create the conditions in which addiction thrives, and growing numbers of addictive people reinforce these trends.

Our society, in a sense, is becoming a large dysfunctional family. And just as children in dysfunctional families become prone to addiction as they try to adapt to their troubled family, so too are we becoming more addiction-prone as we try

to adapt to the larger dysfunctional system in which we live.”

### **So What’s Underneath It All?**

As we’ve seen above, there’s a widely held belief that most – if not all – of us are likely to become “addicted” in some way. Some say it’s because of the society we grow up in. Others, like Lee Jampolsky, PhD, say “there is an addictive personality in each and every one of us. It is part of being human.” In his book, *Healing the Addictive Personality*, Jampolsky writes:

“The Addictive Personality dictates situations either as “to be avoided because it is painful” or “to be embraced because it makes you feel better.” What it does not want you to know is there is nothing about a specific ailment or situation in itself that causes us to experience emotional upset, and that running from the perceived pain is actually the source of the suffering.

It could even be said that another definition of addiction is continuing to run from perceived situations by ways that temporarily make us feel better, despite an increase in our suffering. In the end, the things we do to make us feel better (drugs, alcohol, shopping, eating, relationships, work, gambling) are what cause our suffering.”

Chris Prentiss, in a book called *The Alcoholism and Addiction Cure*, goes deeper into what he believes is driving our addictive behaviors: “Most of us are constantly modifying our moods and physical sensations [with] substances and behavior patterns. We wake up and feel a little foggy or groggy or slow, and we reach for a coffee. At the end of a meal, if we feel a little unsatisfied, we may have a sweet dessert. If we feel a bit out of sorts, we might go shopping. What’s the goal of all those behavioral patterns? We’re striving to achieve balance. ...[But it] is when we use alcohol, addictive drugs, or addictive behavior to modify [our]



feelings, rather than addressing the cause of the imbalance, that we become dependant.”

World-renowned author John Bradshaw – voted by his peers as “one of the most influential writers on emotional health in the 20th Century” – suggests that our inability to face and deal with our emotional pain is causing us to become addicted. In his pioneering book *Bradshaw On: The Family*, he says: “Addiction has become our national lifestyle (or rather death style). It is a death style based on the relinquishment of the self as a worthwhile being to a self who must achieve and perform or use something outside of itself in order to be lovable and happy. Addictions are pain-killing substitutes for legitimate suffering. To legitimately suffer we have to feel as bad as we feel.”

In *Willpower's Not Enough*, Washton and Boundy agree. “Addictive thinking is increasingly common in today’s society and in our families,” they write. At the core of such thinking lies the belief that “life should be without pain and require no effort.” They add, “If we insist on avoiding emotional pain, on being comfortable all the time, we will *have* to seek ways to avoid reality, to escape our mood.” They then go on to describe some of the thinking patterns that are driving this “addictive thinking” and our lack of acceptance of who we are:

“Part of having an addictive “dis-ease” means that we hold certain contradictory beliefs that set the stage for inner conflict and struggle – such as believing simultaneously that we are not enough and that we should be perfect.”

“A faulty belief system lies at the root of addiction. This belief system... embraces the idea that it is possible to be perfect, that the world should be limitless, that our image is more important than who we really are, that we are not enough, and that externals (people, drugs, and other things outside of ourselves) hold the “magic” solutions to life’s problems.”

## What is Causing the Pain?

Dr. William Glasser, M.D. is an American psychiatrist and the author of more than 25 books. In his book, *Positive Addiction*, Glasser states that most of us want *happiness* more than anything else in our lives. We get that, he says, through **love** and **worth**; that is, by loving and being loved, and doing something we believe is worthwhile. However, when we don't have these, we experience some degree of misery, pain and failure instead.

In Glasser's view, when we don't feel strong enough or able to get what we want, we are driven to make choices that get rid of our pain and feelings of failure. At first we simply *give up* trying to find love and worth, or we make excuses for not having it by saying things like, "Why try? I'd just fail," "It's my parents' fault," or some other rationalization or justification. If that doesn't work, we may take what Glasser calls "symptoms" – like depression, anger, rebellion, physical pain or illness.

Finally, as a third step, as those increase in severity we are likely to become addicted – again, as our way of trying to feel better. As painful as all of these are, they are less painful than facing the fact that we have failed and given up on obtaining love and self-worth.

Here's one way that Glasser puts it:

"Typically a negative addict is a person who is severely frustrated in his own particular search for love and worth. He made the first choice to give up usually when he was very young. As a second choice he may have tried acting out for a while but for him it was not very successful and he usually switched to depression or to a psychosomatic symptom. Then he is introduced to alcohol or heroin and suddenly, miraculously, not only is the pain gone but it is replaced by an intense pleasure that he has never before experienced.

...[This] provides him with [a sense of] “glory” where in the past he had only pain, overpowers every other urge within him and he devotes his life to the addicting drug or behavior. To that end he is willing to give up principles, ideals, family, friends, or spouse; nothing in his life is allowed to stand against the drug or the addiction. He lives by one set of values, which is that whatever promotes his addiction is right, everything else is wrong. If the drug is illegal, as is heroin, he will lie, cheat, steal, and on rare occasions kill to get both the relief and the pleasure the drug provides. Even if the drug is legal, as is alcohol, the alcoholic will let little or nothing stand between him and his bottle.”

The reason why addiction is so difficult to break, says Glasser, “is that it alone... consistently... relieves the pain of failure, and provides an intensely pleasurable experience. It could be argued that the intense pleasure came from relieving the pain of failure...”

The obvious problem of addiction is that the addict, through his addiction, is able to live with little love or worth, without having to suffer the pain of failing to get it. In fact, he enjoys his life if his addiction is satisfied, and has no need for anything else. His credo is why search for something as tenuous, in his experience, as love and worth when his addiction is sure.

It is this pain coupled with the pleasure of the drug that locks an addict into his habit...[M]erely depriving an addict of his addiction will neither weaken his habit nor break it.”

### **What the “Three Stages” Might Look Like**

When we look at society as a whole, relatively few of us will end up becoming cocaine, heroin or hard drug addicts. If Glasser’s three-stage theory is correct,

however, many of us could well be using other kinds of experiences and behaviors to deal with our lack of inner happiness. So let's consider them.

First, at the stage-three level, there are all the other kinds of “addictive behaviors” (mentioned earlier) that are showing up in society – from drinking and smoking to over-use of prescription drugs, excessive working and shopping, food consumption and Internet use.

Some authorities label these as compulsions or addictions, while others call them dependencies or ‘bad habits.’ But where's the line? And does it really matter what we call them, since so many people are having difficulty breaking them?

Next, think of the many problems people face with physical pain, illness, stress, depression, even bullying in schools or aggressive behaviors at work. Are these actually symptoms of Glasser's stage two? And could they turn into more addictive behaviors, if what's driving them inside isn't dealt with?

Lastly, what would stage-one issues look like? If we have given up on finding love, worth and happiness in “positive” ways, what behaviors and habits might we engage in to make ourselves feel better: controlling others, worrying, complaining, blaming, overeating, self-medicating, pornography, Web surfing, engaging in unproductive behaviors at work, becoming couch-potatoes? And might this be the reason why many former addicts turn to ‘softer’ addictions and habits – like drinking coffee, smoking cigarettes and eating junk food – after their recovery? Perhaps they're simply shifting from one stage, or form of coping, to another.

Let me reiterate (as I will do often in this book) that this is NOT meant to be a criticism or judgment of any of these behaviors, or those of us who engage in them! As Glasser puts it, they are actually “successful” ways we've found to cope with our negative thoughts and feelings.

Looking at our behaviors in this way also opens up several larger questions. For example, “What is the connection between addictions and habits?” and “How much is ‘choice’ involved?” Both are important when it comes to dealing with the many kinds of destructive, disempowering or hard-to-change behaviors we have in our lives. So let’s consider the “habits” question first.

### **Addictions and Habits: What’s the Connection?**

When I was involved in AA and other 12-step programs, I remember some people making a **very** big distinction between “addictions” and “habits.” ‘MY ADDICTION IS NOT A HABIT!’ some would say vehemently. And I think I now understand why.

If we believe that alcoholism and other addictions are “the result of an illness” and “that no real alcoholic *ever* recovers control” (both quotes come from the Big Book), it is natural to see addictions and habits as different. First, “habit” implies choice; “addiction” and illness imply no choice. And second, as Wilson and Kuhn said, ‘comparing our love of chocolate or football (or other habits) to addictions “trivializes the devastation wrought by addiction.”’

Having personally experienced the ‘ravages’ of addiction and having seen what it has done to so many others, I DO NOT want to either trivialize or compare them to “habits” in severity. I also do not wish to put down the AA/12 step perspective because I personally felt powerless in trying to deal with some of my addictions, used AA for my own recovery; and also taught it to hundreds of others. Heck, this book would never have been written had I not found my mission in life as a result of being taught the 12 steps!

That said, many, many experts in the field – from the CAMH reference earlier (about disease and bad judgment) to many others quoted here who see addiction

as a way of coping with the pain and challenges of life – suggest that there IS a connection between our addictions and our habits.

In their article “How Addiction Hijacks Our Reward System,” neuropharmacologists Wilson and Kuhn put it this way:

“Are habits addictions? This is a tough question, because such habits range from mild and innocuous – such as twirling your hair when you are thinking about something – to dangerous, for example, overeating and gambling. Mild habits can be difficult to stop, but if we can stop when we must, we are not addicted. More dangerous habits or compulsions may be different. In fact... modern neurobiology suggests that there are some strong similarities between drug addictions and compulsive habits.”

So where do habits end and addictions begin? No one can say for sure.

Nationally recognized expert Dr. Marc F. Kern has over 30 years of experience as a clinical psychologist and addictions specialist. Kern, who has also wrestled with his own addictions, treats patients who have “self-sabotaging problem habits with alcohol, street drugs, prescription drugs, smoking, gambling, pornography, overeating, and other excessive behaviors.” Here’s how he describes it:

“What do habits have to do with addictions? We are all creatures of habit. Forming habits is normal and necessary. Some habits help us to be more productive. Being on time, brushing our teeth, exercising regularly are all habits that improve our lives. But some habits have the opposite effect. We call these out-of-control, unhealthy habits by another name. We call them addictions.

Despite the conventional wisdom, addiction is never simply a matter of having a disease. Nor is it simply a choice. In most cases, addictive behavior is really a complicated interaction of psychology, social environment, and individual biology.

Smoking, excessive drinking, gambling compulsively, and even overeating are habitual patterns of behavior that can be modified – with the right approach.

Habits and addictions are part of a continuum. Even addictions themselves range from mild to extreme. But traditional addiction treatments take a black and white, either/or position. The thinking is that if addiction is a disease (and if there is no real medical treatment), the best we can do is learn to live with the biological malady. You are powerless over it and the best you can do is hold onto the hope that it doesn't unexpectedly reappear and ruin your life. If it is a habit, then we think that we should be able to stop it through force of will. And if choosing to stop doesn't work, then the false conclusion is that either we are morally defective, weak-willed, or we must be biologically doomed for our lifetime."

It's interesting to note that, even though Kern was once addicted himself, he then says: "Addictions can be reduced to habits or eliminated completely using modern psychological skill-building techniques. Progress can be made... even while you are involved with substance abuse... Startling as it may seem, some people don't and shouldn't need to stop their habitual behavior 100%!"

### **Where Does "Choice" Come In?**

Almost every authority I've ever read – apart from the ones who see addiction strictly as a disease that requires chemical treatment – says that choice at some level (whether conscious or unconscious) shapes our addictions and habits. For some, it's our choices about the activities we become involved in, the environments we live in, or the people we hang out with. For others, it's the lifestyles we engage in, the thoughts we choose, or the ways we try to deal with our underlying feelings.

Even the founders of AA, who said that chronic alcoholism (addiction) is a "seemingly hopeless state of mind and body," believed that we are not ultimately

powerless to change. In fact, their program was based on our ability to make certain decisions and choose to practice certain behaviors and ways of thinking (i.e. the 12 steps) that would give alcoholics (and addicts) renewed control over their lives.

If both addictions and habits are our ways of coping with, adjusting to, or finding happiness in life, then at some level choice enters into them. It might be the result of “bad judgment,” as CAMH referred to drug abuse. It could be dealt with by “turning our will over to a higher power” as AA instructs (which is also a choice) or using “modern psychological skill-building techniques” as Marc Kern teaches. It might be turning around our “faulty belief system... [that] it is possible to be perfect” or that “life should be without pain and require no effort,” as Washton and Boundy said; or helping “more people to have the resources, values and environments necessary for living productive lives” as Stanton Peele described it. Each one involves both choice, a new way of thinking and a change in behavior.

Jeffrey Schaler, Ph.D., in his book called *Addiction is a Choice*, says: “As [people] come to believe that addiction has more to do with the environments they live in than with the drugs they use (a clear indication of research), they may further realize they have the power to change those environments to help themselves.”

It’s useful to think back to what Chris Prentiss wrote earlier in *The Alcoholism and Addiction Cure*, that “most of us are constantly modifying our moods and physical sensations [with] substances and behavior patterns” such as drinking coffee, eating sweets or going shopping. The goal of these choices, he says, is to create an inner “balance.” He then adds: “When our body, mind and spirit are not in alignment, we consciously or subconsciously medicate with food, alcohol, drugs, sex, television, and other diversions to forget or suppress the symptoms of imbalance.”



Finally, I'd like to return to Dr. William Glasser – who developed both “reality therapy” and “choice theory,” and has some controversial views (at least among psychiatrists) on issues like personal choice, personal responsibility and personal transformation.

Glasser believes there are actually two types of addictions: Negative and Positive. Negative addictions, like alcohol or heroin, “always weaken and often destroy us.” These are based (as mentioned above) on a lack of love and feelings of worthlessness, judgment and guilt. Positive addictions, on the other hand – which can include such practices as meditation or running – “strengthen us and make our lives more satisfying.”

“A positive addiction increases your mental strength and is the opposite of a negative addiction, which seems to sap the strength from every part of your life except in the area of the addiction.” Positive addicts, he says, “are almost always stronger,” and “live with more confidence, more creativity, and more happiness, and usually in much better health.”

