



Unhooked: How to Quit Anything

Susan Shapiro , Frederick Woolverton

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Is smoking, alcohol, drugs, food, gambling, the Internet, or sex addiction holding you back from getting what you want most—in work and in love? We’re all addicted to something—but when the crutch gets in the way of living a happy and productive life, it must stop. Over the past twenty-five years, renowned addiction therapist Dr. Frederick Woolverton has used his dynamic, empathetic approach to help thousands of addicts achieve long-term recovery—including himself. He sees the specific habit as less important than the underlying chaos and fear that motivate the urge to soothe ourselves with bad habits. The solution, he has found, requires only a better understanding of yourself and a change in attitude. *Unhooked: How To Quit Anything* is an intelligent, readable, and actionable guide to conquering any addictive habit. Using real patient examples as well as research and his own experience, Dr. Woolverton and coauthor (and former patient) Susan Shapiro show how to thrive without self-medicating. The approach involves an unorthodox blend of straightforward changes to behavior and open and honest conversation with another person. Woolverton’s specific instructions do not require an expensive therapist, rehab, 12-step program, or a higher power (but he does make readers aware of those viable options). Let him help you kick your addiction and find what’s missing in your world. When you conquer a toxic habit, you are leaving room for something more beautiful to take its place.

Unhooked: How to Quit Anything Details

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From Reader Review Unhooked: How to Quit Anything for online ebook

Ashley says

"In my experience, 99 percent of the addicts I've seen have strong narcissistic tendencies. That's because... as a population they have felt so disappointed by their families and mates that they have basically given up on getting satisfaction and meaning from other humans and have turned to substances instead to feel soothed and taken care of." page 165

It was a quick, interesting and an unconventional read. The author implies one can be addicted to literally everything - the standards of drugs/alcohol/sex along with social media, food and exercise. Some concepts aren't new to treating and understanding addiction. One thread throughout the book was how there was usually a particular hurt/trauma from childhood or the early teen years that changed the individuals discussed in this book including the author.

Aaron says

I don't think this book is getting a fair shake from my fellow goodreads users. As a former addict, I found this more insightful and far less pompous (to use one reviewer's description of the book's tone) than twelve-step and other self-improvement and self-help programs I've attended. And the reviewer who doesn't understand why fairly innocuous addictions such as gum and diet soda aren't harmful is missing the thesis of the entire book. When it comes down to it, (at least in my interpretation), this book is less about the nuts-and-bolts of kicking bad habits than it is removing impediments to a happy and fulfilling life. One case study Dr. Woolverton addresses in the book is a patient who was addicted to exercise. It might be a natural reaction to wonder what's wrong with an exercise addiction - after all, exercise is good for you. But given this patient's adverse reaction when she had to miss a workout, it becomes clear that the motivation behind all the exercise was unhealthy. The workouts brought her no pleasure or mental fulfillment. When viewed in that light, all addictions, even the ones that seem harmless, or even beneficial, stand in the way of a better way of living.

What I liked best about the book is the exercises posed at the end of chapters. Many are couched as writing exercises that force you to confront your emotions and answer unpleasant questions. Others are simply couched as advice such as where to seek help and how to avoid relapse. As helpful as this book was, though, for those dealing with a serious addiction like I was, it's no substitute for therapy and a physician's supervision.

Overall the book is a very readable assortment (if somewhat repetitive - a fair criticism) of Dr. Woolverton's cases over the years. For the current or former addict, it is reassuring to know that not only are you not alone, you are also not alone in your failures either, since Dr. Woolverton does not shy away from describing cases where therapy was not successful.

Deb says

Worth hooking into

If addiction affects your life, or that of someone close to you, Unhooked is a great resource to hook into. With its captivating case studies, the book reads like a novel; with its clinical rationales, insights, and guidelines, it informs like a documentary.

