

WHAT ADDICTS KNOW

10 LESSONS
FROM RECOVERY
TO BENEFIT
EVERYONE

New York Times
Bestselling Author
of *Symptoms of*
Withdrawal and
Recover to Live

CHRISTOPHER
KENNEDY LAWFORD

Foreword by DR. DREW PINSKY



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Dr. Drew on Call



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This book is dedicated to the millions of men and women,
both old and young, who live their lives as inspiring
examples of the power of recovery.

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LESSON #1

FIND OUT WHO YOU ARE

Everything that irritates us about others can lead us to an understanding about ourselves.

—CARL JUNG

Addicts in long-term recovery learn the importance of finding out who they really are beneath all of the lies and self-deception. That discovery of self is necessary if they are to develop sufficient awareness to eventually find contentment. Imagine the benefits to all of humanity if more people uncovered their authentic selves and, as a result, pursued a healthier, more honest standard for well-being.



MEET PATTY POWERS, addictions recovery coach. Patty plays the role of mirror for her clients. By living with each of them for up to a month at a time in their own homes, she reflects back at them every day, and even moment to moment, how devious and manipulative the incessant inner dialogue of voices that distract them, delude them, sabotage them, and warp their personalities can be.

She has observed how the first transformation stage in addiction recovery comes from a self-awareness that develops, usually slowly, by practicing honesty and humility with self and others. Another necessary ingredient is self-acceptance of your “authentic” self, whatever that turns out to be. Addicts so rationalize their actions that they can’t hear the truth or actually feel and express feelings unless something or someone penetrates and short-circuits their inner chatty dialogue of noise, fear, and denial.

One of Patty’s clients, a woman with a very successful career whom we will call Nancy, hired Patty for a month to help her break a dependency on prescription drugs. She developed a problem with painkillers and antidepressants in the wake of the attacks of 9/11, and shortly thereafter had to cope with the painful aftermath of a difficult divorce.

Patty noticed early on that Nancy would begin feeling drowsy any time she began to feel stress. Not only was Nancy unaware of this pattern, she vehemently denied there was any connection between her fatigue and her unexpressed feelings. Nancy showed

very little self-awareness, and that was sabotaging her attempts to maintain sobriety.

One of the advantages of having a full-time sobriety coach such as Patty, as opposed to being in a thirty-day rehab facility, is the constant personalized mirror for self-reflection that the sobriety coach holds up, coupled with the new life skills that clients learn and practice within the familiar world of their own living spaces. In recovery herself for several decades from heroin, Patty lives in New York City but has stayed with clients throughout the United States and in Britain and Canada. She has coached alcoholics and just about every other kind of drug addict known to medical science.

Whenever her client Nancy appeared fatigued despite having engaged in little or no physical exertion during the day, Patty would say to her, “Check in with yourself. What are you feeling right now?”

When Nancy seemed to be withdrawing, Patty would ask, “Where did you just go? What were you thinking about?”

Any time Patty caught Nancy future tripping—feeling unexpressed fear—she would instruct her, “Let’s get you back in your body. Close your eyes and breathe deeply. Feel your feet, your legs, your entire body.”

After several weeks of this often-annoying routine, Nancy finally began getting in the habit of bringing herself back to the present moment whenever the inner dialogue of her addict mind got out of control and tried to undermine her sobriety. Through this process she was rediscovering her authentic self.

Patty’s constant vigilance, combined with her barrages of penetrating questions and the grounding exercises, gradually began to dispel all of Nancy’s rationalizing stories until one day a significant breakthrough occurred. Nancy returned to her former home to pick up some belongings from her married days, and the visit triggered the release of a lifetime of feelings. She got tired and sleepy as soon as she walked through the door, and felt as if she

stayed in the house for any length of time, she would have an overpowering urge to use drugs again.

“You were right!” Nancy later blurted to Patty. “I understand the connection now. I feel it. I see that I react to my feelings by wanting to check out with sleep.”

Once addicts have that first revelatory glimpse of their true self hiding beneath all of the layers of drama and trauma, it’s as if they are coming out of a sleepwalking trance. Consequently, they should keep repeating this mantra: “Don’t go back to sleep! Never go back to sleep!” Without vigilance it’s easy to slip back into an unconscious state. In Nancy’s case, her revelation had a chain reaction that put into place all of the elements necessary for her sustained recovery.

Of course, many people who aren’t addicts also suffering from loneliness, isolation, grief, fear, or whatever else afflicts the human spirit. They lead lives of quiet desperation. Having someone they can be themselves with, someone who they can be honest and self-revealing without fear of judgment with is, in my experience, an essential therapeutic first step to achieving wellness and healing. In this sense we all have the capacity—and, indeed, the duty—to become one another’s sobriety and mental health coach, acting as mirrors reflecting one another’s souls.