“The positive addict enjoys his addiction but it does not dominate his life. From it he gains mental strength which he uses to help himself accomplish whatever he tries to do more successfully. Unlike a negative addict, who is satisfied completely to live for his addiction, to the exclusion of everything else, a positive addict uses his extra strength to gain more love and more worth, more pleasure, more meaning, more zest from life in general. Positive addiction is especially valuable because it is a way in which anyone by himself can increase his strength.”

The key to positive addictions is that it is a choice – an alternative way to find happiness. In fact, Glasser says that “it is possible to become addicted to any physical or mental activity,” if you fulfill certain criteria and achieve a particular state of mind (which he calls the “PA state”) regularly, which he describes in his book. “While the activity itself [like running] may be grueling or boring, it causes a

pleasurable mental effect while it goes on, and on after, that makes the whole experience so pleasing it is addicting.”

Positive addictions aren't as easy as drinking or picking up a cigarette, for instance. Glasser says it can take six months to a year of activity, one hour every day, to develop a strength-giving addiction. The activity must usually be done alone, with no demands, striving for excellence, or self-criticism. But in the experience of millions of joggers, bicycle riders, exercisers, meditators and others, including Glasser, they work.

## **-My Interpretation of the Meaning of Addiction**

Before giving you my interpretation, let me say that another reason I am focusing so much on “addictions” is that they are the most extreme and challenging forms of habitual behaviors. Whether or not you have an addiction, the benefit of considering them is that “if we can deal with these, we can deal with anything.” So that’s what I’m trying to do here – to identify approaches that can work for anyone who reads this book, no matter what condition they might be experiencing.

I also want to stress again that I am not a medical expert. Nor do I want to convince you that my perspective is “the truth.” It’s just a perception, a viewpoint, like all the others. So you might call this my working interpretation/definition which could change at anytime:

1) There is no single “true” or “right” answer on what addiction means or what causes it. However, everybody’s approach is worth listening to, has validity, and can potentially help us deal with our own “habits.”

2) I don’t “know” the meaning of addiction, and the most valuable definition is the one that feels right to you. That may sound strange, since we normally look to “the experts” for what’s “right.” From my perspective, the real goal is not to come up with the perfect “Definition” or “Model” of addiction – but to find one that supports YOU in dealing with it in the most effective way.

For me, an addiction could be *any behavior or habit that has “destructive, hurtful or negative” consequences severe enough that you want to stop or control it to whatever degree you feel you need to in order for these negative consequences to reduce themselves to a level YOU have*

*authentically chosen – and even when you try as hard as you can to accomplish this, you don't seem to have the power of choice to master the "habit." The "habit" seems to have mastered you.*

This behavior may be giving you a degree of comfort or pleasure right now; you may even "love it" while doing it; but at some level, you'd rather not be doing it, because it disagrees with you at a deep personal level. It's also causing negative results in your life, physically, mentally or emotionally. And yet you continue to do it, because it seems like you have no control over it, no matter how committed you are. And even if you do stop or reduce it significantly, you then substitute another "unwanted" behavior to replace it – and we avoid dealing with what might be driving it.

3) If you have an unwanted behavior and the word "addiction" speaks to you, use it, even if some experts don't define your behavior that way. And if the word "Addiction" doesn't resonate for you, pick one that does.

4) There is a connection between what we call "addictions" and what we call "habits." And by listening to people who have successfully dealt with either of these (or both), we can find common practices and "solutions" that will help us deal with ALL of them.

## **Is My Definition of Addiction Useful?**

Remember, I don't want you to take what I've just said as being the "Truth" about addiction. If this definition fits for you, great. If not, that's great too. Personally, I've found it useful for a number of reasons:

**1) *It helps us decide for ourselves.*** This definition applies to *our experience*, rather than a "medical" diagnosis. This isn't to deny the usefulness of expert opinions. However, since doctors, scientists and authorities in the field don't agree on an

absolute truth, this definition encourages people to look at their own behaviors and experience, and decide for themselves.

2) ***It's inclusive, and not dependent on our history.*** This definition applies equally to someone who believes they have a disease and someone who doesn't. In fact, it applies to whatever someone might see as "the cause," be it disease, genetics, environment, upbringing, social-economic conditions or something else. Again, each of those has validity. However, my focus is on what people can do in the present – instead of experiencing themselves as victims of the past (including their birth) or powerless to change because of what they observe going on around them.

3) ***It is neither pro nor con the 12 steps.*** Sometimes a person is feeling so much shame or has come to feel so powerless over their "habit," that being told they have a disease and that it is not their fault, and that there's a solution through a "higher power" is very helpful. Exactly how and why it works is open to interpretation. But the fact is, for many it does.

However, not everyone believes that addiction is a disease. Some can't accept the 12-step's "spiritual/religious" approach. And for others, the belief in powerlessness isn't useful and can be even debilitating. Some people believe they DO still have control over their habit or addiction. And I think that all these perspectives need to be honored. That's why I've tried to use definitions and solutions that can work for anyone, regardless of their belief system.

4) ***This definition doesn't separate addictions from habits.*** Since we all engage in behaviors which have negative consequences, this definition simply applies to those things that you feel unable to stop. However, this doesn't separate them from the rest of your behaviors. And that means you can work with ANY or all of your habits, (including those that we call compulsions and addictions) at the same time.

5) ***It helps to ‘normalize’ addictions and remove some of the stigma.*** As we come to see these ‘patterns of behavior’ in ourselves, it begins to make them more commonplace or acceptable. That helps take some of the shame and guilt out of them. And it also connects us with others instead of separating and dividing us. If everyone has them – i.e. if we’re all doing things that result in different degrees of harm, discomfort or destructiveness – then we don’t have to feel so bad and alone. (This is a core experience of people with addictions and “bad” habits, by the way.) Instead, we can begin to look at these behaviors as simply part of human nature.

## **Going Beyond “Right and Wrong”**

One of the things I’ve learned over the years is that, in the field of addictions, there is a huge emphasis on “who’s right and who’s wrong,” and this causes a lot of conflict, anger and even fighting among us. (Perhaps your experience has been similar.)

So what do we disagree on? Without wanting to be facetious, one could say almost everything. From “addiction is a disease” to addiction isn’t a disease. Some people swear *by* the 12 steps (as the only method of treatment) and just as many who swear *at* them. There are disagreements about how much choice we have; whether you can deal with several addictions at the same time (my reason for starting All Addictions Anonymous); what substances or behaviors are actually addictions; what the differences between addictions and habits are; and even, who is an “addict” at all.

When I was in early “recovery”, I would go to 12 step meetings and judge people as being either moderate drinkers, hard drinkers or “real alcoholics”. I took pride in convincing you I was a “real hardcore” alcoholic/addict, saying things like, “You’re not addicted. Let me tell you about being addicted!” and then share my

worst (or best) war stories to convince you of how I was different from you. I was making others right or wrong, and separating my patterns of addiction from those of others.

### ***What Is Actually an “Addiction?”***

The medical ‘bible’ on addictions that I referred to in the last section, called the DSM-IV (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, fourth edition), includes only a small number of substances – essentially alcohol, drugs and nicotine – in its list. To be factual, it doesn’t even use the word “addictions” at all, but rather refers to “substance abuse” and “substance dependence.” The next proposed edition (DSM-5) *does* use the term addiction, but the list is still quite small. For example, gambling is the only “behavioral addiction” that will be included; issues like sex and Internet use were considered, but have not yet been accepted. So the medical way of looking at addictions is a slowly developing process.

But what about the large number of other “addiction-like” conditions that people are experiencing? For example, consider eating disorders like anorexia and bulimia. Many people I know believe these are addictions; however, the professional community does not. Instead, it calls them “mental health disorders.” Then there is the “addiction movement” itself, where the term addiction is used for a wide range of issues from overeating to codependency to criminal behavior. In fact, if you do an Internet search on 12-step groups, there are more than 65 different types of fellowships. So who is really “right” about what is “actually an addiction?”

### ***What Does “Our Ability to Stop” Mean?***

Another key aspect for determining what is an addiction is our ability or inability to stop – something I’ve also used in my definition. But who can really determine

that for certain? And when we say “stop,” do we mean “stay stopped?” This concept gets us into all kinds of debates.

For example, if our brain chemistry shows we are dependent on a drug or behavior, does that mean we are unable to stop using it? Experience shows that that’s not always the case. Or, if we do find a way to stop a behavior, how long do we need to stay stopped for it to not be considered an addiction? What is the line between “I can’t stop” and “if I had enough motivation, I would stop?” Or when we do discover new ways to stop – as people continually are – does that mean that they (or we) didn’t have an addiction in the first place? Or are they all in denial, headed for relapse because they did not stop in the way we think is “The Right Way.”

I think you can see the difficulties here, and why there’s so much disagreement among those who have been working for years, if not most of their life, to understand addictions, what causes them and how to treat them.

Now I’m not saying that it’s wrong to disagree. We all see things differently, and this process can help us learn from different perspectives. But the problem comes when we focus most of our energy trying to prove our rightness over others. What’s more, communications among us often get quite heated, even abusive. People like Stanford Peele, for example, were viciously attacked when they came out with new theories that disagreed with the disease model. And today, some people attack anything that IS related to the 12 steps. (I recently bore the brunt of such treatment, when I briefly mentioned on a Website the benefits of the 12 steps.)

So what’s my point? Well, to put it as gently – yet as bluntly – as I can, our obsession with “being right” isn’t working. It’s actually hurting us. People who have “addictions” are confused about what to do. It’s blocking our willingness to see the value of each other’s perspective. It’s creating conflict, divisions and



differences among people working in the same field. It's creating fear among those who have problems and want help, as a recent email I received showed all too clearly:

*In understanding addictions, I often see such differing – and heated – discussions online when looking at weight-loss books, or even listening to the media. Some people say that obese people just eat too much; others say there's[sic] psychological or spiritual reasons for weight problems. It hurts when I've struggled so long, and people, very cruelly and judgmentally, say all I need to do is eat less. – Tracey B.*

What I've come to believe is that our conflicts are not only getting in the way of helping people but they might possibly be what is fueling our secondary addictions and stopping us from being fully free. And that's why I've started to move away from "who's right and who's wrong" to "we are all right," and to begin looking for what we have in common.

Suppose we were to put our paradigms aside for a moment, and looked for what's effective among all approaches? Regardless of how we define addiction or what caused these "unwanted habits" originally, what practices are we using that are actually effective in helping people reduce or prevent them? That's what I'm committed to finding out and communicating, so as to bring us together in our shared search for what works.

If that sounds altruistic, maybe it is. But it's not just to be "nice" or kind to each other (though that certainly wouldn't hurt). It's about beginning to see the impact and cost that our conflicts and arguing are having on people. And it's about finding the common patterns, issues, practices and solutions that can help anyone deal with any, and all, addictive or unwanted behaviors.

## CHAPTER SIX

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### What is Driving Our Addictions, Habits and Behaviors?

Many of the “experts” I quoted in the last chapter seem to be pointing to the idea that our addictions and unwanted habits are a response to our thoughts and feelings. For example, Washton and Boundy said that a “faulty belief system lies at the root of addiction” and that when we hold contradictory beliefs like “we are not enough and that we should be perfect,” it sets the stage for inner conflict and struggle. Dr. Glasser said that when we don’t **feel** love and worth, we give up, act out, experience depression or use addictions to relieve our pain and feelings of failure. Stanton Peele said that addiction is a way of “coping with life and artificially attaining feelings.” John Bradshaw wrote about our inability to face and deal with our emotional pain. And Lee Jampolsky described the “addictive personality” within us that continually tries to avoid pain and make ourselves feel better.

So how do we make sense of these ideas in our own lives? For example, what’s the connection between our own thoughts and feelings? Where does the pain come from, and why does it lead us to do more of our “unwanted” behaviors? Here are some of the connections I’ve made for myself and how I made them.

### Working with People with *Serious* Habits

After years of taking other addicts through the 12 steps and the Big Book, I coached hundreds of people one-on-one, spending 30 to 40 hours of intimate time with each person, going through the steps of “recovery” and applying them to many different kinds of addictions. (Note: That’s my addiction background speaking again. Thanks for understanding.) And during our time together, they would tell me how it all started.

People consistently told me that, before they began doing their habits or became addicted, they believed that *something was wrong with them*. In other words, they had this core belief, deep down inside, that they were somehow bad, broken or not enough. The language they used was different for each person, but the theme was always the same. And I understood – because I remembered having that same kind of belief before I began my addictions too.

For me, it was a belief that I was not fully loved. To make a long story short, my father left our family when I was very young. My mother later began dating a man I didn't like, and then moved us away from my childhood home to a different city. In my new school, I became an outcast from the other kids, and even from teachers I'd begun to trust. And that was when I began sniffing paint and varnish remover to make myself feel better.

I'm not saying that these events "caused" me to become addicted. In fact, I choose to see that it's the destructive meanings and interpretations I made up about myself as a kid in response to these events (and many other things that happened in my childhood) that was the fuel that drove me into my addictions. It's the meanings I made up that formed all the many different negative core beliefs (I'm wrong, bad, unlovable, a mistake, I don't deserve to live) that I created about myself, and which could be summed up with the words *"Something is fundamentally wrong with me."*

Now of course there is a paradox in what I just said. This is not about blaming me for becoming an addict BUT it is also not about blaming my circumstances, parents, or anyone else for that matter. If I were an abusive parent, I could use this viewpoint as an excuse to blame my kid for screwing up his/her life instead of taking responsibility for the influence my words and actions have on my child if he/she does not see themselves as having the power to choose their thoughts, meanings and beliefs. What this is about is looking back and asking myself "What

is a possible way of looking at my past that, if I had looked at life that way back then, I might not have become an addict?” And more importantly, if I looked at my life that way, and taught this perspective to kids in particular (because they are the most vulnerable to being programmed by others), might I not have a greater chance of preventing some of them from entering the path that leads to addictions, pain, suffering, and sometimes even to accidental death or suicide?”

Perhaps if I had been taught this Power of Choice concept as a kid, the idea that, no matter what was going on around me, I always had (as Viktor Frankl taught us) the power to choose my thoughts, meanings and beliefs, I might not have chosen to hate myself. For me, I think this single message has the potential to move us in the direction of transforming all addictions on the planet.