The author—a clinical psychologist and a recovered addict himself—presents a coherent synopsis of the factors underlying addictions and the approaches most effective in treating them. Reading through the book, I was continually struck by how well the author conveyed this wealth of information. Here's just a small sampling demonstrating his ability to effectively communicate overarching principles of addiction etiology and treatment:

Addictions are more about avoiding pain than about seeking pleasure:

***Often addictions bring no joy or amusement to the user whatsoever. Instead they take away intolerable pain, depression, and anxiety, and replace it with a numbness, or uneasy equilibrium that make mere survival seem possible. Substances often function as self-medication for an addict's usually undiagnosed distress. (p.63)

***Substances succeed in self-medicating only for short periods of time. A common misconception about addicts is that they are hedonistic pleasure seekers. This is not the case. Most addicts do not use to seek pleasure. They are people out to avoid terrible pain. They use not for fun, but often just to feel okay and get through the day. (p.113)

Substances serve as human stand-ins:

***Addicts often have an infantile need for the attention and safety they never felt from their parents. They have turned to their substances as a stand-in for soothing. So when they quit a substance dependency, they revert back to the age they were when they started using. A young and palpable hunger for love comes out. (pp.88-89)

***Many addicts were disappointed by adults early on and thus had no confidence that they were being protected. Since their own internal voices failed to reassure them or make them feel secure, they turned to substances to manage bad feelings. (p. 59)

***Many people with substance problems feel empty because they have not been nurtured or fed well at home. They yearn to feel love and cared for. Deep down, that's what they're really after. (p.82)

***It's a paradox not uncommon to addicts who crave closeness but often give up on people in favor of substances, which are less likely to cause disappointment and are much easier to control. (p.121)

Addictions become barricades:

***Addictions inhibit emotional intensity, artistic urges, and love. They act as blockades, often keeping users from being deeply involved with the people they care about or from becoming as powerfully creative and successful as they could otherwise be. (p.107)

***[Addicts] artificially soothe themselves with a quick hit while stunting their long-term emotional growth and success. They miss opportunities that could lead to expanding experience, understanding, and greater intimacy with others in their world. (p.104)

What ultimately heals:

***Most addicts use substances because they don't want to suffer and hope to avoid feelings of anger, sorrow, pain and discomfort...Living well, even suffering well, are more attainable goals than being happy. (p. 109)

***Along with external changes, it is also essential to get to the inner roots of a substance problem. To stop it, you have to figure out what hurts so much that makes someone need to self-medicate many times daily, often for decades. (p.204)

***A large part of all addicts' recovery involves feeling intense sadness...They have to confront a huge

empty space inside. (p.207)

***Once a specific addiction has ceased, if you don't deal directly with the underlying emotional problems that caused it, you'll simply switch addictions. (pp.147-148)

The point of addiction therapy or AA is to give addicts the language and skills to unravel the rage and confusion brewing beneath their bad habits. (p.206)

***[Addicts] eventually have to transfer [their substance dependency] onto a human being that can be depended on. (p. 206)

***What hurts people most are secrets and lies, and what finally heals is honesty. One has to find a way to live **with** the truth, not fight against it. (p.110)

In order to get and stay happy and healthy, it is necessary to lead the least secretive life that one can. (p. 206)

***You have to start taking care of yourself the way you wish someone else would take care of you. (p. 118)

Unhooked is both a great read and a great resource. It's even a bit difficult to put down at times—quite appropriate for a book on addictions!

Nancy says

There's a lot of food for thought in this and it takes some time to process it. However, the intent of the book is great and it's worth your time if you think you should make some changes in your life.

mg says

A must read!!!

This book was so inspirational for me. I could relate to the author and many of his clients. One of the best books I've read on addiction. I would definitely, recommend it. I couldn't put it down. You feel a connection to the characters and author.

Natalie Axton says

I liked the case studies/memoir format of this book. The author admits he takes an unconventional approach to addiction studies.

Amy says

Good book on addiction stories. However, the subtitle doesn't make much sense. This book is a bunch of stories about addicts that this doctor treated. Doesn't really tell you how to quit anything.

Daron Yondem says

Somehow this was not what I expected and don't know why I was expecting for something more applicable in practice but I really ended up liking the book. It has great stories and insights into how addiction works in human behavior. The book goes through the experiences of a doctor with his clients and the stories related to it. I might say this is a different book considering all habit/addiction related self-help books out there and you should definitely have a read especially if you are looking for something different, a different perspective.

Natasia says

This book is just awesome. It covers so many addictions that I'm sure some of us don't even realize we have it. It helped me understand on a deeper level something that I already knew and suspected but was always afraid to admit it aloud to myself as I thought of those being only lame excuses. Now I see they aren't, as I've often wondered.

