



EPISODE 434

How Social Media Affects Our Psychology & Why Our Phones Are Becoming Irresistible

With Guest Adam Alter

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Shawn Stevenson: Welcome to The Model Health Show. This is fitness and nutrition expert Shawn Stevenson, and I'm so grateful for you tuning in with me today, I'm going to tell you right off the bat, this is one of the most important episodes that we've ever done. This is one of the most important topics of our time, right now, we are in a sense, living in the future, we're living in a time that we would see in movies many years ago, where we can talk to somebody and see their face while we're talking to them in a handheld portable device. Alright, we got secret super spy level stuff, all of us, super computers right at our fingertips that have access to a world of infinite, infinite possibilities. It's an incredible opportunity, incredible power. But what's said is that "With great power comes great responsibility." And right now, in many aspects, many of us are unknowingly not taking responsibility for our interactions with our technology devices, and they've gotten their hooks into us, and it's affecting so many different dimensions of our lives.

Hopefully you've seen by now, and if you haven't, as soon as this episode is over, go and check it out, it's on a technology device, ironically, but it's a documentary on Netflix and it's called Social Dilemma, Social Dilemma or Dilemma, if you're nasty. Social Dilemma, and it's documenting this effect that social media has had on the human brain. It's documenting the effects that social media has had on our interactions with each other and how we associate with ourselves as well, and it is eye-opening, sobering and shocking on so many different levels, you have to check it out, it's a very, very important thing to see right now, and it's so ironic, they put it out right now, he's been working on it for many years, and right now, at this time, when we're leaning more heavy than ever into our technology, for this to come out, it can be a great opportunity for us to analyze these things to make appropriate actions. So I've been watching a lot of really cool documentaries on Netflix, and this one just as soon as it dropped in, I checked it out and man, it really, really impacted me.

So make sure to check it out, Social Dilemma, but when I watched it, I knew the perfect person I had to talk to, and this man literally wrote the book on this topic and how our technology devices are intercepting our lives, and what this is doing to our ability to connect, what this is doing to our brains and how this is leading to various levels of addiction, and I had planned on talking to him many, many different times, and I just really never adamantly made the connection. And when I watched this film, I was like, "I

have to talk to Adam immediately." So New York Times best-selling author, and again, he wrote the book on this subject, and the book is phenomenal, and what you're going to learn today is absolutely game-changing. Now, as I mentioned myself, as many people have been diving into different documentaries, and even the quarantine itself it can be broken up into phases. Do you remember the Tiger King phase of the quarantine? Quarantine was just kind of just popping off, it's different, it was interesting. It's like a new relationship. You don't know what's going to happen. We got the Tiger King, exotic Joe. It was exotic. It was exotic time. Then you move to the last dance phase of the quarantine, the Michael Jordan documentary. People were begging ESPN, "Put it out. We need it. We're home alone. We're Macaulay Culkin, we need it."

And so the funny thing was the documentary is supposed to come out, I think it was like July or whatever, and the ESPN, they were like, "We got you." And they put it out two months early, and I sopped that up like a biscuit. Now we're in a different phase of the documentary, we're in Social Dilemma phase. Alright, and this is the most sobering and poignant and important of all of them. Alright, Tiger Joe, I thought about maybe getting a tiger because they're so affordable. That's what I picked up from that. The Last Dance, Michael Jordan, the story of the Chicago Bulls dynasty. Inspiring, definitely inspiring, but people aren't even really hooping right now, they're hooping... They got their mask on maybe, can't social distance and pass the basketball. But what did that give me? This Social Dilemma, this documentary changed my life, it changed my perspective, and immediately kindled a new perspective of reality and my relationships and got me to focus more on what's most important, so definitely check it out, but this episode today, we've got the guy.

Alright, he did a TED talk on this subject, one of the most seen Ted Talks ever, first of all, and that's really when we were introduced to him, but right now, this work and this data is more important than ever, so I really can't wait to dive into this episode. Now, a big part of this, we're talking about cognitive performance. So there's our behaviors in the world, and then there's the things that we are actually making our brain out of, the things that we're actually fueling ourselves with. And I want to tell you about a study, and this was published in advanced by a medical research, found that royal jelly has the potential to improve spatial learning, attention and memory. So spatial learning is like being able to navigate your environment... Have you ever got lost? Alright, I remember the first time I came to California, we used MapQuest. Do you remember MapQuest?