I mean, think about this. For those kids that are being violently abused at home and are turning to addictions as a form of relief (a relief that may even be preventing them from killing themselves), and then you teach these kids that drugs and alcohol are bad and you should stop because if you don't you will die, what impact could that have on those kids? Or that cigarettes and drugs are a gateway drug and will lead to greater addictions. What about the kid that is engaged in this thing we are calling a gateway drug? I'm thinking that it's the child believing it could be a gateway drug has more of a determining factor on whether it becomes one or not; but, I don't have scientific evidence for this. (I've actually gotten advice from a number of medical addiction doctors on how to get funding for my school program and have learned that the program is not ideal for funding because it utilizes the "power of belief," which in the scientific and medical community has no value because it is considered part of the "placebo" effect.)

Fortunately for me, my ADHD doctor, Umesh Jain is more open-minded and has encouraged me to find ways to scientifically measure the "placebo" as being an asset rather than an element that has no value. He said "what you are doing is using the placebo effect" to your benefit. If I ever was to make my programs

scientifically based, I would only do so if I found someone who could help me create a rigorous evaluation procedure that could deliver on measuring this. If you know someone who might be interested in doing this with me, please have them reach my office at [ask@powerofchoice.org](mailto:ask@powerofchoice.org) )

I don't deny the positive impact of scaring some kids (the ones that have healthier core-beliefs about themselves) with the potential dangers of various behaviors, but when we give all of our youth the anti-whatever scare tactic message, and don't preface it by saying that ultimately the greatest power lies not in the drugs but in your thoughts and beliefs, is it not possible that our good intentions might be actually killing some of them? I don't know, but personally I'm not willing to risk the possibility. What's the risk of teaching our youth that substances and behaviors are more powerful than them? I'm not sure these fear-based, controlling approaches are not actually causing more damage and perpetuating the weaknesses, rather than supporting the strengths of our kids.

### **Why Do We Believe “Something is Fundamentally Wrong with Us?”**

The circumstances that provoke this thought will be different for all of us. Perhaps we grew up in poverty or suffered abuse in our home. Maybe we lost a parent or a close friend at an early age, or were severely criticized or threatened when we did something “wrong” or “bad.” Or perhaps it was something much less dramatic. It could have been any event in our past.

I think ultimately what causes the belief that something is “wrong with us,” is that we were not taught that, regardless of how or why or what happened to us, we made those events significant *through the meaning we attached to them*; and, that we always did and do have the power to choose our thoughts, meanings and beliefs, if we are committed to it.

Now that last sentence in the Landmark Education post that I found on FaceBook makes more sense!

*When you get that you add the meaning to life, that there is no meaning inherent in anything, that the significance you experience is a function of human interpretation, when you get this you are free, and therefore free to create. **The key, of course, is being willing to be responsible for the mess you have created so far!*** – Landmark Education (on FaceBook)

I once coached a man who grew up in a beautiful home and had a great family. (I met them, so I can attest to this.) He was also a multimillionaire who owned a number of businesses. Yet this man struggled with crack cocaine and sex addictions. In one of our meetings, I asked him when he thought all of his problems with addictions started. And this is what he told me. When he was a kid, he realized that he was gay. It was at a time when being gay wasn't accepted to the degree it is today. So what he decided (the meaning he made up) about himself was that he was evil and bad and didn't deserve to live. And why would he make up that meaning? I don't know. Maybe he overheard his parents talking about homosexuality as being "evil," "wrong," or "bad." The cause could have been as simple as just that one conversation that he overheard. But, because he was not taught the power of his own thoughts, he gave his parents thoughts more power than his own. Perhaps this is how we breed co-dependency?

For this man, this may have been one of those "moments in time" when he created the killer belief that "something was wrong" with him, a belief which caused him eventually to turn to drugs and sex in order to escape the mental and emotional pain he felt inside — all from the belief which he was unaware that HE had created.

## The Destructive Power of a Simple Question...

When we create the belief that something is wrong with us, our mind naturally wants to find out the reason why, so that we can correct the problem and feel better. So we begin asking ourselves a very simple question: “What's wrong with me?” It seems harmless enough. But then our mind asks it again, and again, and again: “What's wrong with me? What's wrong with me?”

What happens when we focus continually on a question like that? We start to get more and more evidence to support our belief that something is wrong with us. Then, whenever bad stuff happens – as it eventually does – our mind is unaware that we actually attracted this bad stuff by our thinking and our belief is enforced even more. We may even start to think that bad things happened *because* there's something wrong with us. Conversely, when good things happen, we've become so used to thinking something's wrong that we start to doubt our good feelings, and we believe the good stuff won't last, and our belief becomes “true.” We may even feel guilty for having good feelings, or look for what's wrong in our “good” situation.

Of even equal importance is how this kind of thinking makes us feel. By asking “What's wrong?” all the time, we cause ourselves mental and emotional pain. And this has a spiraling effect. The worse we feel, the more we ask the question. And the more we ask the question, the worse we feel.

Eventually our discomfort grows to the point where we need relief from it, and that's when we turn to something (anything – it is a matter of emotional survival) to give us peace, comfort or pleasure. So we smoke a cigarette or take a drink. We go to the mall and shop. Or perhaps we blow up at someone – whether at home, at work or on the highway – and suddenly we feel free again!

Unfortunately, it doesn't last long. Soon the good feeling goes away and the

discomfort returns (and sometimes it's worse), so we do the behavior a second time in an attempt to get the good feeling back. And for many of us, this cycle happens again and again. Over time it becomes a habit, and when the discomfort keeps getting worse and the pleasure less, that habit becomes a compulsion, or even an addiction. The thing we once used to "escape" how we feel is now causing us more pain than before we started doing it. And it seems as though we have no control.

But here's the key. For me, the substance or behavior we're doing didn't cause us to feel this way. The thoughts and feelings came first. Before the behavior came the belief. And our habit is now just a symptom – an attempt to escape from the pain or discomfort we feel inside.

### **How Common is This?**

Earlier I said that most addicts I've known believed there was 'something wrong with them,' and that I experienced this too. However, what I've learned since is that it doesn't just apply to addicts (depending on how you define "addicts" of course).

Somewhere deep within the human mind, there seems to be an inherent thought that we are "not enough." (Many people have written about this — I'm definitely not the first.) For some of us, it comes up as a belief that we aren't "good" enough, "strong" enough, or "lovable" enough. For others, it's that we don't "know" enough, "have" enough or "look good" enough.' Some people experience it as mostly unconscious or out of mind; but there are many who are confronted by it each and every day.

This belief that we are not OK shapes our thinking and behavior in significant ways. For example, we may begin to see ourselves as either inferior to other people or as superior to them (which is actually a defense against feeling inferior).



In order to compensate, we try harder and harder to be better and better. So, we excel at things like school, sports or work. Alternatively, we may try to get others to admire, appreciate or love us; or we may try to control people or the world around us so that we feel “safe.” However, the more we do these things, the more energy we are actually giving to those underlying thoughts — that we will never have, do or be quite enough.

Many of us believe that we are not okay as we are. And since it’s not a subject we talk much about, we think we’re the only ones who feel this way. I certainly did at one time in my life. However, some past work I did in the area of codependency has shown me that it’s true for almost everyone.

## **Trying to Make Ourselves Feel Better**

Believing that something is wrong with us or that we’re “not enough” has deep impacts. It provokes feelings of unhappiness, emptiness and lack. It generates thoughts that we’re bad or guilty for some reason, even though we don’t know why. This leads us to doubt our worth and our value. So we begin making choices that are not in our best interests. We become easily influenced by others. And we do things to please others, get attention, or get along.

Instead of making ourselves feel better by doing what’s necessary to restore integrity in our lives – for example, accepting our thoughts and feelings, being true to our selves, making empowered choices and creating what we really want – we turn instead to the “easier, softer way” of accepting substitutes to replace having a full, rich and powerful life.

Here are some more examples of what that might look like:

- If we are feeling powerless and worried about our life, we may try to get that power back by demonstrating power over our kids by controlling them.

We may avoid worrying about our life by worrying about our kids – or anyone else for that matter.

- If we're feeling empty, we may try to 'fill ourselves up' through food, drink, entertainment or activity.
- If we don't think we're good enough, we may use over-working or taking care of others to feel "enough."
- If we don't believe we have value, we may try to prove our worth through over-performing or trying to attract the praise of others.
- If we see ourselves as weak or vulnerable, we might suppress our feelings and emotions (such as tears, anger, tenderness or love) and become tougher and more aggressive.
- If we're afraid of being "wrong," we may do everything we can to be right and not make mistakes.
- If we believe we're not lovable, we may compromise ourselves sexually or emotionally to get love, acceptance or esteem from others.

By the way, this is not meant as a criticism of any of these behaviors. They are all "survivor mode" responses to not feeling good enough. But with each of these choices, we are actually burying or forgetting our true self. We use them to feel safe instead of growing, or to mask our real thoughts and feelings instead of being honest with ourselves and others. And eventually, we start to forget how we really feel and what we really want inside. We become, as the Pink Floyd song goes, "comfortably numb."

In the short term, our habits seem like excellent solutions to fill the gaps we feel inside. But in the long term, they actually perpetuate our problems — because we haven't dealt with how we think and feel underneath.

## Seeing Our Problems as Outside of Us

In addition to using these kinds of behaviors to make ourselves feel better, we also compensate by choosing thoughts that do the same thing. So we say things to ourselves like: “I didn’t do anything wrong; *they* did it to me.” Or, “There’s nothing I can do. Other people are the source of my problem.” The purpose of these thoughts is to protect us from feeling wrong, guilty or bad by putting or “projecting” responsibility onto others. However, they also stop us from looking at the real source of our bad feelings, and *we begin to see ourselves as victims, which for me is the ultimate tragedy and what I am really out to transform.*

We think we’re dissatisfied because we don't have enough money, the right job or the best car. We have a wife who doesn’t understand or a husband who doesn’t appreciate us. Or maybe it’s that we’re not the right height, weight, age or body type to be accepted by others. If we just looked better, then we would be happy.

All of these can certainly influence our self image and happiness. Yet in truth, none of them really matters because they’re not the cause of our feelings. We could change any one of them and feel better for a while. But ultimately, it won’t last, because they weren’t the real problem. As long as we believe we're not loveable or good enough, our mind will continue collecting evidence to support our belief.

Seeing the outside world as the source of our discomfort or problems is very common. This then leads us into judging and criticizing others, or into chronic blaming and complaining about whatever is happening – a key trait of ALL addicts I’ve known (including myself). By seeing ourselves as victims, we may also choose unconsciously not to take responsibility for our life. Why? Because we can’t see there is any other choice from the perspective of “victim.” Or the opposite may happen. We might start trying to save others or change the world to make

ourselves feel better. But instead of doing it from love and acceptance, we do it out of feelings of lack, fear, anger or a need to impose it on others, instead of giving them free choice.

## **Do We All Look for “What’s Wrong?”**

If you see yourself in anything I’ve just said, you might be feeling a little uncomfortable right now. Let me reassure you that that’s not the purpose, and there’s no need to be embarrassed or to beat yourself up about it. Because it’s not just you — it’s all of us. I still do it, just not nearly to the degree I used to.

I once heard a church minister state that this “blaming mentality” started with Adam and Eve. (Whether this is true or not, I don’t know; but I loved the perspective.) He said that when God asked Adam why he ate of the tree of knowledge, Adam blamed both God and Eve, saying something like, “It was because of this woman you gave me!” Seeing the problem as either God’s fault for creating Eve, or Eve’s fault for giving him the apple was just Adam’s way of putting responsibility onto others so that he didn’t have to look at himself, because he perceived that that would have been too painful.

A more conventional explanation for why we look for “what’s wrong” in life is described well by Mark F. Weinstein in his book, *Habitually Great: Master Your Habits, Own Your Destiny*. In it he says that we have a societal predisposition for focusing on the negative. Here’s the way he puts it.

“The ‘Seeing What’s Wrong Habit’ is a Habit embedded in American culture. It is a good example of a helpful perspective that has been overemphasized. The Habit permeates the way information is presented and shared throughout the media. It is so pervasive that our conversations are cast in its mold; we rush to judgment and spend a lot of time talking about what’s wrong, criticizing an event or

people or anything, rather than seeing what's right.”

Weinstein then goes on to say that, “the roots of this Habit can often be found within our families of origin. Perhaps your mother or father was an expert at seeing what's wrong. And there you were at three, four or five years of age listening to somebody who is an authority on what's wrong. Given such a history, it would be hard for you not to grow up with that Habit; you would have been stamped with it.”

## CHAPTER SEVEN

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### How We Try to Deal with Addictions & Habits

In the last chapter, I referred to an important concept that may have gone by a bit unnoticed, so I'd like to begin with it here. It's the idea that *our thoughts cause our feelings*. What I mean by that is this: when our thoughts are predominantly negative (about ourselves, others and life), these thoughts generate negative feelings. Conversely, when we have a more positive sense of ourselves, see the good in people and the possibilities in life, our feelings are going to be more positive (PEACE) as well. I am a huge fan of the artist Sting and one of his songs comes to mind. "Let your Soul be your Pilot." What if the word "soul" could be substituted with the word "feelings?" What if our feelings are our soul speaking to us? Speaking to us about what? Maybe our feelings are a gift to always give us access to knowing if our life is on track with what brings us joy? Could it be that simple? Probably not, right? But then again, who gets to make up the meaning? You do!!

It may not serve you to believe in this perspective, but I think it gives us some very valuable insights into what's going on inside us. It can also help us understand and connect some of the different perspectives we've gotten from the experts I quoted and the addicts I talked to, from the concept of the Law of Attraction, and from the links between addictions and habits. Let me do a quick recap to show you what I mean:

What some of the experts said was, "if we don't have love, worth and happiness, we're going to have pain inside. And if we don't deal with the pain, we're going to use substances and behaviors to feel better." What the addicts said was that they believed something was wrong with them (or avoided dealing with that belief by project what's wrong with everyone and everything else). They then used their addictions to feel better, yet still saw themselves as bad and felt guilt and shame

about their behaviors afterwards. And what the Law of Attraction said is that “like attracts like.” In other words, that positive and negative thinking bring about positive and negative results, respectively.