Too many people are sleepwalking through life, with no self-awareness. One symptom of our collective narcolepsy may be the periodic violent outbursts of shootings and mayhem that characterize our society. I am convinced that the lessons we take from the collective addiction and recovery experience can also tell us a lot about the mental health origins of gun violence in the United States, especially showing the common link between childhood trauma and its impact on the developing brain.

Addicts can lose just about everything in their lives and still survive, “But people in broader society who experience real hardships don’t have the experience or life skills to cope very well,” said

Patty Powers. “The intensity of the fear and grief and financial stress since 9/11 and the Great Recession are all adding up. During the late 1920s and early ’30s at the start of the Great Depression, guys jumped off buildings in response to losing everything in the stock market. They didn’t shoot up their families and groups of strangers. The level of violence and addiction going on today is indicative of the huge pressure of stress from trauma that has built up in all areas of life. Addicts try to cope by getting high because they are afraid of being overwhelmed by their feelings. Getting in touch with our feelings in a healthy way can help us to stop killing ourselves and each other.”

SELF-AWARENESS UNMASKS YOUR AUTHENTIC SELF

Like most people entering recovery from an addiction, I was in a state of confusion for at least the first six months to a year, feeling as if I had been trapped in a hazy bubble that made it difficult to engage in any kind of reality other than brushing my teeth and getting dressed every day. In recovery, the word “mocus” is used to describe that haze. Early recovery is a basic survivalist kind of head space. Although self-awareness can and often does develop over time, “normies” too often think of people in recovery as being stuck in that twilight zone head space.

“By the time I recognized that I had a problem with alcohol, I was very confused about who I was and where I was going,” Dan Duncan, the director of community services for the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse in St. Louis, told me, echoing a common refrain. “Self-awareness is integral to recovery because you lose your authentic self in addiction. Alcohol and drugs have a warping effect. Finding your way out is a gradual self-examination process. The joy

of recovery for me was the adventure of self-discovery. I really wanted to know who the heck I was. Am I the guy who lied so much when I was drinking, or am I the decent guy buried underneath all of the crap? When I finally found out and rediscovered myself, my mother said to me, ‘I finally have my son back.’” Today, Dan has more than three decades in recovery and works as director of community services in the St. Louis area for the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse, dedicating his life to helping others on the recovery path.

Self-awareness is the necessary first step to taking personal responsibility for your life. Self-awareness triggers the process of finding out who you really are so you can deal honestly with yourself and others. Self-awareness is a foundation for 12-Step recovery programs because it’s an acknowledgment that whatever you have been doing hasn’t been working for you.

Not everybody is interested in becoming self-aware, yet I believe that all addicts and alcoholics are seekers looking for answers to life’s questions. Drug and alcohol abuse isn’t just their way of self-medicating; it’s also their attempt to attain some kind of greater consciousness. Unfortunately, using addictive substances to get there leads to a dead end.

Once in recovery, most people begin to explore who they really are, or who they really want to be, in order to solidify and sustain their recovery. You want to get rid of the triggers and the underlying causes and conditions that made you behave the way you did. That can be a thorny challenge for anyone, addict or not. “Most of what we do from childhood on is reacting to what happens to us,” author and magazine journalist David Sheff explained to me. “We develop coping mechanisms and that takes us further away from who we are.”

As you get deeper into recovery, you eventually feel compelled to ask, “What have I been doing with my life? I’ve lived a lie. I’ve lived in reaction my whole life. So who the hell am I?”

These questions are useful for non-addicts as well, of course. They are universal, but they take on a heightened sense of urgency among people dealing with recovery issues.

An important part of the Who Am I self-examination is reassessing the opinions and attitudes that underlay your decision-making. In my case, I had to ask myself questions like, *What color couch do I like?* I know this sounds trivial, but it's an example of a question that ultimately becomes revealing. People would ask me, "Do you like this couch?" And I would answer, "I don't know. Do you like it? Because if you like it, maybe I do, too." I didn't know enough about myself to even know what color couch I liked.

Developing self-awareness is about realizing something as basic as I don't even know what color couch I like. Some people might just leave it up to a professional or a friend to tell them what kind of couch they should like. Developing self-awareness is about realizing you don't even know something as basic about yourself as the colors you prefer.