You print it out... You print it out, and you hope you get there, alright? Now everybody has GPS right there in their phones, but to be able to navigate and to understand your environment, that's what spatial learning is and spatial memory. And even your body



within space, there's a little bit of that, as well. And just being able to manage yourself in your environment. Royal jelly has the potential to improve that, alright? "Do you know where you are right now?" That's a good commercial. "Do you know where you are right now?" Another thing that's improved is attention and memory. In addition to that, it's anti-microbial, anti-tumor, anti-inflammatory, and here's another thing... And this is why I love things that have multiple benefits, clinically proven benefits that stack because there's very rarely something that is exceptional for one thing for the human body, that isn't exceptional for many other things. So it has those qualities as well. But royal jelly has been found to facilitate the differentiation of all types of brain cells. And on top of that, researchers in Japan discovered recently that royal jelly has the power to stimulate neurogenesis in the memory center of the brain, in the hippocampus. Come on, come on.

Powerful, powerful. You might be like, what is royal jelly? Is that like, Smucker's? No, not that kind of jelly. This is what the queen bee eats, alright? Exclusively, right? So this is a bee product. This is like category of phenomenal bee products. But this one has some really, really exceptional benefits. So a little bit about how does it. Royal jelly contains a compound called 10-HDA, as well as AMP N1-oxide, which are both responsible for stimulating neurogenesis. And again, this is the generation, the creation of new brain cells in the memory center of the brain. And we know that this is largely responsible for learning new information, storing long-term memories and also regulating our emotions. We can use some help with that right now. So yes, royal jelly is phenomenal, but the sourcing matters. And what if you stack it? What if you get that brain stack, that memory stack? What I use is called B.LXR. And it also has one of my all-time favorite things. This is literally one of my all-time favorite things called Bacopa. I just like the name of it. I like the way it sounds.

But listen to this, a randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled human trial. This is gold. This is double gold standard right here. This was published in 2016, found that just after six weeks of use, Bacopa significantly improves speed of visual information processing, learning rate, memory consolidation, and even decreased anxiety in study participants. Remarkable, remarkable. So that's in the B.LXR from Beekeeper's Naturals. And the reason that I get my bee products from Beekeeper's Naturals is that they're dedicated to sustainable beekeeping and creating the cleanest, incredible supplements and honeys... Their honeys, Oh, my God. Let me tell you a little bit about the honey really quickly. This was published in the peer-reviewed journal, Evidence-based, Complementary and Alternative Medicine. Raw honey possesses nootropic effects, as well, and has specific memory enhancing benefits. And the honey polyphenols are known to be directly involved in apoptosis activities and these, specifically looking at

modulating and reducing neuro inflammation. Come on taking care of your brain, honey can do that. High quality honey though.

The reason I get it from Beekeeper's Naturals is that they're dedicated to sustainable beekeeping and creating the best bee products possible. And third-party testing for 70-plus pesticide residues and other nefarious things that show up in many conventional bee products, including things like E coli, mercury, arsenic... That's B-E-E-K-E-E-P-E-R-S-naturals.com/model, 15% off everything they carry. Definitely check out that B.LXR, it's fire. Alright, and on that note, let's get to the Apple Podcast Review of the Week.

iTunes Review: Another five star review titled, "Model Health Homeschool" by LoWatson, "Shawn, my husband and I love your show so much that we've made it a part of our teenage boys homeschool schedule. We feel like the topics and information you put out are so important. We hope to raise happy, healthy humans who have a strong mind, body and spirit. Thank you so much for helping us on this journey. We love and appreciate you."

Shawn Stevenson: Wow, that is powerful. Thank you so much for sharing that with me and shout out to you guys. Hope you guys are having an awesome day today and I hope that this made it a little bit better, hearing this review. I appreciate you guys so much and there's so much good stuff coming for education on this episode guys. And listen if you've yet to do so, please pop over to Apple podcast and leave a review for the show, I appreciate it immensely. And on that note, let's get to our special guest and topic of the day.