This core idea – that our negative thoughts and beliefs generate negative feelings – is what I believe is *driving our unwanted habits and addictions*. The more negatively we think and feel, the more compelling it is for us to choose to escape those thoughts and feelings through activities or substances that serve us by numbing our pain, or simply making us feel better temporarily.

This process is something I’ve seen countless times in myself and others, including people who are “addicts” and those with self-defined unwanted or destructive habits. It looks something like this. Someone will engage in a behavior that they “like or enjoy,” but that some part of them wants to stop. Afterwards, they judge themselves, telling themselves that they are bad, wrong, dumb or stupid for doing it. With those thoughts come feelings of discomfort or guilt about their behavior and their inability to stop it, and about how others are judging them for it. This judgment and guilt brings them more mental anguish and emotional pain. And then, even though they want to stop, they eventually engage in the behavior again in order to avoid or escape this emotional discomfort or pain. Over time, the cycle becomes self-perpetuating.

If this IS what’s driving us to engage in our addictive and unwanted habits – and I’m not saying that is the “truth,” just that that is the way it appears to me – then finding ways to reduce our negative thoughts and feelings (self judgment, guilt, etc.) would seem to make a lot of sense. So now let’s consider how many of us deal with these “problem behaviors” and the impact this may be having.

## The Negative Power of Labels

When we call something an addiction, many people immediately attach certain beliefs and stigmas to it. For example, we think of these behaviors as being “bad, wrong or unacceptable.” We may also judge the person the same way – especially if we see it as a choice they’re making and not just as a disease or something they “can’t control.” So we have thoughts like, “They shouldn’t be doing that. They’re self-indulgent. They don’t have enough willpower.” Or that they should stop, clean up and “get a life.” Unable to accept, understand, or even look at our own unwanted behaviors, we project and label others or put them in a “negative box” in order to feel more comfortable ourselves. Maybe we give others a label that means that they are unable to change so that we don’t have to take responsibility for having the power or willingness to change our own behavior? But what impact is our thinking having on the other person? And if WE are the one with the addiction, how is it affecting us – since many of us are even harsher with ourselves than we are with someone else.

So, given the fact that, as soon as we call something an addiction other beliefs come with it as well, this time, let’s consider it from a personal perspective. For example, we may see ourselves as powerless or as victims; believe that we’ve done something wrong and “should” feel ashamed or guilty; or be afraid that others will be angry at us or judge us for it; we may even think that we “deserve” to suffer; and so on. Each time we think about our “problem,” more of these thoughts and feelings (often hidden or unconscious) are generated, because it’s become part of our mindset about addictions.

This is why I’ve come to believe that there is little or no value in judging another person’s behavior as an “addiction.” That doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t use the word, or make this assessment if we are the admitting staff at a treatment centre. But unless we can do it without negative judgment, this way of seeing and labeling people can be quite harmful. Why? Because people pick up on it. They



hear it in our words and feel it in our energy. They know that we think what they are doing is bad or wrong, even if we never say it. This reinforces their negative thoughts and feelings about themselves – and, in turn, fuels their unwanted behavior even more.

What this understanding has shown me is that the way we view, think about and talk about someone's addiction may actually be contributing to their problem. And it's one of the reasons why I encourage people to decide for themselves about whether or not they have an "addiction."

### **Treating the Problem: Best of Intentions, Unintended Results**

Many of us have deep feelings that are touched when we see someone doing drugs, drinking to excess, or doing some other behavior that we feel is destructive. And whether out of fear or compassion, we want to "help" — in other words, to get them to stop what they're doing. But let's look a little deeper at what happens when we want to get someone to change.

Here's one very common scenario: In our desire to help, we begin focusing on the other person's problem. We point out their "bad" behavior in order to be "constructive." We subtly start making suggestions about what they should do. If they don't hear us or make use of these suggestions, then we go further by actually telling them what to do, or making other efforts to control or change their actions. We may try to convince them that they need help. Or we threaten "consequences" if they don't do what we think is "best for them."

Our intention could be very well meaning and coming from genuine concern for them. However, what underlying messages are we sending out when we try to fix someone's behavior? The message is that something is wrong with their behaviour (and sometimes, with THEM), and that what THEY are doing is not

okay. And this may have unintended, negative results, because it reinforces the same kind of blaming and negative thinking in the other person.

Having been an addict, I can tell you something: We ALREADY think and feel this way! We already “know” we’re bad and wrong. We already judge ourselves ruthlessly and try our best to fix ourselves. Having someone else treat us this way just confirms and adds to our own negative perceptions. And it really does make us *want to do our behavior even more*, so we can avoid the discomfort.

What I’ve found continually in my work is that trying to fix, change or control others actually alienates the people we want to help. Whether it’s a parent, a spouse, a friend or an addiction professional, if we are out to change someone or impose our choices on them, people perceive that very quickly. Many will then resist our efforts or avoid contact, because being around us reinforces their thoughts of being inferior or not good enough. Again, unintentionally, we are adding to the problem rather than alleviating it

Labeling or fixing people also separates us from them. Because underneath our language and actions is a kind of thinking that says, “These people have addictions, and I don’t.” “I’m okay, but they’re not.” Or “We’re fine, but they’re broken.” Putting our attention on their “bad” behaviors also leads us to forget about our own. It blinds us to the things we are doing – the addictive behaviors or habits we indulge in – that, while they may not be as severe, still come from the same needy, hurting, compulsive or unfulfilled place inside. This is why I choose to see all addictions and habits as connected, because it reminds me that everyone might have them; and it stops me from looking at someone with “a problem” as being somehow different from myself.

If all of this sounds like a condemnation of how we approach “addictions” now, that is truly not my intention. I believe that we are all doing the best we know how to help others and ourselves. **And there really is not just one perspective**

**that serves all.** Yet I also want to offer these perspectives on what I've seen, what I think is going on inside of people, and what happens when we try to change someone who we perceive as being “addicted” — because I think being willing to acknowledge the validity of all perspectives can help us become more effective, and bring us all closer to love.

## **Do You Have a “Bad” Habit?**

Now let's bring all this down to a more personal level, one that everybody can identify with. How many people reading this have a “bad habit” that they'd like to stop? Most of us would probably say that something we do is “bad,” right? And so what — it's a harmless thought. Or is it...?

Yes, it's true. We ALL do things that aren't “the best” for us. So, we eat too many jelly donuts or buy too many shoes, obsess and worry about our love life or don't spend enough time with the people who are important to us. It is human nature to do things that we think we shouldn't, or to not do the things that we think we should. However, this time I'm not so much interested in the habits, but what we call them.

When we label something as “bad,” somewhere inside us we have a negative judgment about it. By using this word, what we're really saying is that it's “wrong” and we shouldn't be doing it. This thinking may be subtle, but it's there. And with these thoughts come negative feelings. In response, some part of us either thinks we should stop, or may actively try to get us to do so. And when we don't, we frequently feel like we've let ourselves down. So we try harder to get ourselves to change. Our thoughts grow more negative, and our feelings do too. We use more pressure, willpower or guilt to make ourselves stop. And the cycle continues. (Can you identify?)

Even though I'm specifically talking about "bad habits" here, it sounds very much like what I described with addictions, doesn't it? Now I'm NOT trying to say that that's what you have. I'm just asking you to consider the process that might be driving it, and that perhaps the problem is not the behavior you are doing, but your *belief in the "bad-ness"* of it.

To test this out, listen to your thoughts and feelings the next time you engage in whatever "bad" habit you may have. (Or ask someone else who has one.) Notice any judgments or beliefs you have about the rightness or wrongness of what you're doing. Watch the way you talk to yourself. And see if you begin judging yourself as well as the behavior. (For many of us, this is where our thinking goes.)

Next, watch to see if your negative thinking about the habit gets reinforced by people around you or society as whole. One obvious example of this is weight and dieting. For example, how our spouse, friends or co-workers look at us or make comments about our weight. Or the way TV shows and public figures talk about being thin as "good." Or that we won't be loved or admired if we are heavy. What messages are you picking up from others?

Now, what happens if you stop your habit? Do you start to feel angry, frustrated or unhappy inside? And if you feel that way, do you do your habit again to feel better, but then feel worse for having "failed" or let yourself down? If this has ever happened to you, think back to that experience and see if the energy of the words like "bad," "wrong" or "guilty" were present for you. If so, ask yourself: "Was the real problem WHAT I was doing, or were my negative thoughts and feelings making me feel worse and keeping me stuck?"

As a final thought, before we move on: What do you think might happen if you didn't see your habit as "bad?"

## The Power of Focus

The more we focus on something, the more it grows in our thoughts, feelings and experience.

Here's an example: Let's say you're in the midst of a cold and snowy winter, and a friend tells you they're going on vacation to a beautiful, exotic and sunny place. What happens in your thinking? First you might say to yourself, "Wouldn't that be great? I could really use the rest." Then maybe you'd get jealous. "Oh yeah, they get to go but I don't. Why don't I ever get to go on vacation?" (It's part of looking at "what's wrong" with life, right?) After that you might say to yourself, "I wonder how much it would cost?"

You begin noticing ads in newspapers, on TV or online. You start thinking about whether you can afford the time off. Then maybe you go as far as booking a trip, or you finally decide it's impossible and put it out of your mind. And all of that started with a simple comment from a friend. *The more we focus on something, the more it grows in us.*

The same process happens with addictions and "bad" habits, but in a negative way. Whenever we think about them, we are giving them our attention and energy. "I really shouldn't do that. That's bad, that's wrong. What if other people knew I was doing this?" And so on. The more we think about them, the more we generate negative feelings. And the more concerned, frustrated, guilty or upset we become, the more we lock them into our behavior. Similarly, the more critical we become of others, the more this reinforces their behaviors too. So is it any surprise that we keep getting more of these bad habits in our lives?

On a societal level, it's like the war on drugs. Sure, we might have some "victories" at times; but overall there doesn't appear to be any less drug use. So is what we're doing really working?

*“What we are doing hasn’t worked, it’s never going to work and we need to change our whole approach. Tinkering around the edges isn’t going to make a difference”.*

Alex Wodak, M.D. Director, Alcohol and Drug Service, St. Vincent’s Hospital, Sydney, Australia.

Perhaps it’s the same principle at work. The more energy we give to what we don’t want, the more we attract it. The more we focus on what we interpret as being “bad,” the more persistent it becomes.

Now let’s consider the impact of some of the things I mentioned earlier: The way we label and judge people who have addictions or any “bad” habit. The negative energy we give them in our societal thinking, conversations and media. The fighting that goes on within the addictions field about “who’s right” and “who’s wrong,” how to define addiction, what causes it, and the “right” way to deal with it.

At some point what hit me was that all of these are part of the larger problem. It’s our “judgementalism” around addiction and unwanted habits that I believe is fueling our “addictive” society.

Next, let’s consider the “power of focus” on an inter-personal level. How much does our trying to control or fix others actually perpetuate their problems? No one can say for sure; yet every mother who brings their child to me for counseling or coaching eventually gets this idea when I explain it to them this way: “Have you ever noticed, when you worry a lot or try to fix your child, that they often react negatively, or do even more of what you want them to stop?” “Yeah, I’ve seen that!” they’ll say. “So, although it’s with good intentions, isn’t what you are doing actually having the opposite result?” I ask. And suddenly they see it. “OH MY \_\_\_\_! I didn’t realize that my worrying was actually reinforcing their problem.”

And that's when they begin looking for a different way to help the people they care about.

Finally, a similar dynamic also occurs on the personal level. Because, as I've just finished describing, when we try to control, pressure or guilt ourselves into changing a bad habit or addiction, we end up giving it more energy.

Interestingly, the same thing happens when we compare our behaviors to others', or try to hide them. Let's say I focus on your addiction, but keep mine private. (You're a drug addict on the street, but I do my "habit" in the privacy of my home.) Maybe I see yours as "more serious" (like drinking or gambling) and minimize the importance of my own (excessive Internet use). Or perhaps mine is more socially acceptable – like shopping, over-working or trying to change others – and people encourage or even praise me for doing it. "Wow, look at how much she cares," they say, as I'm out there fixing the world. Each one adds to the consciousness, the energy, of the problem.

Now don't get me wrong. I'm not trying to say we shouldn't try to change personally, or that there's something wrong with helping others or making a difference. But the issue is HOW we do it, and what kind of energy we put into it. If we are continually criticizing our own habits or telling others not to do them, we are growing negative thoughts and feelings.

The same is true if we are arguing about how to deal with addictions or whose definition or approach is right. We are still contributing that same negative thought-energy to society, which is going to lead to more negative feelings in ourselves or in others. And eventually some of us are going to want to escape that by using some behavior or substance to make ourselves feel better. At least that's the way it appears to me. And that's why I'm looking for alternatives.

## Using Labels to Avoid Responsibility

There's one last way we use the words "addiction" and "bad" habits that I think is worth mentioning here. It's a bit hidden, but perhaps you'll recognize it.

Many people now use the word "addiction" very liberally. It's something we see all over. When I do talks in schools, I hear kids talking about their addictions, regardless of what issue they have or how severe it may be. The same happens in our popular media, as celebrities talk about their addiction to this or that. It's like the term "everyday addictions" — the idea is now being applied to almost any kind of behavior we're have difficulty stopping. This can be very useful, because it's normalizing the word — taking the morality out of it, making it something we can all identify with, and taking some of the shame and blame out of it. However, it also has its downside, because at times we are using it to avoid taking responsibility for our behaviors.

Sometimes what we have might not be an addiction. However we hide behind the word because it implies that "there's nothing we can do about it" or that change is beyond our control. And the real truth is that we just don't want to change, or we feel guilty about what we're doing and our inability to stop doing it.

Used in this way, saying "I'm addicted" becomes an easy way out. And I've done that with different issues in my own life. I once believed I was addicted to junk food and drinking coffee. Yes, I had other "real" addictions, so I thought it made sense to say that these were too. But what I didn't understand then was that there was a pay-off to it. And the pay-off was, "I don't have to be responsible for doing what I would need to do to break free of these eating habits."