The author/s go through each addiction or groups of them through their ex clients' stories. It might seem boring but I really enjoyed following how the treatment went and all those different people's profile's - all with the same or similar problem, some form of addiction...food, cigarettes, cocaine, over-shopping...whatever.

Each of these chapters are directed towards the reader with some points to look upon or some advice on what to do or similar.

I definitely plan on reading (listening to, as I have the audio book version) this book again with my boyfriend. I hope it will help us with his plan to stop smoking and mine to stop eating late or when I'm in need of comfort or something. I'm sure we'll find more matters to address.

Totally recommend it to anyone with any kind of addiction that he or she wants to get rid of, or even if you don't want to because you think you have no issues, read this book, I'm sure it will be at least a bit eye opening but I'm sure it will be a lot more than that.

Len says

People want to avoid bad feelings, and will resort to many different substances or patterns to avoid it: cocaine, oxycontin, meth, alcohol, shopping, or gambling. The authors talk about how hard it is to quit and how vigilant you have to guard against doing a "substance shuffle": just swapping one addiction for another. But ultimately, kicking a habit requires facing those uncomfortable feelings and to learning to rely on people to help deal with the hard times in life.

I thought it was a good book, the author talked about successes and failures, and recommend it for anybody. Most of us are not snorting cocaine or blowing our paycheck at a casino. But we all tend to avoid facing things that make us uncomfortable or unhappy, and we could all stand to learn from some of the stories of growth in this book.

Beatriz Andrea Fernandez says

This book can be a little self-congratulatory. The author tends to flaunt his success and his insights every

chance he gets. He also seems a tad over-defensive about his unorthodox and controversial therapy practices.

That being said, the points that he is trying to make are solid, real, and true, particularly the point about "suffering well" and expecting to "feel like hell for a year." Most of the book is case studies which make you feel less alone and make you much more realistic about what you should expect from yourself as you try to manage an addiction. The author also does not hide his failed cases or his cases still in progress, which can give you a very real sense of the pains and time involved in getting out from under an addiction. He also does not hide the fact that reading a book is not going to make you clean. The author spends a good chunk of time talking about making changes in the real world, finding what he calls "core pillars," surrounding yourself with a support system, and actually feeling your actual pain without the substance to take the edge off. It's hard, painful, grizzly work. Make no mistake, this book is not selling itself as the cure-all for addiction. There is no "30 Days to Success" here, which I tremendously appreciate.

It is forceful when it needs to be, drawing clear boundaries so one does not equivocate on the nitty-gritty. In my experience, that same hard-line approach to addiction is vital. If you are struggling with addiction and genuinely want to stop, you will appreciate this no excuses, no exceptions method and mentality. It is the only way to get clean.

I definitely recommend this book, but as addicts (like myself) are a self-deluding bunch, it will not be an easy pill to take. It requires a level of self-awareness and enough desperation to stop your destructive habit. Otherwise, it's just paper with funny marks or pixels on a screen. That said, there's no reason not to hang on to a copy and give it to your addicted loved ones when they're ready.

Rory says

Amazing, easy, powerful

This book has helped me come to terms with my own addictions. It's easy to read and constantly interesting. A must-read for anyone dealing with addiction or an addict in their life.

Kate says

When I decided to become more mindful about my drinking, I wanted to look at a lifetime, mostly unthought, habit. Ditto with food and coffee and sometimes shopping and exercise.

I can see now (or admit now) that at times I'd get mad or anxious if I couldn't have my fix. Hiking only two miles? Not enough! Coffee delayed beyond 10 a.m.? Help! No wine or beer served at this restaurant? Really???

I want a peaceful mind, a mind that can sit, a mind that can go with the flow. A mind that doesn't expect something external to make me feel better.

Pema Chodron's Buddhist writings have helped me immensely on this path. As have two books that are decidedly not Buddhist: Jason Vale's "Kick the Drink Easily" and this one by Fred Woolverton and Susan Shapiro. Although both are geared toward the addict who needs to quit, I think they are also helpful for

people like me who'd like to look at their habits and compulsions and still have a drink or a dessert now and then. This amalgamation of ideas is not about deprivation but about a peaceful, happy mind and body. It's about making friends with my feelings.