Our guest today is Adam Alter, and he is an associate professor of marketing at the New York University's Stern School of Business, and an affiliated professor of social psychology in NYU's Psychology department. And in 2020, he was voted as Professor of the Year by the student body and faculty at NYU's Stern School of Business. He's a New York Times bestselling author of two books, including the book we're diving into today, Irresistible: The Rise of Addictive Technology and the Business of Keeping Us Hooked. He has one of the most popular TED Talks ever, with millions of views talking about this very subject that we're diving into today. He's been featured everywhere from the New York Times, to the Atlantic, to Wired, Popular Science. And Adam also has a PhD in Social Psychology from Princeton University, where he focused on how people reach the judgments and make the decisions that shape their lives. And now we're going to dive into this awesome, powerful, important conversation with Adam Alter.

Adam, welcome to the Model Health Show, thanks for hanging out with us today.



Adam Alter: Yeah, thanks for having me, Shawn. Good to be here.

Shawn Stevenson: So I've got to ask you. First and foremost, I want to know your superhero origin story, because this topic is so palpable, so important, but how in the world did you find yourself interested in this domain with tech and how it's kind of relating to our lives?

Adam Alter: I think the superhero or the super power for an academic is that when we get interested in things that other people get interested in, we can actually study them, and that's what happened with me. I think a lot of people were talking about tech, the encroachment of tech in their lives, and especially their personal lives. I was sitting on the couch next to my wife, we'd spend two hours on our phones, we wouldn't be interacting with each other. I remember being on a flight between New York and LA, and I don't even remember the flight, 'cause I opened a video game on my phone, it was an app, played it for six hours, landed and was like, "What just happened?" Time melted away. So I think a lot of people, probably millions of people, were experiencing some version of that in the roughly like 2013, '14, '15, but for me, it was something that I had the capacity to actually study, to investigate, and so I did. I started to look into it, and I had a few critical questions. Like, am I the only one experiencing this? The answer was very clearly no. And what else was gripping us this way and what should we do about it? Is it something to be concerned about? And that's how I got interested, probably six or seven years ago.

Shawn Stevenson: Yes, and even through that time, can you talk about, first and foremost for us, like you said, you're not alone by a long shot, but how has our investment in our time grown from what it was prior? Somebody just here in the studio, one of my guys mentioned he wants to get a flip phone now, since the flip phone to now, how has our investment in time grown over time to getting on the internet and tech?

Adam Alter: Yeah, so we spent about 18 minutes attached to our phones before the first iPhone, before 2007, so you gave up like a third of an hour every day to your phone, which is not that much time, it's some time, but it's not that much time. Now today, the average for an adult in the United States, and it's very similar across the developed world, is about four hours, so it's increased by a factor of about 12, 13, 14. And if you imagine that being expanded across the lifespan, we're talking between 10 and 20 years of your life, depending on whether you're a light or a heavy user of the phone, so you're giving up effectively one or two decades of your life to this device.

Shawn Stevenson: Unbelievable. And the thing is, even when you say that number, I bet so many people was like, "Well, that's not me." How can you kind of quantify that? Because a lot of



people feel the same way until they get tracked. They think that they maybe do 50% of the time that they actually do.

Adam Alter:

Yeah, it's true. In 2015, I reached out to this guy who created an app called Moment, and Moment was one of the first really sophisticated trackers that looked at what you were doing on your phone, how much time you were spending, occasionally you'd get these pings saying, "Are you happy with your engagement right now?" And he said to me, "Before you use it, before you install it on your phone, tell me, what do you think, how long do you think you're spending on your phone?" And he'd said to me, most people have no idea, and that was true for me too. I guessed. And so I guessed like, I thought an hour, but just to be conservative about it, I say, "How about 90 minutes? I'll say 90 minutes a day." And I started using this tracker, and it was three, three and a half hours a day, so I was underestimating by more than half. And I said to him, "That's crazy, that I just have no idea how much time I'm giving up. And it's such a lot of the waking day." And he said, "It's totally typical. Most of us are using twice or even three times more than we think we are."

Shawn Stevenson:

Man, one of the things that really just kind of hit me like a ton of bricks is... And you mentioned this in the book. So first of all, your TED Talk was phenomenal, one of the most popular TED Talks, but in your book, you also reiterated the story about Steve Jobs, and when I heard that, and even the way that you framed it in your book, it just really tripped me out. Can you share a little bit about that story and this concept of never getting high on your own supply.

