

## THE BIG IDEAS

**The Psychology:**  
Strength and Weakness.

**A Positive Addict**  
What is that?

**Finding Happiness**  
One, two, three, go!

**Giving Up**  
1st choice of the weak.

**Symptoms Categories**  
2nd choice of the weak.

**Negative Addiction**  
3rd choice of the weak.

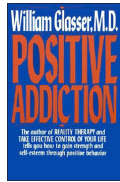
**Depression Is a Choice**  
(So are headaches. :)

**Strength**  
The Psychology of it.

**A Positive Addiction**  
Six criteria.

**The Benefits**  
Of a positive addiction.

**We Need**  
All the strength possible.



# Positive Addiction

The author of 'Reality Therapy' and 'Take Effective Control of Your Life' tells you how to gain strength and self-esteem through positive behavior

BY WILLIAM GLASSER · HARPER PERENNIAL © 1985 · 159 PAGES

“The thesis of this book is that many people, weak and strong, can help themselves to be stronger, and an important new path to strength may be positive addiction. If more of us gain strength maybe we will make a better world; there is little chance we will do so if too many of us are weak.”

~ William Glasser, M.D. from *Positive Addiction*

“Positive” Addiction?!? What’s that?!?

Well, imagine a negative addiction (drugs, alcohol, gambling, etc.) and take that “addictive” behavior and apply it to positive stuff like running (the *“hardest but surest way to positive addiction”*), yoga, and meditation (the *“most popular way”*) and voilà! You have a Positive Addiction. You also have the difference between a weak and a strong person. A depressed and a happy person.

In his brilliant, direct style, psychiatrist and author William Glasser outlines the process we can follow to create positive addictions in our lives. Really cool stuff. The book is a quick-reading 159 pages and I \*highly\* recommend you check it out.

I was truly blown away by Glasser’s description of negative addictions and, as I looked at what Ideas I wanted to pursue in this Note, I kept on coming back to the importance of highlighting his approach to NEGATIVE addictions.

... So, we’re gonna spend most of our time here on the negative side of addictions. :)

I trust you’ll dig the exploration of Glasser’s bold/direct/penetrating Ideas about the consequences of weakness and how we can build the strength necessary to flow with life’s challenges! We’ll start with:

## THE PSYCHOLOGY OF STRENGTH & WEAKNESS

“Very few of us realize how much we choose the misery in our lives. Even when we do, we still go ahead with the disastrous choice because we are convinced that we don’t have the strength to choose better... I will first describe in detail how weakness is the cause of almost all the unfortunate choices we make. Then I will argue that anyone who wishes to become stronger seriously consider trying to become an addict.”

Glasser’s an intense guy. Although he’s sensitive to the fact that we all face challenges and that none of us are immune to moments of weakness, he remains steadfast in his commitment to our power to CHOOSE the stronger response and thereby create more of all the good things we want in our lives.

To fail to recognize the choices we are making that lead to our happiness or our depression is to give up our power. And that’s never a good idea. :)

Positive addiction, he believes, is a key way for us to build the strength we need to face the challenges of our lives and our world! So, what’s a positive addict?

*“Only a few give up completely but huge numbers settle for a lot less love or worth in their lives than they could have if they only had the strength to work for more.”*

~ William Glasser

## A POSITIVE ADDICT

“I will call them positive addicts because, due to their addictions, they are almost always stronger than nonpositively addicted people who lead similar lives. With this added strength they live with more confidence, more creativity, and more happiness and usually in much better health.”

Sweet. There’s our definition of a positive addict: stronger, confident, happier, healthier. Me likes. We’ll get to some more detail on the how’s/why’s of their positive addictions, for now, let’s explore the roots of a \*negative\* addiction.

## FINDING HAPPINESS

“To find the happiness we all desire we have to figure out: (1) what to do, (2) how to do it, (3) where to get the strength to get it done. ... Even when we seem to be hung up on what to do or how to do it this hang-up is rarely the real problem. The problem is we don’t have the strength to do what will make us happy. It is hard for us to admit to ourselves that we don’t have what it takes so we tend to rationalize, to weep and wail about not knowing what to do or how to do it. As much as we may complain, we usually know that what we lack is not the know-how, but the strength.”

Glasser tells us that finding happiness involves knowing what to do, how to do it and, most importantly, the STRENGTH to get it done.

