



Addictions & Freedom

From 6pm on Monday 20th September until 3.30pm on Tuesday 21st

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?



Agenda

The conversation will flow through three key stages:

- **This is Me** – taking stock of where we find ourselves currently in relation to this theme and the questions that are arising from our experience
- **Tell Us More** – enquiring more deeply into our learning and insights as we probe into this experience
- **Yes I can, Yes I will** – turning wisdom and insight into intention and practice

This is me

We will open the conversation with a sharing of stories of when we have seen addictive patterns playing out in our own experience of leadership in action. This will take us into a conversation of the social imperative to understanding the nature of addiction more fully and to witnessing the more subtle addictions impacting our lives and our businesses. We will then explore key questions further arising from our own real experience. Is there such a thing as a 'healthy addiction'? what is our real learning and experience of this? Is there the possibility of 'freedom from addiction' in the cut and thrust of a high achieving workplace? what does living in 'an age of anxiety' cause? What are the emotions that underpin our leadership choices, fear or courage?



Tell Us More

This takes us into the second phase of the conversation where we will explore these insights in more depth. What is our experience of the effects of addiction creeping into working life and how have we attempted to control this? What is the long-term pattern of addiction that we see playing out? What is our own response to what we see, denial, containment, education, well-being? What is the state of mind we need to be preserving in order to be capable of playing a proactive role in this area? This will be an honest and empathic enquiry, probably only possible in an environment such as this with other leaders of considerable experience and a deep desire to learn and lead well. There are no 'fixes' in this space, it takes courage to see, to step in, to work with and through the sensitivity of addiction. We will therefore be exploring what it really takes to lead a thriving business in a world where the under-current of addiction is so prevalent.

Yes I can

The final phase of the conversation will have us, after a period of reflection, crystallising these insights into specific intentions and commitment, and ongoing personal practices that will support us in our aim of 'freedom from addiction'. This is where the experience of the leadership Fellows will really come into its own as we challenge each other to be both bold and realistic in what we seek to step into.

This will then form the basis of something of a 'social experiment' between the close of the conversation and our subsequent video link-up. What have we tried and what have been the learnings and insights as we have done this? Our hope would be that as a group you will be motivated to continue in this enquiry for a couple of further follow up sessions.



Timings: Monday 20th September

- 1430 You are welcome to check in to your room in St George's House
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- 1630 Tea in the House for those joining Evensong in the Chapel
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- 1705 Evensong (*optional*)
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- 1750 **Vicars' Hall.** Refreshments, then start of the Conversation at 6.00pm. Introduction to the Guiding Principles and then on to Stage One: ***This is me!*** We break for small groups and when we return we encourage you to share some aspects of your personal story that helps other Fellows gain a sense of how 'addictions and freedom' are at play in your leadership context.
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- 1930 Free time/drinks in the Sitting Room No. 25 The Cloisters
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- 1945 Working dinner in the House Dining Room
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- 2115 We go back to the Sitting Room for tea/coffee, and after dinner drinks
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- 2145 (tbc) Private floodlit tour of St George's Chapel, departing the Sitting Room (*optional*). After the tour, please join us for a nightcap
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Tuesday 21st September

- 0745 Breakfast is served in St George's House. Please clear your luggage from your bedroom because the domestic staff need to service the rooms. You are welcome to leave bags in the Sitting Room or bring them down to the Vicars' Hall where we will be for the remainder of the Conversation
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- 0845 We start again promptly in the Vicars' Hall. At 10.00am or earlier we move on to Stage 2: Tell us more. We move in and out of small groups as we identify specific aspects and challenges in our different situations that require more focused attention and quality thinking time. We capture key insights and take-aways as we go and at around 12.15 prepare for Stage 3: Yes I can!
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Tuesday 21st September cont...

1245 A hot buffet lunch is served in the Vicars' Hall and we work together in our groups, reflecting on how our insights from the morning are speaking directly to us and our intentions as leaders. At 1.40 we have a team photo on the West steps of the Chapel (weather permitting!)

1345 Back together as one group, we draw out the key outcomes of our lunchtime discussions and reflections. We prepare for our final round of small groups, after which we invite each of you to sharpen up your personal resolves to enable you to become more effective as a leader in how you handle the addictive patterns you see playing out. We close the Conversation promptly at 3.30pm.

Video link-up:

In the final minutes of the Conversation we will arrange a time for a follow-up video link-up to hear how much progress we have each made in taking forward our resolves.

The key to us making the best possible use of our time in this is for Fellows to share a brief email beforehand updating the rest of us on how you have acted on your resolves, and especially which one you found the most challenging. We then take it from there!