Adam Alter:

Yeah, well, I thought this was fascinating. I read an article written by a journalist named Nick Bilton in The New York Times, and he had interviewed Jobs as soon as the iPad came out, and they had this long interview, this long discussion, and at the end of the interview, Bilton said to Jobs, "Your kids must love the iPad?" Which is a kind of softball throw away question. And the right answer to that question, if you're Steve Jobs is, "Yeah, they love it." But the answer he gave was much more honest. To his credit, he said, "They've never used it. We haven't allowed them anywhere near the iPad in our home." And Bilton found that fascinating. Here's a guy who was standing up on stage at Apple events, telling everyone they should buy an iPad, their kids needed one, it was great for education, it was great for entertainment and so on, and then privately, he was behaving very differently.

And so Bilton got interested in this, and he started investigating whether this was true about other tech titans in similar positions or people in the tech world, and he found it was. That a huge number of people who are the most sophisticated consumers of tech

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themselves, wouldn't let their kids near the same technology that they were either writing about or using themselves. And so to me, it's undeniable that there's a sort of link there between, not the drug trade maybe, but just this idea that... The idea in the drug trade is never get high on your own supply, what you're selling, you shouldn't use, partake of yourself, you would never give it to your kids, for example, if you're a drug dealer. And that's exactly what you're seeing, that same kind of pattern of behavior in the tech world. And so I found it very difficult not to draw that analogy, and I think it's quite apt, it's interesting, that they're worried that their kids are going to become hooked on the very devices they're selling to the rest of us.

Shawn Stevenson: Right, man, that's fascinating. When I heard that sentiment, I thought about... Because I first heard that in a Biggie Small song, and I was like, "This is kind of referencing Biggie."

Adam Alter: Yeah. It is.

Shawn Stevenson: And it's such a real... Again, if we can get that connection, I think a lot of folks, they might even hear it and it might wash over them a little bit. It should be very concerning that the people who are making a lot of these things, purposefully don't use them, or especially don't allow their kids to use them, or without extreme regulation. So, and you just mentioned a word, a term that I want to dive more into, you said hooks, can you talk about this concept of hooks and how the number of hooks that we're exposed to has drastically changed?

Adam Alter: Yeah, it's a little bit like going fishing and you're lowering the hook into the water and you're trying to make it as attractive as possible for the fish. And so if you can put a lure on it so that you've got maybe some flashy little feathers and things going on that light up when the fish swim by, you're more likely to catch the fish. And when you're building a tech product, there are certain hooks or lures that you can build into your product in the same way. It's like picking and choosing from a toolbox or a tackle box. And they're all there and you just have to build them in. You just have to make them a feature in your program. And as the people who are developing software and apps become more sophisticated, they become better at naturally folding these tools into their programs.

And a result, with each additional tool, the platform becomes more difficult for us to resist, and that's where the title of the book Irresistible comes from. It's this idea that if you weaponize a program, you start to embed these hooks in that program it becomes irresistible to us, and that's why we went from 18 minutes a day to four, five, six, seven hours a day now.

Shawn Stevenson: Right. And those hooks include obviously all of the social media apps and dynamics with those... Email, texting, the list goes on and on. And I... When I read this in the book, I literally thought about humans. I pictured it, I'm a very visual person, a bunch of us swimming around like fish with our stupid fish faces. And we're swimming in an environment that has far more hooks than water and wondering why we're getting caught up. So yeah, totally crazy.

Adam Alter: Yeah, that's true, that's true.

Shawn Stevenson: Now, one of the things that... And I told you this is before the show, I literally put the book down... I had to go for a walk after I read this. But you shared a story demonstrating how just the presence of your phone affects our ability to connect with other people. Can you talk about that?

Adam Alter: Yeah. The phone is basically a portal to another world. And so when you see a phone it reminds you of all the things that you do with the phone. So if you're a social media person, you're going to start thinking Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, whatever other apps you have. You might be thinking email, WhatsApp, text messaging, education programs, whatever the things you do on your phone are, when you see your phone you're reminded of all of that and it removes you from the here and now. And so one of the effects is that if I meet someone for the first time, imagine we sit across from each other at a table and we have a conversation. If we do that and there's a phone sitting on the table, even if it's not turned on, just the fact that the phone is sitting there, we will draw a weaker connection between ourselves.