Self-awareness is about a lot more than just having opinions. Opinions matter because you can latch onto them without necessarily having any visceral connections to them. An opinion is one thing, how you *feel* about something is entirely different. Addicts live in their heads most of the time. Recovery is about moving from your head to your heart. Self-awareness facilitates that.

If you like a couch because a parent liked it, or you saw it in a movie once, or the person you were dating at the time thought it was a cool couch, then you like that couch for superficial reasons. Recovery involves a deeper investigation into what really makes you tick. Do you like that couch just because you want to be a people pleaser? Once you get closer to your authentic self, you may realize you actually hate that damn couch and you aren't afraid to say so.

There are many layers to penetrate during recovery, and that's why it takes so much time. It's not an easy exploration of "I just

want to find out what I really like.” The trajectory of a person’s life often obscures very diabolically who they really are, making self-awareness even more difficult to attain.

I had been so intoxicated and brainwashed by where I came from in life that I accepted a lot of what I wouldn’t dream of accepting today. I came from a place where accomplishment and activity were highly valued, where just sitting around and connecting with someone was not. I came from a family where everything we did had to have a purpose, where there were strong convictions about giving back to society. Later in life, I came to realize much of that family behavior was really about getting recognition. Everybody was more or less out for themselves, as many human beings are, but it was especially magnified in my family.

Is that part of my authentic self? Yes, because that’s where I came from, although I denied that out-for-myself part of my upbringing for many years because it was uncomfortable for me to behave that way. It’s not uncomfortable for me to behave like that today, however. It’s not a particularly attractive quality, but it is part of who I am at my core. Is it a part of my personality or my character that I would like to change? Yes. Just because you discover your authentic self doesn’t mean it’s necessarily good or that you like it or want to preserve it.

I like moving fast. I like sucking the marrow out of life. It’s the family dynamic that I come from. Is it really me? I don’t know, but I’ve accepted it as part of me and I like it. There was this sort of daredevil ethic I grew up with, trying to show who you were as a man. Driving or flying a plane with a broken foot or playing football while you were skiing on a mountain was the kind of stuff that was typical in my family. The more dangerous the stunts you pulled and the more you pushed the envelope, the more attention and admiration you got. That was never who I was, though at the time I wanted to be like that.

When we begin the process of trying to change, it's often difficult because the behavior instilled in us is so engraved that to do something differently feels wrong. It doesn't feel good. And addicts are addicted to feeling good. So if we're not feeling good, many of us just feel, "What the hell do I care?"

LIFE REWARDS AUTHENTICITY

Geoffrey S. Mason knew he needed help when he woke up in the south of France and didn't know where he was or what he had been doing the night before, although he knew it had something to do with an assignment covering a sporting event for ABC Sports. His increasingly heavy social drinking had stolen his identity and put him on a career treadmill that was undermining his reputation and self-esteem. So finally, in 1983, he checked himself into the Betty Ford Center.

Five years into recovery, Geoffrey had, in his words, "reclaimed my life and my career aspirations," and was named executive producer of ABC Sports, picking up twenty-six Emmy Awards during his career. "I wouldn't have had even a remote prayer for getting that job if I hadn't gotten sober," he said. "I wouldn't have had a remote prayer for a successful marriage before getting sober."

Only by getting in touch with his authentic self while in recovery, stripping away all the layers of self-deceit, was Geoffrey able to master the life skills necessary for a highly successful career and an eventual stable relationship leading to marriage. "Only when the poison in me was out of me could I know myself. There had been nothing real about my life. I was acting with artificiality. I didn't want to lie anymore. I learned who my true self was and I was okay with myself."

Most human beings want to feel special. They want to feel like they matter. They want to know that when they walk into a room, people care they are there. Therein is part of the genius of 12-Step programs. When you walk into one of those 12-Step meeting rooms, people really care that you are there and they show it.

When I first joined a 12-Step program, I thought I wanted to quit drinking and doing drugs and be a star like Tom Cruise. It took fifteen years for me to discover the real reason for me being there was to find my authentic self. A lot of people never get there. They are never able to turn their backs on who they are that doesn't work for them anymore. You gain tremendous freedom when you discard what doesn't work in your life.

The recovery journey is a long one. You're going to attain a different level of awareness and see stuff about yourself that you don't like and want to get rid of. The journey is about getting a clearer picture of your true self—your likes and dislikes, the traits that are genuine and those that are false, and what you will keep versus what needs to be discarded.

Part of finding and accepting the authentic self is getting to a point where you're not a victim anymore. You make conscious choices about what you want in your life and what you don't want. You realize, finally, it's up to you.