How about you? If you find yourself “*weeping and wailing*” about not knowing what to do or how to do it, check in and see if the \*real\* issue is whether you have the *strength* to do it!! Powerful, powerful, powerful (!!!) stuff. (While we’re here, let’s check in on your deepest drives/desires. :)

*If I knew I was \*absolutely guaranteed\* to succeed, I would do this:*

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And, a la Deepak’s two potent questions for discovering our dharma: *If I had all the money and all the time in the world, I would do this:*

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(No rush... We’ll wait while you complete those questions. :)

From there, Glasser goes on to talk about the psychology of strength and weakness—establishing the fact that, in his opinion, negative addictions are born out of weakness that results in the “**Three Choices of the Weak**” that, in turn, lead to negative addictions.

So, here’s the process: Step one: life gives you pain.

In response to that pain, here’s how it goes for the weak:

## GIVING UP – THE FIRST CHOICE OF THE WEAK

“Since the obvious purpose of pain, misery, and suffering is to tell you something is wrong, fix it, change it, reform, improve, get help; if you don’t have the strength to do it, you are stuck with the pain.”

\*ALL\* the great teachers tell us to master ourselves and many refer to pain as nothing more than a sign we have purifying to do. As Glasser tells us here, pain is there to let us know what’s wrong.

*"He hasn't the strength to buckle down and help himself; if he had, he would not be depressed. Even an expert may fall into the trap of attempting to help him rather than helping him to help himself."*

~ William Glasser

*"We must understand that many people are willing to pay a huge price in sickness and disability to avoid facing the reality of their inability to find happiness."*

~ William Glasser

*"With the first choice, giving up, he relinquished responsibility, but with the second choice, depression, he is now shielded from his own inadequacy and able to turn to others."*

~ William Glasser

If we don't have the strength to deal with the pain and take action to relieve it by improving ourselves, we're going to still have the pain. Right? Then what? According to Glasser: "If we haven't enough strength we attempt to reduce our suffering by partially giving up."

So, if we aren't strong enough to deal with the pain by taking effective action, we give up. That "giving up" is the first of three choices of the weak. (Which, of course, ALL of us are at times.)

For example, let's say you hate your job. The purpose of your misery is to get you to seek something (a new/altered job in this case) that will make you happier. If you ignore the pain and don't take the action (altering your current job so it's more groovy, looking for a new job, starting your own business you've always wanted to create, etc.), you make the first choice in the negative addiction process: you're GIVING UP. That leads to:

## THE SYMPTOMS CATEGORIES – THE SECOND CHOICE OF THE WEAK

"Although like all those who make a second choice he is totally unaware that it is a choice, he chose depression."

Now, importantly, when you choose to give up, the pain didn't go away. It's still there. So, we move into the second choice: symptoms appear. These symptoms might be as subtle as a headache or as drastic as suicidal depression. In any case, they are SYMPTOMS of a deeper issue—the fact that you CHOSE to give up.

Now, of course, we aren't strong enough to acknowledge the fact that we gave up, so we hide behind our symptoms and complain to whoever will listen. (Again, we've \*all\* done this at times!) Then what?

## NEGATIVE ADDICTION – THE THIRD CHOICE OF THE WEAK

"Each choice—from the initial decision to give up trying to find more love or worth, the second choice to take on one or more symptoms, and the final choice of becoming addicted—is a pain-reducing step. The reason addiction is powerful and difficult to break is that it alone of all the choices consistently both completely relieves the pain of failure, and provides an intensely pleasurable experience."

Wow. That's strong.

So, we've had the introduction of pain into our lives, Choice #1 of giving up (and not facing our pain head on), Choice #2 of symptoms (tension, headaches, depression, etc.) and then Choice #3 of behavior to reduce the pain that leads to a negative addiction (alcohol, drugs, gambling, whatever).

A couple of other interesting things to note here.

First, remember: "Typically a negative addict is a person who is severely frustrated in his own particular search for love and worth."

And, the reason why addiction occurs: "It is this peculiar, unique combination of pain relief first and then, quickly, a 'rush' of pleasure that is necessary for an addiction."

... Alrighty. That's a \*really\* quick look at the three dangerous choices of the weak that lead to addiction.

Let's take a quick look at a couple of the symptoms of Choice #2: depression and headaches, and then move into how we can create POSITIVE ADDICTIONS to build strength in our lives.