We're less likely to form a bond and we're more likely to say that was kind of distracting, and I don't feel like I fully formed a sense of this other person. If you replace the phone with a book. So you take the phone away you put a book there instead you don't have that effect. So it's specifically phones themselves that lift us out of the here and now. And basically they divide our attention. They take a part of us and put it somewhere else.

Shawn Stevenson: That's like a soul sucking statement right there, man. I literally... Yesterday, I was discussing this, that my phone... Any of us when we're on our phones we have no choice but to leave our reality. We go into a different reality that in a sense doesn't really exist, it's like a parallel universe from where we are right now. And even that transition back into the real world there's like a lag time. And you've got a wonderful little checklist or a quiz in the book to see your level of... I love the fact that you break down the different dimensions of addiction and what that looks like, because there's so many different



terms we throw around. But just to get a baseline on that, and when we hear our kids being like, "Hey dad... Da-da-da-da." And you're just like, "Just a minute. Just give me a minute... Two minutes I'll be done."

So it was really like a lot of these is kind of a face to face... It's like a gut check for us. And I think that having this conversation is really important. Now, I think that a lot of us, we believe... Especially when in the concept of addiction, we think about a myriad of different things. And we think that it's... Well we'll get to that in a moment. I want to talk about one dimension being willpower, because I think a lot of people believe that this is an issue of willpower. But we don't understand, it's far more complex and veiled than that, and there are people working behind the scenes. Can you talk about that? To make sure that your willpower doesn't matter.

Adam Alter:

Yeah. Well, one thing about willpower is it's limited, it's finite. We all have a certain store or reserve that we can draw on from time to time, but if you are busy, if you're overworked, if you're tired, if you're making a lot of decisions during the day... Imagine willpower like a kind of gas tank and the gas slowly recedes until eventually the tank is empty. And if you rely on willpower constantly to make the right call, the right kinds of decisions with respect to things like how much time you spend on your phone ultimately, you'll fail. Because you just can't keep drawing on that will. So what you really need to be able to do is to set up structures that mean that you don't have to rely on willpower.

So habits... We can talk about this at some point if you're interested, but there are things you can do to circumvent willpower so you don't need to use it. But yeah... The biggest issue with it and why, why willpower is never enough is as you say that behind every screen there are two things. One is there are very smart people who know a lot about human motivation and psychology designing those products. So they're putting those hooks in that we talked about. The other thing that's going on though is you don't need to be smart, you just need access to a lot of data. And if you have access to data, you can A/B test everything. So if I'm creating an app and I want to know if I make the background red will people spend more time than if I make it blue, I release two versions.

Everyone gets a red version or a blue version. And then maybe I see from user data that the blue version is more engaging. So suddenly everyone gets the blue version. Then I say, "I wonder if I add a like button or a button that allows engagement what happens?" Suddenly people are spending 20 minutes a day more on the platform. If you do that with each feature over and over again, this little arms race between different versions



of the product, what you end up getting at the end of it all is this evolved weaponized version of the product that is perfectly designed to overcome whatever willpower reserves most humans have. And that's why so many of us spend more time than we'd like on our screens.

Shawn Stevenson: Yeah. I wanted to really reference that because even hearing this, that the average person is spending around four hours of their day on their device and kind of losing track of reality, we think that we can just willpower our way through it. Like, "I'll just put this down it's not going to bother me." It's far deeper than that. And these hooks can really get into us pretty deep. But now let's talk about that and this concept of feedback. And if you could, a little bit of the history, like how social media likes became addictive, it became a little bit of a drug.

Adam Alter: Yeah. People are very interested in the history of social media platforms and understanding how they evolved over time, and for me, the biggest change, the sea change in social media platforms was the introduction of the like button for Facebook, which is more than a decade ago now. And the reason that was so important was because Facebook for a long time, I remember using it in 2005 when it was first released to the university where I was studying, and it was engaging, it was interesting to see what people were doing, but they had to tell you what they were doing, they had to update you by saying, I moved towns, I got a new job, or whatever. Then with the like button, everything became bi-directional, so you could get feedback. So if I posted something, like tell people how I'm feeling, or I post a photo or a link to something, eventually you were able to do that on the platform as well. I could find out what people thought of me, a proxy for my social value in that context was how many people liked what I did, how many people engaged. And sometimes you'd post something and you'd be hit with a wall of silence and that wouldn't feel very good.