## Why Do We Do That?

One of the reasons we use words to hide behind is that many of us are afraid to tell the truth about what's really going on. In my case, it was, "I'm eating junk food. I know it's not good for me. But I have no desire to change. I'm not committed to doing so and I'm tired of being fixed and judged by others for not eating the way they wanted me to. They won't accept my choices, so maybe calling it an addiction might shut them up." Calling it an "addiction" was my attempt at getting people's judgment off my back. In other words, it was a defence, a way to protect myself, something I could even joke about: "Hey, what can I do? I'm addicted to it!" What I was really saying was "Stop judging me," so people would leave me alone about my behavior. I didn't just do this for them though. I did it to justify the behavior in my own mind as well.

In my case, the word "addiction" was what I used. However, the term "bad habit" gets used in exactly the same way. In fact, that one is really common: "I want to lose weight, but I have this 'bad habit' of eating sweets or junk food." "I want to be on time, but I have this bad habit of being late." "I want to be more active, but I have this bad habit of watching too much TV." It's become a way of letting ourselves off the hook; of saying to others, as well as to ourselves, "There's nothing I can do. I have no control." So, we unwittingly choose to become "victims" to our own bad habits.

Getting rid of guilt and shame about our behaviors is absolutely critical. In fact, that is one of the major benefits some people get from the disease model of addiction. For people who believe that they are bad and wrong for destroying their life and the lives of others or that they are worthless at the deepest level, accepting the viewpoint that they have a disease that they were born with is often the perfect place to begin the process of letting go of the self-hatred. Of course this model is not the best for everyone; but no model is the best for everyone! And I really do include my model in that statement too!! Mine is not

superior! It is just another way of looking at it that will serve some and will not serve others .

If unconditional acceptance was present from the very beginning, I wonder if we would have no need to remove the guilt or shame about our behaviors. In fact, I wonder if many of them would not have started in the first place. But for me, “unconditional” includes also not judging or seeing anything wrong with even “guilt” and “shame.” It would be a choice to even see the perfection in guilt and shame. More on that in the next chapter...

## CHAPTER EIGHT

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### Acceptance, Love, and the Power of Choice

About a year ago, I coached a woman who had severe self-harm behaviors. Sarah was regularly using razor blades to cut herself. She called it an addiction, but whether it was “officially” one doesn’t really matter. She had been doing it for years and was feeling desperate about being unable to stop.

Prior to working with her, what I’d come to realize in my work was that I couldn’t help anyone if I first looked at what’s “wrong” in them. In fact, for several years I had been consciously training myself to see what was “right” in each person’s behavior. Therefore, when we met I began by seeing her as perfect, whole and complete, feeling that *whatever* she was doing was in some way good. At one point I said to her, quite sincerely, “Sarah, I see you as perfect. Yes, you are cutting yourself. But other people do weird stuff too. We all do stuff. And there’s nothing ‘wrong’ with it.” Well, she was dumbfounded. She had never met anyone who didn’t judge her for her behavior. And we spent about an hour talking about just that one belief.

Later in our meeting I asked Sarah, “In those moments when you cut yourself, does the physical pain of the cut provide a temporary sense of ease and comfort from all the bad, crazy and judgmental thoughts that were going on in your head just before cutting yourself.” Of course she said “YES.” In other words, her behavior was just as Dr. William Glasser described in the last chapter — a successful strategy for coping with what was going on inside her.

When Sarah got the message that there really was nothing wrong with what she was doing – and that she was free to do something different, if she wanted to – her energy changed. She suddenly realized that she didn’t have to judge or condemn herself any more, and therefore didn’t have to keep doing this to make

herself feel better. We then began exploring what she would really like to be doing with her life, and what small steps she could take to move towards it. And on that day, she stopped cutting herself.

Looking back, I don't think that this result could have been accomplished if I had *tried to get her* to do it. It certainly wouldn't have happened if I'd told her not to cut or been upset about her for doing so, because seeing her as "whole and complete" was where we had to start, acknowledging that her cutting was a brilliant and creative habit she had created to survive uncontrollable thoughts and emotional pain. Had we not first dealt with "there's nothing wrong here," she would have had no "access" to something different. She'd simply have continued criticizing herself, fighting against the wrongness or badness of her addictive behavior, and probably continued the cutting.

This is another example of what I mean by "going beyond right and wrong" in how we approach addictions and habits. It's something I now call "unconditional acceptance" — and it has become a cornerstone of my work.

## **What Does Unconditional Acceptance Look Like?**

When we do something we "shouldn't" or don't do something we "should," we touch a place inside that many of us know only too well: a place of feeling wrong or bad. "You shouldn't be eating junk food. You're overweight," we tell ourselves. Or, "You shouldn't be shopping so much. You're spending too much money." It could be anything (so use whatever words fit for you). Or maybe it's the reverse: "You should be exercising more. You should be eating healthier. You should be earning more money..." Whatever the "wrong" behavior is, we judge ourselves for it. And with that judgment come subtle – or NOT so subtle – feelings of guilt, shame or badness.

For some of us, in these moments we become so self critical that we “beat ourselves up” inside. Or we may try frantically to change whatever it is that we’re doing. However, it’s worth repeating one more time that the behavior is not the real issue. The real problem is what is “making us” do it, what is driving our actions. If it is our negative thoughts and feelings, then anything we think, say or do that reinforces these will add to the problem.

So what can we do to turn this around, to escape the shame and blame we pile on ourselves and others? For me, the answer lies in the concept of unconditional acceptance and love, because it reduces the negativity inside us.

How do we show unconditional love and acceptance? There are many, many different ways: By not using negative labels such as bad and wrong to judge our behaviors (or someone else’s), even if society might see them that way; By starting to consciously accept ourselves and our behavior, regardless of what we’re doing or our willingness (or lack of willingness) to change; By choosing to see what’s right in whatever someone is doing, instead of what’s wrong; By being honest with ourselves about how we feel, what we want and the choices we’re making; And by shifting from avoidance to taking responsibility for what we are doing. These are just a few starting points.

Instead of feeling like we need to hide behind words like “addictions” or “bad habits,” wouldn’t it be cool if we could just be straight with ourselves? For example, looking in the mirror and saying, “I’m over-weight, but I’m not committed to losing any of it,” but then not feeling ashamed or thinking that there’s anything wrong with us. Or looking at our behavior honestly, and loving ourselves for whatever we’re choosing to do. “Yes, I’m eating these French fries. Does that mean that I’m not changing my eating habits or doing more exercise? Yes, it does ... but I’m okay with that.” (I know that that probably sounds impossible to some readers. But that shows how deeply our “lack of self-acceptance” and negative thinking goes.)

Making this shift from forcing or guiltting ourselves to accepting ourselves as we are is a major one for many people. I've been practicing it and teaching it for several years, so I understand just how tough it can be. Yet what I've discovered is that it's also tremendously freeing. Instead of continually trying to correct, fix or pressure myself into changing, I find it much more peaceful to be honest and accepting. "Yes, I know that running every day, eating salads and drinking water would help me lose weight and feel better, but I don't want to do all that right now. I'd rather keep these habits, and I am willing to be responsible for the consequence of my choice."

### **Isn't This Just a License to "Do What We Want?"**

This is another one of those paradoxical answers, of which there are many when we begin moving beyond right-wrong-negative, good-bad-positive thinking. What I've learned is that giving myself this kind of unconditional acceptance makes me feel better, more relaxed and at peace. I also like myself more, because I'm treating myself with greater love and respect. It's my way of honouring myself for who I am and for who I am not. On one hand, this gives me more permission to do whatever I want to do. Yet at the same time, it gives me a sense of freedom and opens the door to so many possibilities and choices that were previously unavailable to me. I feel so much better about myself, am able to listen to my feelings as a guide to what actions would make me feel good and act on it. So in these ways, it's like Sarah's experience earlier: Acceptance opens the door to the possibility of something different happening.

This isn't just "self indulgence." In my programs, I also teach people to do things that take them outside of their comfort zone. These are simple steps and behaviors to begin growing positive habits. Yet no matter how small they are, I know this is going to make people feel uncomfortable, because going beyond our

comfort zone always is! However, this is part of how we get out of our old ruts of “ease and comfort.”

Thus it’s not “one or the other,” it’s both: giving people unconditional acceptance and love AND encouraging them to take steps to change, if that is what serves them; helping them to honestly accept themselves as they are AND beginning to make choices that move them in the direction of what they most want in their life. But these choices aren’t mine; these come from the people I serve. It’s what they decide they want to do, freely and authentically. Therefore, they’re more likely to keep doing them. And this is what creates lasting change. What I’ve found is that unconditional acceptance of wherever they are right now is the foundation, because it brings the internal peace and willingness out of which honest choice and authentic change can come.

Here’s another example of that. A young teen attended one of my high school programs some months ago. It turns out that he came because he was concerned about the amount of marijuana he was smoking. After the 28-day program ended, we spoke on the phone about what his experiences had been. He told me that he was now smoking half the amount of pot he did before – and a month before, he hadn’t thought that that was possible.

I asked him what he thought had helped him to change. And what he said was that he wasn’t beating himself up about his habit any more. He wasn’t shaming himself, thinking that he was a bad person, or hating himself for what he’d been doing. This was what enabled him to cut down his smoking. He also said that, going into the program, he thought he “would never, ever, ever, ever be able to stop” smoking pot. However, now he believed that it was truly possible that one day he could get off it entirely.

## What is the Meaning of “Love and Acceptance?”

After reading an early draft of this book, a woman named Angel sent me an email to share her views about this subject. Here’s a brief excerpt of what she said:

Dear Scott:

Treating others with love does not necessarily mean allowing others to do as they wish...

I believe in order to help an addict in the long run there must be boundaries. Unconditional love and acceptance should not be equated with being a doormat for their abusiveness, a bank machine to feed their habit, and an excuse for their friends and families to put their lives on hold, waiting for the addict to come around. Unconditional love and acceptance should be tempered with boundaries.

For example: I will love and accept you always but unless I can see you working towards sobriety by going to rehab, I cannot permit you to disrupt my daily life and I cannot allow you around our children or family unsupervised. Example#2: I will always love and accept you, but I cannot sit around and wait for you to change your mind about going to rehab or getting help. You need to know that I will continue to move forward in my life regardless of what you choose to do, although I would hope that you would choose sobriety. - Angel

So what do you think? Is this the way we should deal with addicts or people with destructive behaviors? This is definitely a useful viewpoint on what unconditional acceptance and love could look like. Yet at the same time, other people will have other perspectives. Just as with “addictions” and “bad habits,” the words “love” and “acceptance” mean different things to different people. So for me, there are no “right” answers. Just like “Addictions,” no single definition or interpretation works for everyone. Therefore it’s up to you to decide. It’s how you hear it, understand it and use it in your own life that matters most.

In his book *Conversations with God*, Neale Donald Walsch talks about these concepts as they relate to the “destructive habit” of abuse:



“... [I]f you look to what is best for you in these situations where you are being abused, at the very least what you will do is stop the abuse. And that will be good for both you and the abuser. *For even an abuser is abused when his abuse is allowed to continue.*

This is not healing to the abuser, but damaging. For if the abuser finds that his abuse is acceptable, what has he learned? Yet, if the abuser finds that his abuse will be accepted no more, what has he been allowed to discover? Therefore, treating others with love does not necessarily mean allowing others to do as they wish.

Parents learn this early with children. Adults are not so quick to learn it with other adults, nor nation with nation. Yet despots cannot be allowed to flourish, but must be stopped in their despotism. Love of Self, *and love of the despot*, demands it.” (Note to readers: Dictionary.com defines a *despot* as, among other things, “a tyrant or oppressor.”)

My views are quite similar to Neale’s on this, particularly with respect to his last sentence: “Love of Self, and love of the [other], demands it.” And here’s the way I’d phrase it to honor my perspective: I believe that unconditional acceptance and love are about honoring both ourselves AND others. It’s giving people full freedom of choice to do what THEY FEEL is “right” for them. It’s also giving ourselves the same permission – to love and accept ourselves, then choose to do what is right for us. This is the foundation of all my work, including family “interventions.”

Recently, I was watching a TV show about dealing with people who have addictions and destructive habits. (It’s called *Intervention*.) Frequently on the show, families try to get someone they care about to go into treatment. However, even if they’re successful at doing this, often the person’s “recovery” doesn’t last. As I watch the show, I’ve come to be able to predict when this is going to happen. And here’s the clue: it’s when the family is trying to force someone into treatment in such a manner that the addict perceives that they really are not being given a

choice. The addict will say something like, “I don’t want to go.” And the family says, “No, you have to. It’s for your own good.” Or, “There are going to be serious consequences,” or “you’re going to have to leave if you don’t.”

For me, it always comes back to love and acceptance. When we try to control someone else’s behavior, the way they hear and experience that is: “If you don’t do what we want you to do, we won’t love or accept you.” And in my experience, I’ve seen over and over again that this very seldom works.

Now, don’t get me wrong: Interventions ARE necessary at times. And many of us DO have situations where we have to deal with someone else’s behavior that is negatively impacting our life. But here’s where I’d ask a new question: How can we use acceptance, love and choice to honour everyone involved? Here’s what that might sound like.

“Listen, if you want to use drugs, you have every right to. It’s not my business to impose my will on yours. But I also want you to know that I choose not to live with someone who’s doing drugs, even if you’re my child, husband or wife. I am absolutely committed to that. So if you want to continue doing them, either one of us may need to leave. Or, if you’re willing, you could go to treatment, or explore other options that feel right for you. But I really want you to know that I’m not trying to force you into that, because I don’t want you to do something you don’t want to do.”

I don’t believe that any of us has the “right” to change someone else. Whether we are in a marriage or a partnership, or if it’s our kids, friends or employees, the other person’s choices are ultimately up to them. Yet being in a relationship means that some of their choices may also affect us. So at the same time as I want to give other people love, acceptance and free choice, I also want to do the same for myself.

If I perceive that being around someone is provoking suffering in me, even though I know changing my thinking would change how I feel, sometimes that is not realistic. I am best served when I make choices that honour myself. And paradoxically, the actions that I take out of self-love are also the most loving towards the other person.