## DEPRESSION IS A CHOICE (SO ARE HEADACHES :)

"Throughout almost the whole history of psychiatry it has been difficult for most psychiatrists to

*" People who have given up often become deeply involved not only with depression but also with anxiety, fear, tension, dejection, apathy, or some self-selected emotion that is a personal hybrid of these common feelings."*

~ William Glasser

*" We all experience temporary episodes of painful depression, tension, fears, and anxiety... We would have to have superhuman strength never to choose a symptom when we are temporarily frustrated or rejected, but the stronger we are the less we suffer from the choice."*

~ William Glasser

*" Almost all of us have headaches, usually when we are under stress and lack sufficient strength, but most of us pull ourselves together, relax, and the headache disappears."*

~ William Glasser

accept that depression is a choice."

Those are some more powerful words. (Me likes! :)

Per Glasser's web site: "Dr. Glasser's approach is non-traditional. He does not believe in the concept of mental illness unless there is something organically wrong with the brain that can be confirmed by a pathologist."

"So you're saying my depression's a choice?"

Well, unless you are one of the few with something organically wrong with your brain, yah. Your/my/everyone's depression is a choice. (See Choice #1 above.)

Now, on one hand, it's tough to hear that.

On the other hand, it's INCREDIBLY powerful because if we CHOSE our initially weak response that led to unpleasant symptoms, we can CHOOSE a NEW, BETTER, STRONGER response that leads to "symptoms" of joy, empowerment and all such goodness.

"What about my headache?"

Sorry to break it to you, but, um, yah. That's a choice, too.

As Glasser so brilliantly says: "Few doctors will say, 'Look, your headaches are caused by inadequacy; take some aspirin and then go and find some more love and do something more worthwhile.'" (hehe. :)

Glasser also says: "Depression, no more than acting out, does not come from the outside. We don't catch it like chicken pox. It is out of our weakness that we choose to be depressed because we have discovered that not making this choice is even more painful."

All this talk about depression as a choice reminds me of Tony Robbins who is adamant that we "do depression" (rather than somehow being passive victims to it).

I vividly remember him working with a woman at an event I attended demonstrating how a shift in her physical posture/mannerisms directly and immediately altered her psychological state. She went from deep hopelessness and its associated physical attributes to a state of enthusiasm and appreciation for life and \*its\* associated physical attributes. Powerful.

David Reynolds, another psychologist and author (Dan Millman is a \*huge\* fan of his work—which is how I got introduced to his ideas), captures it perfectly in *Constructive Living* (see Notes) where he says: "Depression can be created by sitting slouched in a chair, shoulders hunched, head hanging down. Repeat these words over and over: 'There's nothing anybody can do. No one can help me. I'm helpless. I give up.' Shake your head, sigh, cry. In general, act depressed and the genuine feeling will follow in time... Feelings follow behavior."

Hah. Love that. Now, as I said, the good news here is that once we stop arguing for our limitations, we can do something about it. We can make better choices. Remember: "No one is so inadequate that he cannot help himself to some degree. Not only can he, but he must; nothing else will work."

... That's a pretty intense look at the consequences of weakness. Glasser dedicated his life to helping people develop STRENGTH to deal with life's challenges so let's turn to:

## THE PSYCHOLOGY OF STRENGTH

"What they always seem to have that makes them strong is that no matter how many problems they face they rarely run out of options. Unlike the weak, who tend to give up and then choose symptoms to reduce their pain and perhaps later become addicted to get some pleasure in their lives, strong people never seem to be at the end of their rope. They almost never lock themselves into one pattern of thinking and behavior."

*"I believe that their ability to find love and worth, when most of us would give up and settle for much less, is what separates the strong from the rest of us."*

~ William Glasser

And, as Glasser says: "Unlike the weak, the strong neither give up nor are driven by pain into rash or stupid behavior. They don't like pain any more than anyone else, but they are not willing to settle for short-term relief if it means reducing their options later. They don't rob Peter to pay Paul, they face reality now."

→ "They face reality now."

THAT's what strength is all about. The belief in ourselves and the strength to stand in the face of a challenge and not choose to give up.

So, spotlight on you: What are you avoiding in your life?

If you're suffering, is it possible that first choice of weakness (giving up) is leading to the second (symptoms like depression/headaches/etc.)?

Check in on that!

Now, to a quick look at the characteristics and benefits of a Positive Addiction in your life—one of the key ways to build our strength!