But sometimes you'd post something and everyone got engaged and they shared it and they talked about it, and it's impossible as a social creature, as a social being, which we all are as humans, not to some extent, feel some burst of reward that comes from that experience. And so the introduction of the like button I think was the smartest and most important thing, Facebook did, obviously copied by a lot of the other social media platforms. And it was because it introduced this engine of feedback, it made social media like a gambling device, like a slot machine where every time you posted, you were pulling that handle and wondering what was going to come up, and sometimes you hit the jackpot, people engaged, lots of positive feedback, massive dopamine rush, people feel great. And I think that's why it was such an important decision among the developers.



Shawn Stevenson: Oh my goodness gracious. So already my wheels are turning even more so than from reading the book right now, and how this stuff affects our value, it affects our perception of what we're saying of what we're sharing, or even who we are, and how valuable we are based on the response that we get from this world that is largely detached from us from a lot of people that we don't even know. So would that be accurate... Can you talk about how these things affect or dictate our value.

Adam Alter: Yeah. I think this is a... The biggest problem here is with young people, with teens, with kids, with adolescents. But it's true for adults as well. If you think about what it's like to be a kid, you draw a picture of an elephant that doesn't look like an elephant, and you give it to your mom or your dad, or someone who supports you and cares for you, your teacher maybe and they say that is a fantastic elephant, you get this burst of positive feedback and you get it for very little when you're a kid, because we know kids are just developing and maturing and we want to encourage them. But there's a point... And it happens at different points in different cultures, but there's a point where if I as an adult draw a terrible picture of an elephant and show it to someone, I'm not going to get that same burst of positive feedback. I've got to do something truly remarkable to get that same reward that a kid gets very easily. Now that doesn't mean adults don't need that, that positive regard, shapes who we are and who we think of ourselves as in the same way that it does for kids, it's just as important to us, but it's more scarce.

That was until the advent of social media, because suddenly now adults can post pictures of their lunch, you have a burger and fries, you post a picture of that, suddenly people that are telling you, that's a wonderful photo, you get 500 likes and you're affirmed in the way that a kid is for doing essentially not very much, right? It's... That elephant is, it's fine, but it's not the greatest elephant that was ever drawn, we absolutely derive a measure of our self-worth from the feedback we get online, and that's I think problematic.

Shawn Stevenson: Yeah and it's also been the negative that comes into play too, when you mentioned showing the picture of an elephant to your teacher or your parents. And now if you do it now and you show me this really sucky elephant picture, I'm going to be like, "Adam this isn't an elephant, this is an elecan't. This is trash." And then you go home, maybe you're crying, "You can't tell me... Whatever." And we actually look for that, and you talk about that in the book that we are more likely to remember these bad events, we're more likely to be drawn to the negative comments. Why is that?

Adam Alter: Yeah. It's an evolutionary property in humans that the thing that matters the most for



your survival as a species is being able to detect threats and concerns and alarm bells. So if something is good, if it's sailing along nicely, humans don't pay that much attention to it, they don't tend to remember it that well, positive emotions, obviously, we seek them out, but they don't have a really super deep, profound effect on us. In contrast, negative emotions that signal some sort of threat or signal that something is not okay in the world, it can be sadness, it could be anger or it could be... Whatever, it could be loneliness, there are lots of different kinds of it. Boredom as well, all of those signal that there's a problem in the environment around us, something is not quite right.

And so we've evolved to be preferentially sensitive to those negative emotions, and so when it comes to social media, if someone gives you negative feedback, if you're bullied as a teen online, or even if someone just ignores your post, and you feel like they should have given you a response, it has a colossal effect on you, way more... You can get 500 likes, but then there's that one person who says something negative and it's like releasing a book. You release a book... You'll know this, you look at those reviews like a hawk and you remember the positive ones, but if you ever get negative reviews, those things stay with you and it's the same on social media, we're preferentially sensitive to it.

