

Social media and addiction

Almost every alcoholic discovered alcohol when they were teenagers. When we are very, very young the only approval we need is the approval of our parents and as we go through adolescence we make this transition where we now need the approval of our peers. Very frustrating for our parents, very important for the teenager. It allows us to acculturate outside of our immediate families and into the broader tribe. It's a highly, highly stressful and anxious period of our lives and we are supposed to learn to rely on our friends.

Some people, quite by accident, discover alcohol, the numbing effects of dopamine, to help them cope with the stresses and anxieties of adolescence. Unfortunately that becomes hard wired in their brains and for the rest of their lives, when they suffer significant stress, they will not turn to a person, they will turn to the bottle. Social stress, financial stress, career stress, that's pretty much the primary reasons why an alcoholic drinks. But now because we are allowing unfettered access to these devices and media, basically it is becoming hard wired and what we are seeing is that as they grow older, too many kids don't know how to form deep, meaningful relationships. "Their words, not mine."

They will admit that many of their relationships are superficial, they will admit that they don't count on their friends, they don't rely on their friends. They have fun with their friends, but they also know that their friends will cancel on them when something better comes along. Deep meaningful relationships are not there because they never practiced the skillset and worse, they don't have the coping mechanisms to deal with stress. So when significant stress begins to show up in their lives, they're not turning to a person, they're turning to a device, they're turning to social media, they're turning to these things which offer temporary relief.

We know, the science is clear, we know that people who spend more time on Facebook suffer higher rates of depression than people who spend less time on Facebook. (...)

If you are sitting at dinner with your friends, and you are texting somebody who is not there – that's a problem. That's an addiction. If you are sitting in a meeting with people you are supposed to be listening and speaking to, and you put your phone on the table, that sends a subconscious message to the room "you're just not that important." The fact that you can't put the phone away, that's because you are addicted.

If you wake up and you check your phone before you say good morning to your girlfriend, boyfriend or spouse, you have an addiction. And like all addictions, in time, it will destroy relationships, it will cost time, it will cost money and it will make your life worse.

Simon Sinek, interview for Inside Quest, 2016