Unhooked was co-written by a therapist and his client, Susan Shapiro--who also wrote a funny memoir about quitting her addictions, *Lighting Up: How I Stopped Smoking, Drinking, and Everything Else I Loved In Life Except Sex*. For my "Books That Inspire" series, I spoke to her here:

<http://beingandwriting.blogspot.com/2012/03/unhooked.html>

Clara says

This book seemed to inspire a wide range of reviews. I agreed both with the 4-star ratings and with the 2-star ratings, depending on what section of the book I was reading. (Interestingly, it seemed that many of the highest ratings were from former substance abusers.) Like those reviewers who gave the book 1s and 2s, I thought the suggestions the author provided for "unhooking" were superficial. Undoubtedly true, as in "put as many blockades between you and your addictive activity or behavior as possible," but superficial nevertheless. In light of the book's title, I expected these to be the heart of the book. This is the main reason for the "2" rating.

Instead the core of the book is a series of case studies, which the author, psychotherapist and addiction specialist Fred Woolverton, uses to illustrate not only his patients' issues, but his style of therapy, which is more personal/paternal and aggressive than that of more traditional therapists. He believes that this approach is more effective with patients who suffer from compulsion and addiction, and the case studies help the reader appreciate why it works.

Woolverton reveals personal details to the reader as well. He is the son of a "raging alcoholic mother." Discussing his choice of profession, he notes:

"Horrible anxiety states caused by missing mothers. Chaotic mood swings. A world filled with darkness and danger. Was it any wonder why I was so drawn to the addict population?...As a child with an abusive alcoholic mother, nobody had come to my rescue. As an adult, I wanted to be the person I wished would have saved me from the troubles of my childhood."

Much of what Woolverton says about obsessions and addictions is fairly standard, but that doesn't make it any less true or valuable. For example:

* "I define an addiction as a compulsive reliance on any activity or substance that harms or deters your ability to function in one or more major areas of your life such as work, school, family, social, and intimate relationships. Often, the activity or substance is used to regulate emotional states that would otherwise feel intolerable if one did not use...I do not distinguish between 'hard' and 'soft' addictions. Whether it is Xanax, pot, sweet desserts, pornography, or too many weekend jaunts to Atlantic City, I have found that the specific substance or obsessive habit itself is of less importance than the chaotic and scary emotions that the substance is being used to regulate and repress."

* "What many people don't realize is that substance abuse is often what keeps you from getting what you

want most in the world. Addictions inhibit emotional intensity and love. They act as blockades, often keeping users from being deeply involved with the people they care about and who care about them."

* "The first step to recovery and to recapturing your full life is to wake up emotionally and examine your daily life and rituals in a new way. You can overuse or abuse almost anything. An addiction is something that provides an escape, takes you out of yourself and allows you to get further away from the painful feelings and emotions we would all prefer to avoid. An addiction works short-term but fails miserably long-term because it winds up causing more problems than it solves."

* "Hiding or lying about it could be one mark that it's become an addiction. I constantly advise my patients to 'lead the least secretive life that you can.'"

* "It is my belief that you cannot successfully treat an addiction without confronting the deep, emotional issues that are giving rise to the substance abuse in the first place. If you do not dig deeply enough into the roots of the behavior, you will either start using again, or you will switch vices, sometimes without even realizing it. The goal is to let yourself feel horrible rather than just switching vices to avoid bad feelings."

* "Because the unconscious aim of addictive behavior is to alter, cure, or escape one's emotions, addictions inspire, fuel, and enhance self-deceptions...All the rules about relationships were made up in her head because her parents were never role models and never provided any useful or rational road map to follow...When she quit using her addiction to cope at 40, she was still a teenager emotionally and had to start over from where she left off."

* "The void that substances and activities seek to replace can never be filled. So a once-a-week habit that seems to momentarily placate emotional emptiness can easily become a daily or hourly compulsion. Yet the quantity of what you reach for will only get bigger, not smaller, because the void is endless and won't be satisfied. Instead of having to struggle with negative feelings and develop creative and constructive ways to cope, addicts soothe themselves with a quick hit while stunting their long-term emotional growth. They miss opportunities that could lead to expanding experience, understanding, and greater intimacy with others.