Shawn Stevenson: Holy moly. Is there anything we could do about that though, Adam? I know a lot of people experience that more so than ever, and the difference as well as part of the... And we'll talk about this more, I'm sure, but it's part of the separation of humanity in a sense, like I was just with Layla Ali and she's the undefeated champion, her father, the greatest of all times, and she would tell me that some people would say little crazy things out of the way to her online. And the reality is, she knows when I said I was like, "They would never say it to your face," and she looked at me like, "Of course not."

But there's no sense of empathy. The things that we would be willing to say to another person who oftentimes, we don't know, we can't even see their response, there's an entire level of disconnection and what's even appropriate. And then people unfortunately get caught up into those comments from people who don't know them, and or they don't even have an emotional association to the thing that they're saying.

Adam Alter: Yeah. Well, a big problem is anonymity and being able to conduct yourself at a distance from other people. The perfect example of this is YouTube comments that most people hide behind user names that mean they're anonymous. And there's this good reason for that as well, but the negative side of that is it liberates us to be our worst selves, we're separated from the people we are commenting about in space, they're not actually in the room with us and also, we're separated by the veil of anonymity. Which

basically means that we are liberated to be the worst version of ourselves online, which is a problem. You asked whether there's anything we can do about this. The first thing you can do, I think, is to surround yourself both online and offline with people who support you and who genuinely care about your well-being. And that's easier said than done, especially for younger people. For teens thrust into the high school environment, for example, or you can't always pick all the people you're around, you can't choose them.

But where you can, where you can intervene on your environment, where you can release yourself from friendships or relationships that are really unhelpful, that are unproductive, that are negative, that are critical, I think that's really, really important, and I think it's become more important in the last two decades than ever, because not only do we need support in the offline world as we always have, but we need that support to counteract the focus on negativity as well, which I think is problematic too.

Shawn Stevenson: So one of the things that, of course, I want to talk to you about is this association between behavioral addiction, addiction and kind of identifying, "Is this just a flaw that some people carry or is it something deeper?" And we're going to talk about that right after this quick break, so sit tight, we'll be right back.

For years, people will come into my office wanting to get the programs designed for improving their health and wellness and accomplishing their goals. But the biggest question that people would ask me is, "Shawn, what can I take for more energy?" Now, what I first expressed to them is that humans don't necessarily get energy, we create energy through our interaction with food and nutrients, and also through our movement. Even as I'm moving now, I'm generating something called piezoelectricity. It's a form of energy, it's a current in our bodies that we're all capable of when we are simply moving our body. So again humans don't get energy we make energy, but the things that we are interacting with, with our nutrition can be paramount to our experience of having energy.

And today, when people are looking for energy because of these crazy things that we have access to today, we're like chugging down these "Energy drinks" that are causing more harm than good, because they're hitting on one channel, just being a nervous system stimulant. And that's okay in some small doses, but when we're doing that over and over, because what generally happens is we get a correlating crash, we take something that spikes our nervous system, then when it starts to calm down and cool down, it goes even lower than it was before, and we need to take something else again.

So whether it's an energy drink or going ham at the local coffee shop over and over again, we start to actually lose the resilience of our receptor sites for this caffeine, and our body doesn't even use it as good as it once did. And many people have had that experience where one cup of coffee, that first experience was like life changing. It was a... The music came on, and you fell in love, "Oh my gosh, this exists." But then after that, you need two cups, three cups, and we have to have a better strategy because I'm absolutely a fan of coffee and of caffeine because of some of the benefits it has like for example, on human metabolism.

Studies show that caffeine can increase your metabolic rate by upwards of 11%, that means your body's ability to burn calories, and a study published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition found that most of the increase in metabolism from consuming caffeine is from the increase in burning effect. So it is triggering your body to burn fat. So that might make some of us run out and want to take a bunch of caffeine, but there are different versions of caffeine. The source that you get it from matters a lot because they're dirty versions, there's dirty caffeine, right? But we want to go for the clean stuff, right? There's clean... There's big clean eating movement, we need that to be more intentional in cleaning our sources of things like coffee as well. Because dirty caffeine... Because what good things in life come with the word dirty attached to it. Right? We got dirty clothes, nobody likes dirty clothes. Dirty bulking, dirty looks, nothing good comes with the word dirty attached to it. Expect maybe, "Christina Aguilera's Dirty." That was pretty hot when that came out.