The reason why I don't drink or take drugs today is because I don't want to lose who I am. I would become less of Chris, and my commitment in recovery is to become *more* of me, not less. When you become more of you, the universe rewards you—you become happier and more successful, you have better relationships.

I'm willing to try almost anything. I'm always curious to see whether I'll like it and whether I'll want to do it again. If I go scuba diving and have a miserable time, I'm not going to go again just because I think it's cool to go scuba diving. If I go to yoga and it

makes me feel good and I think it's good for me in terms of my health, I'm going to go every day regardless of what people think.

Much of my self-awareness has come from doing the deeper work. I've tried every kind of therapy imaginable. I've gone to workshops for relationships and for getting more in touch with the authentic self. A workshop called Sage and Warrior I did with my ex-wife was so powerful it brought us to our knees and had us crying on the floor. It wasn't abusive, everybody was safe, but the workshop was really hard emotionally. While there, I finally experienced living in my heart and not just in my head. I'm not talking about feeling love for somebody or feeling the presence of God. In this workshop I did actually move from my head to my heart. It was like nothing I've ever felt from a drug, love, sex, or anything else. It was the most profound, amazing experience of my life and lasted for about three weeks and then slowly faded away.

It might have been bliss. I felt as if I didn't filter anything through my mind. I was completely present and totally conscious, experiencing life directly through my heart. There was nothing there but me. So I do know something better is possible.

Attaining this awareness of an authentic self is about getting rid of the nonsense that doesn't serve you and diminishes your experience of life. That is what happens in 12-Step program meetings because what goes on in those meeting rooms is authentic and real, more real than most people ever experience in their lifetimes. But it's only the beginning.

Critical to the recovery process is realizing you aren't a victim in any part of your life, so you shouldn't blame anything or anyone but yourself for whatever happens in your life, be it good or bad. This is the essence of taking personal responsibility and being accountable for how you live your life.

I slip back into autopilot periodically, even when it comes to my self-awareness. Patterns and behaviors and beliefs are

impressed upon us from an early age, so it's easy to return to them sometimes. As Gandhi framed the challenge for us—and I am paraphrasing—the man who changes himself is greater than the man who conquers ten thousand armies.

THE ROAD TO CONTENTMENT

Meditation has been an important tool in my self-transformation process because it brings me back to being in the moment. If I take the time to meditate, I get to go on pause.

Mindfulness techniques are as enormously useful to those in recovery as they are for “normies” who want better tools for navigating the pressures and chaos of daily life. These techniques facilitate the constant vigilance necessary to prevent relapse. If you mindfully pause before you respond or react, you can actually get more awareness in that brief interval.

The practices of meditation and yoga keep you in the present because of their focus on the breath. Yoga in particular got me through my battle with hepatitis C. Like meditation, yoga is about shutting off the mind. The quieter my mind is, the closer I am to my authentic self.

Before starting meditation and yoga I had no idea about breath or how important it is to health and well-being. If you're just focused on the postures, you're missing the point. The point is breath. Breath is everything. I used to smoke cigarettes and then cigars while in recovery. I cannot believe I did that, especially because of my awareness now about the importance of breath.

When I separated from my wife and kids and went through hepatitis C treatment, my acting career melted away. No Tom Cruise for me. All of that happened in about a year, and that is

when I decided to write my first book. During that time, I attended yoga classes every day, meditated, and went to 12-Step meetings. I could have gotten drunk or even killed myself, which a lot of people do during hepatitis C treatment because it makes you feel utterly hopeless. Instead, thanks to the breath practices, this difficult experience strengthened my recovery. I said to myself, *Okay, this is razor's edge. I can drink or take drugs. I can kill somebody or kill myself. But that's not going to happen.* I made a conscious decision that this would be a transforming time for me.

During that dark period in my life I wrote my memoir, *Symptoms of Withdrawal*. It was cathartic and changed my whole life. I came away from that experience telling people that if you want to get closer to your authentic self, write your life story. I don't care whether you publish it or trash it. Even if you just call it journaling. If you take it on, you're going to find out a lot of revealing things about yourself.

When growing up, if you were a people pleaser, you may never have said what you really wanted or felt and always did what everybody wanted you to do. And you probably emerged a resentful and angry person. That anger has to come out somehow, someday. You don't have to have been an addict, of course, to be a people pleaser, or to be at the mercy of the people who socialized you. But I'm here to tell you that whether you're an addict or not, if you don't learn how to serve your authentic self, you're going to feel resentful, and this will affect all of the relationships in your life.