Occasionally there was some information which, if not entirely new to me, offered new insights, some of them haunting:

* "A common misconception about addicts is that they are hedonistic pleasure seekers. This is not the case. Most addicts and compulsives I have seen do not use substances or behaviors to seek pleasure. They are people out to avoid terrible pain. They use not for fun, but often just to feel okay and get through the day."

* "For people who have experienced severe trauma and family addiction, as I have, being happy, as many define it, is simply not an option. Trying to pursue conventional contentment is futile. The only way to generate ongoing happiness is to use substance or activity to get there. So you have to give up all hope of being blissful, revolve your life around rational rules, and aim for suffering *and* living well, and meaningfully...In Freud's famous theory of the personality, the id represents a primitive drive that follows the pleasure principle: if it makes me feel good (or takes away pain), I do it. The superego acts as the conscience, the naysayer, the rule maker. The ego mediates between the two. I find that addicts do not have a strong ego that can referee between their powerful, often childlike desires and the parental voice of admonishment that exists in their heads."

* "If you give credence to my philosophy, then nothing is ever going to feel as good as a child getting his or her mother's protection and adoration. For those not lucky enough to experience that kind of loving care in

their first few years of childhood, nothing compensates for it later in life. At a certain point that window to internalize unconditional love closes. A large part of all addicts' recovery involves feeling intense sadness. They have to confront a huge empty space inside. In fact, I can trace my broken marriage, my parents' estrangement, and all my siblings' divorces back to my mother's inability to stop drinking."

* "Addicts benefit from having tough, skeptical people in their lives who do not trust their judgment, who are cynical about their promises, and who have the courage to say no and make the addicts prove themselves (again, another reason why an addiction specialist, a tough shrink, or an AA colleague helps).

* "I sometimes counter-intuitively tell patients beginning treatment, 'Don't trust your instincts, they are always wrong.' That's because the feelings, urges, and instincts of addicts and compulsives will always steer them away from turbulence and fear they don't want to face and lead them back to the habits that soothed them. Underlying every substance problem I have ever seen, whether the substance is alcohol, cocaine, pornography, sex, exercise or food, is deep depression that feels unbearable. It is not, in fact, unbearable. But it feels like it. Addicts are extremely sensitive, overwhelmed by big emotions...The minute they give up their compulsions they feel raw, agonized, and vulnerable. 'I warn people in early stages of recovery: you will feel like a burn victim who has no skin.'"

* "I do not believe in the school of thought that allows former alcoholics to drink once in a while. I have never seen the practice of 'occasional use' work. Although your desire to return to your habit might remain dormant for years, you must understand that it is always there. While your cravings might feel less intense, the loss is not going to disappear. Some rules are meant not to be broken. It's black and white. Don't let your mind play tricks on you or your emotions will take over your common sense. The answer is simply no."

My final thought, as I re-read these quotes, is that had the book been shorter and contained more substantive recommendations, I might have moved my rating up to a 3 or 4.

Happyreader says

Unhooked is essentially a parenting book. To work with addicts, be supportive while also being honest and blunt, provide boundaries and discipline, be the voice of reason inside their heads, demand accountability, and help addicts find more productive ways to self-soothe. Beyond emphasizing the root of all addictions is the development of dysfunctional coping mechanisms and that quitting addictions will cause suffering, I'm not sure what distinguishes a bad habit from an addiction or if the author even believes there is a distinction. Little distinction is also made between chemically-based external addictions like heroin and avoidance internal addictions like obsessive video game playing. Here, everything from crack smoking to too much ice cream is considered addictive and everyone is advised to seek professional help and join a 12-step group. Agreed that anything can turn obsessive and life limiting but scale and threat to life should account for intensity and type of treatment and where distinguishing between bad habits and addictions would be helpful.

He does wisely state that the key to giving up addictions is learning to be more tolerant of suffering and uncomfortable feelings yet, beyond a warm bath, some soothing music, and journaling, he doesn't offer practices to learn to sit with pain or transform your thinking. His advice is more along the lines of stay away from your triggers, find support, and watch what you consume, which sounds like good advice for changing bad habits.