This might begin by saying, “When you do this or say that, I end up feeling bad. I do not want to control or blame you for anything because I am responsible for how I feel, but I also want to let you know that if you do continue, then something’s going to change. I won’t be training you that it is OK to treat me this way.” This kind of unconditional acceptance and commitment to your own well-being first is, in my opinion, an essential part of all healthy relationships, AND essential to the process of dealing with someone else’s habits or addictions. It’s not about accepting or loving them OR you — it’s both.

Continually allowing someone to hurt or abuse us is not love. It’s not love for us, and it’s not love for them either. What we’re actually doing is teaching the person that their behavior is permitted and can continue. Therefore we are actually stimulating more of it by continuing to allow it.

Now, some people will take what I’ve just said and use it to control the other person. It might look and sound the same, but inside we will know, and they will too. If our intention is, “I want to control, stop or change you,” then they are going to feel it. And whatever change they make is not likely going to last, because it wasn’t their honest, authentic choice.

For me, real change doesn’t come out of control. It’s just the opposite. “If you need to continue to do your addiction or habit, I want to honour your choice. I wish I did not allow your choices to impact me the way they do, because I really love you. And I don’t want to ask you to stop just because it is affecting me; but

I'm also taking a stand (or making a choice) for my own happiness, which does not include being around this behavior."

Having said all that, I also need to remind you that this is still not "the truth." It's just my own interpretation of what unconditional love and acceptance look like for me, and alternative ways we can treat others and ourselves in these extreme situations.

Honouring ourselves, while at the same time loving and accepting someone else unconditionally – even their desire to do a destructive habit – may sound like a huge challenge. And at times it is! I don't want to minimize that, or the pain you may be experiencing if you're dealing with that. The question I'd invite you to ask yourself is, "What will bring me more peace?" What I've found, for myself, is that when we make the other person wrong or believe that one of us should change, it generates a lot of conflict between us. However, when I can truly come from love and acceptance – for me and the other person – my language and actions become more focused and clear. I feel stronger about standing up for myself. At the same time, I truly want to support the other person in whatever they choose; and they feel that and hear it in my words and actions. And the results are often more positive than we previously might have expected.

Perhaps the real challenge is not who will change, but will WE honestly accept ourselves and honour our own choices? That's something many of us have difficulty with.

## The Paradox of Choice...

I believe that the way we choose to interpret the meaning of the events and circumstances in our life is always a choice. Even this belief is an interpretation of the meaning of “choice”. And the choice I want to make is the one that empowers me the most.

When I’m experiencing “negative” circumstances, or people seem to be doing or saying things I don’t want, it empowers me to see myself as 100% responsible for everything that’s occurring — not because it is “true,” but because that empowers me more than “blaming”.

At the same time, when I’m talking to someone or working with them I choose what might seem like the opposite perspective. While I believe they have the same capacity to choose, they may not be aware of this, not believe it to be true for them, or just not yet developed the muscle of consciously choosing their thoughts. So when I relate to them, I want to act as if everything I say is going to impact them potentially even more than their own thoughts and perceptions.

Let me say that again slightly differently. If ultimately what I want to do is make a difference in the world, I can’t do that if I see myself as being a victim to the circumstances, people, places or things around me. That perspective doesn’t give me access to transforming anything. That’s why, when I’m working with someone, I am committed to clearing my thoughts, feelings, words and behaviors of any disempowering judgment in order to provide as much love and acceptance as I can.

That’s the paradox of choice for me. And that too is just a perspective...

## What I Want For You...

When considering how I most want to treat another person, this is the way I choose to look at things: “I want for you what you want for you.”

That might sound like I’m just being nice, or people-pleasing. But I honestly mean it. Even if what you want appears not to be what I want, what I want for you is what you want for you.

When I say this statement to myself, I literally feel better and stronger inside. It brings a smile to my face. And it truly feels like I’m honouring the other person. Saying it also helps me go beyond what I think is “best or right” for them, or what I personally want to happen in any situation. Instead, “my interest” becomes what the other person unconditionally wants for him or herself. And this is something I also want, and give to myself. I want you to want for me what I want for me and that is therefore what I give to you.

Let’s also be real. This doesn’t mean I don’t have my own wants, hopes or desires. Yes, my humanity might want you to stop smoking, drinking or doing drugs. I might hope that you’ll stop being angry or controlling. And I’d certainly desire that we find a way for you to want to live rather than die, to not commit suicide if you’re considering that, especially if you’re someone who’s close to me. And yet, I can still honestly say: “I only want what you want for you.”

An extreme example of this was the death of someone close to me named Matt. Matt was like a brother and son to me and he died tragically through a drug overdose at the age of 23. He was someone I deeply loved and wanted to be here. I wanted him to live! Yet on another level, my interpretation was that his soul made a choice to leave. So what’s in my “best interests,” then? If his soul was really saying, “Scott, I don’t want to be here anymore,” would I want to have him stay for me, or go for him? My choice came down to what I wanted most for him.

The same thing happened with Gary - another friend who passed away – but this time due to cancer. I felt that he wanted to die, but I also sensed it would be hard for him to say that to those who loved him, since a lot of people have difficulty with death. I wanted him to live too. Yet I also wanted him to know that there's nothing wrong with choosing to die; and that if he chose to, it was what I would want for him. When he died, I was deeply sad that he was no longer here. But I was also at peace with knowing it was what he wanted.

The reason I share these stories in a book about bad habits and addictions is this: I don't want to be attached to, or have expectations about what another person does. Why? Because ultimately I don't know what is in their best interests. Whatever I think is "best" for them is just my viewpoint. I don't *know*.

What I want most is what truly serves the other person — whatever they want in their heart of hearts. And, if right now that is doing drugs or getting drunk, over-shopping or working, under-or-over eating or self-harm, then I have to trust (or choose to think) that that is serving a purpose. So I want to give them the experience of such love and acceptance that they feel able to choose what's right for them, and feel safe to tell me the truth about it.

Yes, I may have feelings to express or ideas to contribute. And when it feels appropriate, I will voice these – not out of need, but from a desire to contribute my full self to others. But I don't want someone to see themselves as bad or wrong, or take it as personal rejection if they don't act on it. That's why I choose not to focus on the outcome I want and focus instead on discovering what they really want for themselves.

What helps me have this kind of unconditional acceptance is knowing that I really don't know what's right or best for any human being on earth. In the grand scheme of things, I don't know why you are here or what you "need" to do for

yourself. Therefore I'm not going to tell you that drugs are bad or try to make you stop. For all I know, they may be the only thing that's stopping you from killing yourself or hurting or abusing someone else. I just don't know.

Understanding that makes it much easier to accept another person's choices. Are they good or bad? Well, in what context? What about a kid who interprets his father's and mother's behaviors as being abusive, for example? Maybe that son blames his parents for why his life did not turn out the way he wanted, then becomes an addict in response to his interpretations. Maybe that too is not as bad as it sounds. Maybe that kid grows up to start organizations that prevent and solve addiction problems, organizations that touch so many people that the world would have been a worse place had he not had the experience of abuse, created disempowering meanings and subsequently become an addict.

My personal access to unconditional acceptance comes from being willing to be open to the possibility that no matter how much I exercise my power to create and choose meanings, that there may be a greater purpose, benefit or plan in whatever someone is doing. That perhaps, in the bigger picture, they're doing it for a reason that serves both them and the planet in a massive way that I am not capable of seeing because I don't have the mindset of God to see it. So judging you or your behavior simply makes no sense to me. And I fully acknowledge that everything I just said is an interpretation I created of "the meaning of meaning".

## **I Want This for Myself**

The reason I've chosen this approach is, first: It works. It actually does help people reduce or end their unwanted habits. And second, because it's also what I want for myself.

Just like any child, there were many times that I felt I wasn't being accepted and loved. When my father said things or my mother did things, or when my



classmates or teachers acted in certain ways, I interpreted these events to mean that I wasn't accepted for who I was, that my choices, feelings and needs weren't important, and consequently experienced a lot of pain. I didn't know then that I had the power to choose and see things differently. So I got trapped in my own negative patterns, which led to my bad habits and addictions.

To this day, I still hate being controlled by people. I dislike being told what to do or having people give me advice when I don't ask for it. Since I don't like being treated this way, it would only be out of integrity for myself not to treat others that way. So I try to give to people what I want for myself. I want the freedom to be a good person as well as a jerk — in other words, to be a human being, with all of what that means for me.

That said, I also love having the freedom to be honest and direct with people and having friends who accept that. It feels great to say what's on my mind and speak my truth without being judged or judging myself for it. There's peace in that. And I guess that's ultimately what it comes down to. When I feel that people accept me for both who I am and for who I'm not, I can be myself — and I experience peace. But when I sense that people are trying to fix me or change me, I feel restless and judged.

If you've ever been around someone who's constantly worrying about you or wanting you to change, you'll know what I mean: It feels awful. You don't feel safe to be yourself, to tell them your truth or to say what's really going on — because if you do, they're going to worry or be upset. They don't really want to hear it, so you don't really want to share it. And you tend not to give that to yourself, either. So instead of coming from acceptance and love, you end up making choices out of fear. And that just adds to the cycle I described earlier, where our negative thoughts and feelings fuel our negative habits and behaviors.

## **Restless, Irritable, Discontented... and Our Search for Peace**

I'd like to go back briefly to the 12 steps and the big book of *Alcoholics Anonymous*. (So pardon me if this approach or language doesn't fit for you.) In that book, there's one very small section that I used to teach people so often that it became a core element of my thinking. And while it deals with addiction, it also seems to apply to everyone I've ever worked with — so perhaps it's just part of being human.

In *Alcoholics Anonymous* it says that alcoholics are “restless, irritable and discontented unless they can experience ease and comfort, which comes at once by taking a few drinks.” That phrase stayed with me all these years. And at some point I started asking myself: “What's the common problem, the thing that everyone I've worked with said was true?” Whenever I took someone through that section of the book, people agreed with it. Regardless of what their behavior was, they said that they felt that way (or words to that effect) before and after doing their addiction or habit, and they felt some ease, peace or comfort while doing it.

So what are people really looking for, I wondered: Feelings of ease or comfort? And what are “restless, irritable and discontented?” Are those the feelings that are driving them to make themselves feel better in whatever way they can?

And that was the clue. What came to me was this: We do things we don't really want to, even when they hurt us, because of how “restless, irritable and discontented” we feel; and what we are really seeking is some kind of comfort and peace. Our addictive behaviors and habits have become our primary way of getting these feelings. But instead of using our addictions and unwanted habits, couldn't we find a different way to generate those feelings inside?

These questions led me to ask other questions. What could be causing those feelings? What would stop us from feeling that way? If we could find out what

causes these uncomfortable feelings as well as what alleviates them, and also, what both have in common, we might have something that could work for anyone. That's why the Cognitive Behavior Therapy, and Law of Attraction viewpoint that "thoughts cause feelings" became so appealing to me, and led me to create the programs and do the work that I'm doing.

Now let me make all this more personal. What kind of thinking causes ME to feel discontented inside? Well, it's when I'm judging someone else or judging myself. When I don't unconditionally accept someone. When I think they should be doing something they're not (and that includes me). Or when I'm focused on what I want for myself, but not for others. All of these result in me feeling irritable or discontented inside. And that's the opposite of peaceful.

I recently saw some old friends from my "recovery" years, a time when we used to take addicts page-by-page through the Big Book. We were passionate in those days and "knew" that what we were doing was "right" and the most effective way to recover. What I discovered when I met with them is that some of them haven't changed — they still believe in their "truth." When I listened to them talk, I just smiled. I honestly felt no desire to try to correct or change them by saying, "Look, you guys, here's where I am. I've got this better way now ..." I didn't feel the need to say that, because my way is not better. But perhaps more importantly, that would have been making them wrong, which makes me (and probably them) not feel peaceful.

And it's so easy to do, right? When we want to find the right answer or a better way, we start trying to convince other people that we have it. Subtly, we start thinking that we're in a superior place. "But wait, you don't understand. This way is even better. Let me teach you about my peaceful way." It's well meaning; but it just leads me back to the same old place of not being peaceful.

So once again, it's paradoxical. Yes, I absolutely want to share these new insights with people. And no, it won't work if I want to correct them or get attached to them "getting" it. The best way I can be peaceful is by accepting people where they are. If someone wants help or to discuss new approaches, I'd be happy to share. But I don't want to start by trying to change them. Just being with people, where they are, with whatever they believe, has become more peaceful now for me.

Since I mentioned the 12 steps and Alcoholics Anonymous, I'd like to quote from their basic text on the subject of "acceptance." It's from Page 449 in the first 3 editions, pg. 417 in the 4th edition of *Alcoholics Anonymous* or [The Big Book](#) as it is widely known:

"And acceptance is the answer to all my problems today. When I am disturbed, it is because I find some person, place, thing or situation – some fact of my life – unacceptable to me, and I can find no serenity until I accept that person, place, thing or situation as being exactly the way it is supposed to be at this moment.

Nothing, absolutely nothing happens in God's world by mistake. Until I could accept my alcoholism, I could not stay sober; unless I accept life completely on life's terms, I cannot be happy. I need to concentrate not so much on what needs to be changed in the world as on what needs to be changed in me and in my attitudes."

Here is my current process for making decisions. I may see the logic, value or need for something; but if I don't feel peaceful inside, I know I'm not there yet. I don't have to understand why. All I know is that I am committed to being peaceful, and trust that if the thoughts I'm thinking, or the decisions I am considering making results in me feeling peaceful as I consider making them, then those decisions are probably the right ones for me. And sometimes it is not black and white. Sometimes there are a few options that I am considering, and one of

those options is not peaceful, but it's at least more peaceful than all the others, so I move in the direction of greatest peace.

If you want to try this out, begin watching what brings you that internal sense of peace. Certain thoughts, words and actions cause peace, and certain thoughts, words and actions take it away. I'm not saying that they're the same ones for everyone. And whether you call it "peace" or something else doesn't matter — it's the feeling you get inside. And don't be fooled by "excitement." Excitement feels good, but it is not what I am talking about.

So that's what is "driving" me these days: Peace. Whether it's deciding to run, to coach someone, to enter a new partnership or to change a previous commitment, whatever feels more peaceful for me is what I do. Because it makes me feel better. And I'm coming to see that this works on so many levels.

