



Addictions & Freedom

From 6pm on Thursday 6th May until 3.30pm on Friday 7th

There's a subtlety and an outrageous truth to addictions in our society and in our businesses today. Addiction has been a human trait since the beginning of time, but the nature and prevalence of addiction is changing. Why? If an addiction is '*any activity, substance, object, or behaviour that has become the major focus of a person's life to the exclusion of other activities*', what do we see in ourselves, those around us, and in our society?

At a social level, we will explore the growing crisis of addictions that are taking over people's lives in the 21st century - workaholism, internet, gaming, 24 hour news, therapy, alcohol and drugs, to name but a few of the obvious ones. And as we name these things, one of the immediate challenges it raises is that these addictions actually fuel, and are fuelled by, major businesses in modern capitalism. From a social perspective, when does 'meeting customer needs' become damaging to the fabric of our society and what should our stance be on this?

But addiction also operates at a much more subtle level in our organisations and our homes. For example, over-controlling senior leaders addicted to data so they can always have the right answer to any question that is posed, or public figures addicted to their profile in the media. There are so many subtle forms of addiction – being popular, over-caring, dynamic, clever, right, powerful, people-pleasing etc. Whenever one of these is running the show it is almost always detrimental to effectiveness and constructive purposeful connection. How can we as leaders develop a compassionate but uncompromising eye for these things?

Addiction is said to be "a genuine longing we are trying to meet by knocking on the wrong door", so what is the hole or the poverty that is being filled by flooding the body with dopamine, serotonin, adrenaline? What is the healing we are seeking? Given that addiction is neither a choice nor a disease, and that circa 70% of addicts are said to be 'functioning' in the work-place, where does this topic sit with our concern for mental health and well-being?

How do we respond? What is our role as leaders in seeing and freeing our organisations of the effects of addictive behaviour? How do we replace addiction as an escape with hope and ambition that makes a real difference to people's lives? How do we ensure we do not return to any addictive patterns, once we have laid them down?