When people don't know themselves, they have few, if any, boundaries. They're confused, and it's hard for them to get any kind of clarity on anything. When you begin to set boundaries, however arbitrary they are, it gives you a foothold for making a statement about yourself. Boundary setting is a huge deal in realizing who you are. It gives you a heightened awareness of what's possible.

If you want to discover your authentic self, it's important for your self-growth to try a lot of different things and do so fearlessly. Also critical for self-awareness is understanding that you may have a tendency to engage in contempt before investigation. A lot of times people come into recovery with the attitude of, "Oh, I don't like that. No, I don't want to do that. I don't want to talk about that." They display contempt before investigating. For example, if you want to find out what you really like to eat, you've got to try a bunch of different foods. You can't just say "I don't like Thai food" if you've never really tried it. You've got to experiment and rid yourself of contempt and fear to ever discover who you are really capable of becoming.

Are the most authentic people, the ones most true to self, also among the happiest people? Not necessarily. But I do think the most authentic folks are the most centered, the most fearless, the most accepting. But are they happy? I think a more fitting word is "content."

Though self-awareness isn't necessarily synonymous with happiness, I believe that contentment is a possible outgrowth of self-awareness. Today, I know contentment. Are there still things that I'm not content with and want to change? Yes. I want to feel more peaceful and be less driven. Am I going to get around to that? Yes, but meanwhile I'm content.

If you're going down this self-exploratory path, you must accept that it's not going to be easy. You've got to be constantly vigilant to avoid slipping back into old toxic patterns of behavior. Whether you are in recovery from an addiction or not, the payoff is the promise of self-realization and contentment. The promise is *the real you!*



Dark Nights of the Soul

KRISTEN JOHNSTON is one of the most genuinely funny people I have ever known. She lights up every conversation with her disarming wit and candor. You may remember her as the two-time Emmy Award-winning actress in *3rd Rock from the Sun* and as an actress in two of the Austin Powers comedies. She also authored the addiction-recovery memoir *Guts: The Endless Follies and Tiny Triumphs of a Giant Disaster*. Here is what she had to say about the authenticity that can emerge from trauma and hardship:

“I’m convinced that the only people worth knowing are those who’ve had at least one dark night of the soul . . . Recovering addicts and alcoholics sometimes refer to this as their ‘bottom,’ but it happens to almost everyone, at some point or another. It’s that life-changing moment when everything you’ve always wanted to become, everything you actually are, and everything you know you’ll never be, all slam into each other with the deadly force of three high-speed trains. It’s the night of your reckoning, the terrifying moment when your mask falls away and you’re forced to see what’s actually been festering underneath it all these years. You finally see who you *really are*, instead of who you’ve always *pretended* to be.”

PET PEEVES, FINGER POINTING, AND YOUR “SHADOW”

Self-awareness also involves learning about the “shadow” side of your nature, those unconscious aspects of self that influence behaviors and beliefs, yet remain mostly hidden. The late

Dr. W. Brugh Joy, author of *Avalanche: Heretical Reflections on the Dark and the Light*, a book about excavating those hidden aspects, your shadow material, conducted Dark Side Conferences across the United States. One exercise in the meetings involved “the pointing finger,” an examination of what pointing your finger at someone or something reveals about your own judgment or defensiveness, your true self. (As we say in recovery, if you point a finger there are three fingers pointing back at you.)

“Pet peeves are wonderful ways to catch the shadow because the pet peeve is actually the key to something about you,” said Dr. Joy.

This is a delicious exercise: Criticize an individual, work on expressing everything—just unleash all of it—no tiptoeing around, no modulating the energy—just get in touch with these forces and get them out, let them out fully.

Then begins the process of re-weaving the forces back into your own nature. You point your finger, but then you begin to see that there is a pattern to it, that it has shown up in your life from time to time as well, this very same thing. Not the same person doing the exact same thing, but you begin to read the pattern. Is it abandonment, or is it a rejection mystery, is it martyrdom? There are various kinds of patterns that you’ll see. Then you trace it back as far as you can go in your own life, where other circumstances had exactly the same kind of patterning to it.

(For more about Lesson #1, including the results of several research studies, visit our website, www.Recover2Live.com.)

LESSON #1: PARTING SHOT

Stop what you're doing right now (reading this book) and ask yourself the following simple questions. Some will be more relevant to you than others. All should make you think—and that's exactly the idea:

- Do you like what you see when you look in the mirror? Do you smile at yourself?
- What are your two best qualities?
- What are two of your personality traits you don't like?
- Would you want to be your friend?

There are no right or wrong answers, of course. Just *your* answers. Socrates' advice resonates down through the centuries: Know thyself. Introspective questions like these help you do just that.



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