### **Choosing to interpret the meaning of Unwanted Habits and Addictions as being "Right-Good-Positive"**

Another way of choosing "peace" is by being willing to see "the good" in people's unwanted habits and addictions. Now I know THIS sounds strange so remember, I'm not saying such an interpretation is the truth. It is merely a possible interpretation – and one which may cause more peace.

As I described earlier, most of the world sees addictions as "bad," i.e., as something we shouldn't have or be doing. And while that seems totally logical, considering the pain and suffering many addicts go through, as well as the negative consequences of some of their behaviors, our judgments are contributing more of that same energy to the people we'd like to help. That's why I now choose to consider the ways in which each person's addiction or habit may be "right-good-positive". Here are some ways I do that, as well as a few more reasons why.

First, when people are defensive or resistant to change, I want to help them reduce that, so as to make it easier for them to change if they want to. So instead of seeing their behavior as “bad or wrong,” I choose to see them as whole and complete. I also look for “what’s right” in what they are doing, instead of seeing “what’s wrong.” It literally engages my brain in looking for what is useful, valuable and good in the situation. My positive energy grows, and people pick up on this.

Second, I choose to see that the habit or addiction is a successful way of coping with life (as Glasser said), and it is “good” not in a moral sense, but because it’s serving a purpose. If you are feeling uncomfortable or in pain inside and you’re using a substance or behavior to feel better, who am I to judge that? It makes total sense. And as I said earlier, for some people I know, their addiction may very well be the only thing stopping them from committing suicide. And when I’ve said that in some Native or First Nations communities where I’ve worked, I can’t tell you how many young people and elders nod their heads in agreement. It was like “Yeah, someone finally gets it!”

Third, unwanted habits and addictions can be looked on as a gift — a wake-up call about something in our life that is currently “off” or seeking “balance” (as Chris Prentiss said in *The Alcoholism and Addiction Cure*). I remember once hearing a talk by healing pioneer Louise Hay about her discovering that she had cancer. Instead of just fighting or judging it (though she was quite shocked initially), what she chose to do was use the illness/disease to heal at a deeper level. Believing that cancer is caused by resentment and anger, she looked for these kinds of thoughts and feelings that she didn’t know she had. And through releasing them, she also released (healed) her disease.

I’ve seen a similar thing happen for many people with whom I’ve worked. If it wasn’t for the unwanted habits and addictions that brought them to me, they wouldn’t have recognized where they were “stuck” in their lives. This could be

anything from a difficult family situation to a troubled marriage, or working in a career they hated. The pain of their unwanted habits drove them to find and create an authentic life they really love. They began making choosing new thoughts, to grow in new ways, from doing art or music, to speaking more honestly and openly with others, to starting new careers, or making a difference in the lives of others.

Fourth, seeing other people's unwanted habits and addictions differently can also provide us with opportunities. For example, if we are willing to let go of focusing on their problems or trying to change them, we may come to see that their "problems" are actually a mirror for us to see what it is in ourselves that we are unable to look at or accept. They may help us see what habits in our own life are not working – and do so free from self-judgment. We may also begin seeing how much we judge other people, and ourselves too. This may encourage us to have more acceptance, love and compassion, become more effective in helping others, and develop healthier behaviors for ourselves.

So are addictions good or bad? That's up to you to decide. For me it depends on how we choose to see them. Clearly not all consequences of addictive or unwanted behaviors are "good." But if we choose to see that they are serving a purpose and may actually be "gifts in disguise," then perhaps the good in them will become evident. Then our unwanted habits and addictions can become allies in pushing us to shift our thinking and feelings, the ways we see ourselves and others, and the ways that we live our lives.

## **Going Beyond the Guilt and Shame**

Writer and teacher John Bradshaw said some years ago that shame is at the root of all addictions. This can be a useful perspective. So for me, helping people deal with their addictions and unwanted habits is one way of helping them get rid of

that shame — by looking beyond what’s wrong with them to seeing what’s right, giving more unconditional acceptance, and encouraging freedom of choice.

If we choose the interpretation that these kinds of behaviors are natural and commonplace, and that everybody may have them in one form or another, we no longer need to look on them as something to be embarrassed or guilty about, or as even being “our fault.” Maybe we really were born into a world where people are conditioned to look at things negatively, where most people believe that something’s wrong with them, or that they’re not enough — a world where we judge each other, and ourselves, critically. We think we are living an integrity-based life, but we’re not being true to our deeper needs. We work in unhappy jobs and live in unsatisfying relationships, because we thought it was the best we could have. And instead of living more full and powerful lives, we turn to substances, people (sometimes termed “co-dependence”) and behaviors to make ourselves feel better. If that’s “true”, then we can choose to accept that this is simply the world we live in.

From this perspective, we can choose to (as Ghandi said), “be the change we want to see in the world” by gently looking at what we’ve been avoiding in our own lives – our habits, our feelings, our truths, our hopes and dreams – and begin to create new, more empowering habits of thought and action.

We can begin thinking about what we really want in life, instead of what we thought we had to settle for. We can try out new behaviors that replace the shame with something that makes us feel good inside. We might even start doing some things that we’ve been longing to do but have been putting off because we’ve been too afraid or came to believe they were no longer possible.

Yes, like I said, this process is going to be uncomfortable at times. It will take us outside our comfort zone. And we’ll do some things we’ve never done before. But if you knew that you could end up living a life of peace, feeling a greater sense of



ease and fulfillment than you have ever experienced before, wouldn't it be worth some temporary discomfort in order to achieve this result?

Some people will say to that, "Sure!" Others will say, "No thanks, Scott." But either way, that's okay. In fact, it's awesome. For my response will always be "Thank you for being straight and honest with yourself." 'Peace' is not a superior emotion or choice. This isn't about doing what you "should" or needing to please me or anyone else. It's about exercising your own power of choice and honoring yourself. This is why I actually have no interest in changing any of your behaviors. To me they are all perfect not interested in changing any of your behaviors. That would probably make at least one of us feel "wrong-bad-negative" which ultimately is not peaceful for me. What's important to me is that you listen to your own truth and inner wisdom, and make whatever choices you feel right to you.

## **Habit Mastery & Power of Choice**

These last few paragraphs, by the way, are what my Habit Mastery & Power of Choice programs are really all about. They're about creating an atmosphere of acceptance, where people support themselves and others in developing the mental muscle of habitually choosing our thoughts, words, and interpretations, as well as mastering the habit of honoring our words, commitments and promises.

The "Power of Choice" perspective is just that – a perspective, a viewpoint. In fact, although I own the Canadian trademark, I'm certainly not the first person to use the words "Power of Choice". When I say "Power of Choice", I am talking about my own interpretation of the meaning of these words which includes this;

It is our thought and behavioral habits (both conscious and unconscious) that are the cause of our unwanted and wanted experiences in life. Our "choice muscles" have been severely weakened over the years. We've unknowingly given away our power so often that "feeling better" has become our number one

obsession. We've become numb and blind to who we really are and what we "truly want". We've lost touch with our authentic selves. We live to survive and hold on to anything that gives us instant gratification. Little by little, we engage in our unwanted habits more and more. Eventually we eventually become addicted to them, knowingly or not. Kind of like the frog in the pot story that goes something like this.

If you drop a frog in a pot of boiling water, it will frantically try to clamber out. But if you place it gently in a pot of room temperature water and turn the heat on low, it will float there quite placidly. As the water gradually heats up, the frog will sink into a tranquil stupor, exactly like one of us in a hot bath, and before long, it will unresistingly allow itself to be boiled to death.

Fortunately for us, unlike the frog, we are self-aware. Our past choices were a logical outcome of the things we experienced in the past, based on our consciousness at that time. But now we can choose something different. Rather than continuing to give power to past events, circumstances or other people as being the "cause" of our problems or success in life, the "Power of Choice" perspective is the choice to put responsibility and power squarely in our hands. I believe it's how we apply these choices that shapes and determines our future.

"We shape our lives. We shape ourselves. The choices we make are ultimately our own responsibility" Eleanor Roosevelt.

The Power of Choice rests on the belief that each of us has the capacity to reclaim our power – to think, believe, feel, be, have and do - to virtually create anything we want in life, whether it's breaking free of unwanted habits or addictions, overcoming personal challenges, or accomplishing something that others say is "impossible." If one person can accomplish it, it's available to all of us. And if one person did it, so can WE.

*"Your time is limited. So don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma – which is living with the results of other people's thinking. Don't let the noise of others' opinions, drown out your own inner voice. And most important,*

*have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you want to become. Everything else is secondary.” Steve Jobs 1955-2011.*

## **Having Authentic Choice...**

What I tell participants in my programs is that, whatever their habits are or how serious they believe them to be, I first want them to get the idea that there is nothing wrong with what they are doing. My intention is not to convince them to change, because that choice has to be 100 per cent their own. In other words, I want them to authentically choose for themselves.

For me, “authentic choice” means that nobody is trying to make us do something. There’s no pressure, force, guilt, manipulation or intimidation behind it. Thus, when we say “I want to change,” it comes honestly from within us.

When they look at their behavior this way, people come to see that it was probably quite satisfying or beneficial at one time, perhaps even for many years, but if it is no longer serving them and they want to make a different choice, then of course they can. And it’s from this place of emotional freedom, willingness and desire that they can authentically choose what’s right for them.

Making ourselves wrong all the time simply keeps us stuck. No one can choose freely from here, because this belief is what’s perpetuating the problem. It’s only when we see that nothing’s wrong, and there’s no judgment or guilt about having to change, that free will becomes available to us. And that, too, is the power of choice.

## **What the Habit Mastery & Power of Choice Programs Involve**

One of the objectives of this book is to share the key distinctions of all our Habit Mastery & Power of Choice Programs - as well as some of the practical steps we use.

These programs are about encouraging people to make free choices for themselves, choices about whether or not to participate, what new positive habits they will try out, how much they'll do on a daily basis. And it's about creating structures that support them in keeping their commitments. There's no attempt to get people to do things they don't want to, and no criticism or guilt if they don't follow through. However, it is also about learning how they feel when they do or don't keep their commitments, do their new habits, and make new choices to feel better about themselves.

In all of our programs, participants are given simple activities and positive behaviors to start building up their “muscles of choice.” These may include things like drinking water, doing exercises and taking new steps to do things the things they have been putting off — but all in ridiculously small amounts. This is to avoid the normal pressures we put on ourselves to make immediate changes or to set huge and unattainable goals that set us up for failure. This program is about setting ourselves up to succeed.

Other elements of our programs are: training ourselves to develop the habit of seeing “what's right-good-positive” in others instead of “what's wrong-bad-negative;” creating new meanings for past events in our lives; making amends or apologies to those we may have hurt or let down; having daily contact with a buddy (or team of buddies); and keeping daily commitments to ourselves. (I've given a more detailed list below.)

However, it's not these activities themselves that are the most important. It's the internal good feelings – like confidence, self-acceptance and strength – that people start to experience as a result of doing them. These more positive thoughts and feelings begin to replace the old (but previously persistent) negative thoughts and feelings which may have been driving their behaviors.

Part of the reason I call it the “power of choice” is because, almost by definition, addictions and unwanted behaviors are about having little or no choice. They describe an internal state where we feel unable to change. The Habit Mastery & Power of Choice process is about helping people see and experience for themselves the areas of their lives where they really DO have choice. And engaging in those choices facilitates a shift towards more positive thinking, feeling and behavior. In fact, for some, the creation and development of certain positive habits results in the “accidental” disappearance of their “addiction.”

Here are some of the core ideas and steps used in the Habit Mastery & Power of Choice programs that help create this shift:

- 1) Giving people the freedom to choose what's authentically right for them by not trying to manipulate or control them into changing their behaviors.
- 2) Considering the possibility that thoughts cause our feelings and that negative thinking and feeling motivate us to do our negative behaviors.
- 3) Shifting our belief that there is something wrong with us (or others), that we are not enough or need to be perfect and that there is something that needs to be fixed or changed.
- 4) Transforming our way of thinking (and the language we use) about addictive behaviors and unwanted habits by not judging them, seeing them as “wrong or bad,” or seeing others as “broken,” or “needing to be fixed.”

- 5) Choosing to see the positive aspects, or the “good” in addictions and unwanted habits; seeing our addictions/habits as a gift or message from our conscience or spirit that we are being, thinking and/or doing things that are out of alignment with what we really want.
- 6) Giving unconditional acceptance and love to others, and ourselves by choosing to see people as “right, whole and perfect.”
- 7) Creating structures that support us in developing new behaviors and habits of thinking that make us feel better about ourselves and that enable us to enjoy life.
- 8) Developing the habit of choosing our perceptions and being responsible for them; choosing to interpret our life experiences in ways that make us feel better and empower ourselves and others.
- 9) Choosing thoughts that help us move beyond the need to fight our unwanted habits/addictions; allow our new habits of thought, talk and action to release, redirect and replace our hold behaviors.
- 10) Seeing our unwanted habits/addictions as a gift, an opportunity to re-evaluate our lives and choose differently (if we wish) in order to be more fulfilled in our lives and work.
- 11) Developing our sense of integrity, both in relation to ourselves and with others; striving for fulfillment in our work and life as a way of bringing us more peace and contentment; moving towards our truth — who we want to be and how we want to live.
- 12) Being empowered by seeing our connection and relationship to others who have unwanted habits and addictions.
- 13) Moving beyond conflicts about “who’s right and who’s wrong” and ceasing to try to prove that our definitions or interpretations or solutions are the best ones (which is simply another disguised form of negative thinking).
- 14) Looking for what's common among us that helps us change our thinking and transform these behaviors; finding useful, supportive,

helpful, beneficial, valuable, empowering methods, processes, techniques, practices that are aligned with any and all belief systems.

- 15) Finding new habits that help us prevent, reduce and replace any and all unwanted behaviors, whether we label them as addictions or not.

## CHAPTER NINE

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### Transforming Addictions & Habits: A Summary

When I began writing this book, my mission was to transform “addictions.” By that I mean anything we are doing, any behavior we’re engaged in that’s brought us to say, “I just don’t want to do this anymore. It’s having a negative impact on my life and I’m committed to something different.” Yet despite those thoughts and feelings, we can’t seem to stop, stay stopped or really break free of this thing, no matter how committed we are.