## A POSITIVE ADDICTION: SIX CRITERIA

"A positive addiction can be anything at all that a person chooses to do as long as it fulfills the following six criteria: (1) It is something noncompetitive that you choose to do and you can devote an hour (approximately) a day to it. (2) It is possible for you to do it easily and it doesn't take a great deal of mental effort to do it well. (3) You can do it alone or rarely with others but it does not depend upon others to do it. (4) You believe that it has some value (physical, mental, or spiritual) for you. (5) You believe that if you persist at it you will improve, but this is completely subjective—you need to be the only one who measures that improvement. (6) The activity *must* have the quality that you can do it *without criticizing yourself*. *If you can't accept yourself during this time the activity will not be addicting.*"

So, it's gotta be noncompetitive, easy for you, something you can do alone, that you believe has value, that you can improve at and it **MUST** be something you can do without criticizing yourself.

Why?

Because when you get into this "zone" for at least around an hour a day, your brain is able to do some fantastic stuff. In Glasser's words: "It is the spinning-free, mentally relaxed PA state that provides an extremely optimal condition for our brains to grow."

When we're in that state, Glasser says something magical happens: "It also seems obvious that strength breeds strength, and as the pathways in their brains increase they probably do so at least geometrically, maybe even to a higher degree. Two pathways become four, four become sixteen, sixteen become two hundred and fifty-six. The more they have, the more they get."

This is powerful.

Strength breeds strength. The better it gets, the better it gets!

## THE BENEFITS

"Then we come to the question 'What benefits do you receive from your addiction?' ... Many say they have been able to give up bad habits, quite often excess drinking, sometimes smoking. People describe mental alertness, increased self-awareness, a physical feeling of well-being. Over and over again people report a *sense of confidence*, perhaps the single most often used words to describe the benefits of their addiction. Many describe that they are more tolerant and less angry. All of these are obviously tied to the increased mental strength discussed in the preceding chapter."

Mental strength. Me likes!

*"If positive addiction makes us strong, as I claim it does, then the brain of a person who is positively addicted has more options than it had before it reached PA."*

~ William Glasser

As I write this, I'm 200+ days into building my Positive Addiction on meditation. I spend an hour first thing every morning and I'll \*definitely\* be doing this for the foreseeable future.

I'm already feeling tremendous gains, including a deeper sense of confidence, and I attribute it to two things: first, there's no doubt my brain is re-wiring itself as I spend more time in the "PA" flow state (see my Notes on *Thresholds of the Mind* for a deeper discussion on what's going on when we meditate/get into the PA state); and second, it feels REALLY good to do what we KNOW is consistent with our Highest Self. :)

So, what positive addiction are *you* gonna build?!?

## WE NEED ALL THE STRENGTH WE CAN GET

"Therefore, I strongly suggest that anyone, from the weakest negative addict to the strongest among us, consider PA as a way to gain strength. We need all the strength we can get; none of us has a surplus supply."

As Glasser says, we ALL need all the strength we can get!

So, in what activity would you like to/are you trying to build a positive addiction? :)

To strength, strength and more strength, my friend!

B

**Brian Johnson,**  
*Chief Philosopher*

If you liked this Note,  
you'll probably like...

**Constructive Living**

**Thresholds of the Mind**

**The Power of \*TED**

**Tony Robbins**

## About the Author of "Positive Addiction"

WILLIAM GLASSER, M.D.



Dr. Glasser is an internationally recognized psychiatrist who is best known as the author of *Reality Therapy*, a method of psychotherapy he created in 1965 and that is now taught all over the world. Born in 1925 and raised in Cleveland, Ohio, Dr. Glasser was initially a Chemical Engineer but went into psychiatry when it became apparent to him that this was his real interest in life. He attended medical school at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, and took his psychiatric training at the Veterans Administration Hospital in West Los Angeles and UCLA (1954-57). He became Board Certified in 1961 and was in private practice from 1957 to 1986. Glasser's path has been one of a continuing progression from private practice to lecturing and writing and ultimately culminating in the publication of over twenty books.

Learn more at **WGlasser.com**.

## About the Author of This Note

BRIAN JOHNSON



Brian Johnson is a lover of wisdom (aka a "Philosopher") and a passionate student of life who's committed to inspiring and empowering millions of people to live their greatest lives as he studies, embodies and shares the universal truths of optimal living. He harts his job.