Then at some point along the way, I realized that my focus isn’t just about addictions — it’s about transforming the way we think about and deal with ANY destructive circumstance or self-limiting behavior, whatever we want to call it. It’s not the addiction, circumstance, or behavior that’s important to me, because I see those as symptoms of something deeper. It’s about discovering what’s happening inside of the person I’m working with, what’s causing them to feel pain or stopping them from living a great life.

That’s why I don’t want to label or judge people, to categorize or put them in a box through the language I use. It’s because I don’t want to further fuel that pain inside. Instead, I want them to know that I really and truly accept them, whether they’re watching video games or are into self-harm or suicidal behaviors; whether they’re eating fast food all the time or doing heroin. If THEY are feeling like they want or need support in stopping or changing something that doesn’t feel good to them, that’s where I want to be of service.

I approach all of them in essentially the same way. I start with love and acceptance. I see what they’re doing as a successful, creative way of getting out of or relieving whatever pain or discomfort they’re feeling inside, knowing that it’s the best way they know to survive, cope, or feel good about their life.



I believe that, ultimately, the way we will know we have transformed addictions on this planet – and I don't even know if it's possible in my lifetime – is when the word “addiction” no longer even exists in our vocabulary. But right now it does, so we need to deal with it. One place we can start is by changing our thinking about it.

Our judgments. Seeing others as victims. Blaming others or criticizing ourselves. And seeing the common elements among all such behaviors, whether it's drinking alcohol or using crack cocaine, smoking, self-harm, gambling, sex, overeating, being co-dependent, abusing or controlling others, or even excessive worrying, blaming and complaining.

So what's common to all of these? It's being engaged in a behavior that we want to stop, reduce or control and feel we can't. Stuck. Unable to change. As I've said, I want to make sure that nobody gets left behind. They may have an “actual” addiction or not. But it's how they feel that matters most. This applies to any kind of behavior or habit.

What's more, it applies to all our other life circumstances, habits and behaviors as well. Maybe you don't feel hopeless, but you've just given up trying to change whatever habit you have. Or maybe you know you could change if you REALLY wanted to, but you haven't been able to find the motivation or the right methodology for you. Why would I not want to help you, too?

What if someone is not feeling hopeless, but just feeling stuck in a behavior? Continually on the internet or watching TV. Going out shopping so they can feel the rush. Going out for fast food because it's easy and they don't have to think about anything else. Feeling unfulfilled in the relationship they're in. Doing unproductive or time-wasting behaviors at work. Even blocked in expressing themselves or their creativity. Or having any life circumstance or doing anything that they feel is negatively impacting their life – at home, at work, at school,

wherever – and wanting a change for something better and maybe not feeling it's possible.

We all keep making choices that are unfulfilling or unproductive. Choices that are not creating what we really want to do, be, or have or that don't meet our soul's desire for our life. And because of it, we're feeling discomfort inside. An inner pain, irritability, restlessness or discontentment that we deal with by turning to foods, various substances and a multitude of behaviors in an attempt to make ourselves feel better or keep us mindless of how we actually feel. They might even involve pain – like something extreme like the cutting I mentioned earlier – but for a time they quiet the negative voice and feelings inside.

### **When Comfort Replaces Fulfillment...**

For some of us, addictions are those habits that we've kept doing over time that have replaced fulfillment with comfort. Our body's biology and chemistry have adapted to and become dependent on them. And so has our thinking. There are habits of thinking that are going on that we might not even be aware of. These habits are causing us to feel bad, which leads us to choose substances and behaviors that are not fulfilling or that even may be destructive.

The more negative our thinking and feeling, the more these behaviors become locked in. So we bully others because we're actually afraid or scared of others inside. We keep working at mindless jobs or jobs we hate because we don't believe we can really do what we want to and get paid for it. We get drunk because we don't want to face the pain of a bad marriage or cruelty at home. Or we get hooked on the thrill of a substance like paint and varnish remover, as I did at the age of 10 because I was feeling lonely and an outcast in my family and at school.

For me – and let me reiterate that this is just my perspective, not “the truth” – addictions are one of a series or spectrum of behaviors that come from living unfulfilled lives; from living life out of integrity with our own principles, values and truth, disconnected from our own love or inner truth, our source or that which some call God; or from living with resentment, anger, pain, fear judgment or hopelessness inside.

We’re not being true to ourselves. And to avoid being present to that, we run away and try to escape. We use whatever substances, people and behaviors we can to make ourselves feel better temporarily. But these are also giving us negative consequences. Some of these behaviors are severe and we call them addictions; others are less so and we call them something else, like habits. But it’s the root issues behind these behaviors that have come to interest me most.

That’s why I’m not out to “treat” the addiction or the behavior. If you feel that anything you are doing is hurting your life or holding you back, I want to provide choices and habits and behaviors that can help for two reasons: First, so that you don’t have to keep living with the negative thoughts and feelings about whatever you are doing; and second, so you can begin to create your life – one small step at a time – and feel better about yourself, have more self-confidence and self-esteem and begin to do the things that you most want to do.

By moving towards the direction of a life you truly want to live, I believe, based on my own experience, that you will leave your distractions, pain/discomfort-relieving habits and your avoidance behaviors behind because you don’t need them any longer to make you feel better. But again, that’s only if you want to. It’s not that anything you’re doing is wrong. You don’t need to change to make someone else happier. It really is up to you.

What I’ve found is that, by addressing these issues, many different kinds of unwanted behaviors can be overcome. I’ve seen this with my own numerous

unwanted habits and addictions; I've seen it in the school kids, teachers and business people I've coached, as well as in people of all ages who I've counseled one-to-one or in family situations; I've seen it in First Nations, Inuit, Native circles, with evangelical Christian believers; and I've seen it with people of no particular faith and from many different cultural backgrounds.

And that's why I've written this book. Not to try and convince you that I have the "answer" or the "truth," but because I wanted to share with you what I've been learning and discovering and habits and addictions. I'm excited about the results I've been seeing with people who put some of my insights and techniques into practice.

## **The Habit Mastery & Power of Choice Approach**

Putting it in the language I used earlier, this approach is not about "solving the original cause" of our habit or addiction, whatever that may have been. It's about releasing and replacing old habits/addictions with new and more empowering habits of thought, speech and behavior. It's also about shifting the old "negative" ways of thinking that have created our negative feelings and which in turn are driving our behaviors and habits now.

Fundamentally, the Habit Mastery & Power of Choice programs are about encouraging people to make free and authentic choices, choices that make them feel better, stronger and more confident about themselves. It's about helping them grow and develop empowering habits and take steps towards living the life they want to live. And it's about giving them the experience of how their "unwanted habits" begin to decline and are replaced with the positive habits that they have created, enabling them to get the "ease, comfort and peace" they seek from within themselves. *Habit Mastery & Power of Choice* is simply the term I've used to describe the process that facilitates this shift in thinking, feeling and

behavior. The process is always changing and growing, and can always be improved upon.

Unconditional acceptance and love are fundamental to all of our programs. As discussed above, they are essential for giving people access or permission to make authentic choices for themselves and for their willingness to change their behavior and life circumstances, if and when they choose. The program activities themselves are simply a way of delivering this message of love and acceptance, and help give people the direct experience of behaviors that result in them feeling better.

### **More Words on Love and Acceptance**

My belief is that when the experience of unconditional acceptance and love is not present, destructive habits and addictions develop as a substitute and as an escape or avoidance mechanism. Conversely, when they ARE present, people have more choices available to them because they feel able to honestly choose what feels right for them. That's why I call it the "power of choice."

Most of us who want to deal with our unwanted habits and addictions focus on techniques or activities. These are part of what the Habit Mastery & Power of Choice programs provide. However, I believe that such techniques will only work to the degree that unconditional acceptance and love are at the heart of it. You might say that they are "love and acceptance in action" — a method for growing new habits of thinking, speaking, and behavior based on the experience of unconditional love and acceptance.

And it all begins with listening. That's what I do when I sit down with someone who has a habit or addiction they want help with. I don't start with a program, a technique or an approach. I see them as perfect, whole and complete. I look for what's right. And I listen.

Recently I came across an email that I had sent myself that had been sitting in my “Inbox” for close to a year. It was a piece of writing by Dr. Lee Jampolsky that I had found on the internet somewhere, and it described what I’m talking about in a simple but eloquent way:

*What did you want most as a child? To be loved? And what could most effectively communicate that you were loved? Was it not to be listened to with interest and caring? Though the world might seem much more complicated as an adult, nothing has changed in terms of your most basic needs. There is no greater gift you can give a person than listening to them.*

*Despite popular opinion, the goal of listening is not to figure out how the other person is wrong and how you can make them see it your way. Nor is it to figure out what the problem is and fix it. The goal of authentic listening is to love.*

*Try a little experiment. Instead of taking some physical action, focus on actively listening more. Active listening means that you listen to other people with the full intention of understanding them. For this experiment, let go of any criticism you might have of the other person. Don't try to figure out any solutions to what they are saying. Simply listen.*

This is the way I try to work with people. Because what I’ve found is that this gives me clues about what to do. Deeply listening without judgment helps me to hear people’s thoughts and feelings, their language and beliefs. It opens up my logic and intuition to what approach may be of maximum service to this person and how to speak about it in the way that will meet them where they are.

These insights about acceptance and love have changed the way I help people. And they’ve helped me to see that is isn’t really about techniques, clients or programs — it’s about giving and sharing love as human beings on a deep level.

For me, that's what truly transforms unwanted habits, behaviors, compulsions and addictions of every kind.

## CHAPTER TEN

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### **The Miraculous Power of Community in Action**

*We shall not cease from exploration. And the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.*

—T. S. Eliot

I want to thank you for taking the time to read through this entire book. I am completely honoured that you have given me so much of your time. I also want to thank you again for participating in the transformation of unwanted habits and addictions on this planet.

AND... as I said in chapter one, because this book is still a work in progress, I really would very much appreciate suggestions from you on how to improve it, which you can send to [feedback@powerofchoice.org](mailto:feedback@powerofchoice.org).

If it speaks to you to do so, I would appreciate a book testimonial from you. So, if you found this manuscript helpful (or even if you didn't!), please send me your comments at [feedback@powerofchoice.org](mailto:feedback@powerofchoice.org). I may not have time to respond to every email, but I promise you I will read every one of them personally!

### **The Habit Mastery & Power of Choice Program for Schools**

Although our programs are delivered for any audience, this book has a very specific fund-raising objective. To support the delivery of our programs into schools that cannot afford it. Should you choose to pay for this book, or purchase additional copies, here are the details of what your money will support:

The school version of *The Power of Choice & Habit Mastery Program* is customized for the student body and serves as a train the trainer session for teachers and other school staff that self-select themselves - to participate in the program as equals with the students – who have also self-selected themselves –



adults and youth experience the power of choice in the process of self-selecting themselves to participate in it or not!!

Educators have reported that one of the many benefits of our customized school based programs is that they help entire school communities (youth, parents, teachers, and their caregivers) reduce, break free of – and prevent – unwanted habits and addictions of all sorts. We've also been told that they prevent unwanted habits from turning into addictions although we have no scientific evidence of this.

It is true that the program teaches self-efficacy - but the profound results come through accessing the miraculous power of community that already exists with them – so the program does not breed co-dependence and does not depend on us for it to get results after we set it up.

The full day school program, with 28 days of follow-up, provides a **self-sustaining** structure which results in the formulation of a community the student and adult participants create together within their school – a community of people (young and old, teachers, peers, secretaries, janitors, bus drivers, principals) wanting to support one another in becoming Habit Masters.

The community who engages in this program consists of people who choose to be there for themselves (not because someone else thinks they need to change). They have chosen to put their attention on creating and supporting others who want to build positive habits for themselves – as opposed to giving energy and focus to the negative habits!!

The program, after being delivered during school hours, is also offered to the entire community as an evening or weekend session so as to expand the reach, in the spirit of my commitment that no one gets left behind.

As well, I extend the program knowing that the most effective way to impact positive change in kids is to offer access to positive change to those people our

kids are bonded to and have relationships with, and who have the greatest influence on them - and that includes those that teach and parent those kids (their elders).

By offering this program to adults, those adults can then support their kids by being an example of the change.

What happens when some kids try to make changes in their school community, those changes are sometimes undermined because their family has a greater influence on them than the power of the community at their school.

For some kids, the power of their family community can be a very dark and destructive force. This is not meant to blame the parents! They are doing the best they can with the tools they were given by their parents. And often times those adults are suffering and hurting because of their own issues, habits and addictions.

Many times, these adults DO WANT TO CHANGE!! In fact, I find that, of the parents that show up to my evening and weekends session, more of them choose to participate in the Habit Mastery 28 day follow up program than kids do in the school introductory sessions; about 3 times more adults want and choose to be part of the program than teens.

Admittedly, that has a lot to do with the fact that the parents that show up to the introductory keynote are doing so because they have already self-identified to having some sort of a problem in their lives. At first they think the problem has to do with their kids, but they soon discover that their problem begins in them. In the case of the kids, they are expected to come to my keynote assembly as it is part of their school day (so choice is less obvious), but everything after that is a choice for them.

As a result of participation in this program, many people reduce and stop a specific unwanted habit. Based on self-report, the success rate is close to 90%. What matters most is that participants got the power of choice for themselves.

They got to CHOOSE – and that is why it works. Without people first owning their choice 100%, change does not last. When choice comes first, change lasts!

The program is delivered through Power of Choice Wellness Inc., and is also supported by the non-profit organization, Addiction Free Youth as a project of the Seeds of Hope Foundation.

### **Support Our Youth**

If you would like to see the message of this book be given to kids, please purchase additional copies of it through this link:

[www.powerofchoice.org/store.html](http://www.powerofchoice.org/store.html)

(Note: You will get any and all future revisions sent to you at no extra charge.)

### **Corporate**

To discuss the benefits of having your corporation bring the message of this book to entire communities through customized sponsorship events, conferences, or staff training – please contact us at:

[corporate@powerofchoice.org](mailto:corporate@powerofchoice.org)

Thank you,

Scott Gallagher