But bottom line is this, we want to get clean sources of caffeine. So organic coffee is the way to go, so we're not consuming pesticides and herbicides or rodenticides, that do in fact influence our microbiome because they're meant to destroy small organisms and guess what our gastrointestinal track is made of? These small organisms. And they can damage our endocrine system and also our nervous system as well, so organic is definitely paramount. But also I want to see a reduction in the amount that we're taking by balancing it out with something else that provides the human body a natural source of energy production that happens within ourselves. And there was a study that was published in medicine and science, in Sports and Exercise that looked at 30 healthy people for six weeks and record the effects of Cordyceps, medicinal mushroom on their performance.

The group that added Cordyceps to their daily regimen had twice the oxygen intake of the control group who didn't get the Cordyceps and this oxygen by the way, when we're talking about energy, this is the number one thing that we need. Oxygen is the most important thing, far more important than anything else. You can only last a few minutes



without oxygen, and oxygen is essential in our cells and providing nutrients to our cells, so this is really important. And another study that was conducted with the same researchers found that consumption of Cordyceps medicinal mushroom led to a 9% increase in aerobic activity from taking Cordyceps. It helps you to perform better. It directly influences your stamina and it doesn't have these weird crazy after effects of having a crash. Alright, so this is why I love the blend of cordyceps and medicinal mushroom and organic coffee that you get with Four Sigmatic. Alright? And I highly, highly recommend checking it out. I absolutely love it. It's what I had today. It's foursigmatic.com/model. That's F-O-U-R-S-I-G-M-A-T-I-C.com/model.

And you get 15% off all of their incredible mushroom coffees, mushroom hot cacaos and mushroom elixirs as well. If you're not a fan of coffee, you can get cordyceps by itself, you can get Reishi and Chaga all from great sources, and they're dual extracted, which sets Four Sigmatic in a league of their own. This means it's a hot water extract and alcohol extract to give you all of these nutrients that you're hearing about in these studies, you're making sure that you're getting everything. Alright, so head over there, check them out, foursigmatic.com/model. And now back to the show.

Alright, we're back and we're talking with New York Times best-selling author Adam Alter and before the break, I was leaning in on this concept of addiction. And we're seeing levels of this like we've never seen before. And when I was reading through this... And of course, as soon as bring up the word addiction, we have this negative connotation, we think about illegal drugs, things of that nature, alcoholism, gambling. But there's this concept also of behavioral addiction, so number one, can you talk about that? And also, can you talk about whether or not addiction, because I think a lot of us when we know somebody who is an addict or we hear about an addict or we see a story or movie, we think it's a character defect. But your data actually revealed that essentially all humans are susceptible to addiction, and you talked about an incredible story from Vietnam and the heroin use that took place. So that's a lot there, so can you please dive into that for us?

Adam Alter:

Yeah, absolutely. The first question, what is addiction and what is behavioral addiction was such an important one for me in writing this book. You're right, that traditionally we've thought of addiction as being about substance ingestion, so whether it's a drug or nicotine or alcohol, you ingest a substance into your body, and that has an effect on your physiology, and then you have this response that means that you chase more and more of that product and you get this addictive response, this kind of chain of addiction, that's traditional addiction. Behavioral addiction is a newer phenomenon, and certainly it's true of things like gambling, which have been around for a long time. But apart from

gambling it's really the last 20 years or so where we've become behavioral addicts in all sorts of new context, this is kind of mushroom. And so the majority of us now have at least one, what people call behavioral addiction, where behavioral addiction is basically defined as something that you do over and over again, compulsively, despite the fact that you recognize it's probably not good for you. In some respect it's harming your well-being.

And so it's incredibly common and so then that leads to the second question, which is, is this about certain personality types. Like are some of us just susceptible to this, or is this just a property of what it means to be human? And it turns out it's about being human in the wrong place at the wrong time. And so the story of Vietnam was, it's totally fascinating that a whole lot of the soldiers that went to Vietnam, the GIs that went to Vietnam, they had a lot of downtime when they were there. There was obviously battle, but they were also spending a huge amount of time being bored and not having much to do. And a lot of them, because of the area of the world they were in, they happened to be in a very heroin laden area of the world. There were a lot of chemists around at that time, they were producing increasingly higher grades of heroin, and so the production of heroin was improving. It became cheaper, and so a lot of the GIs took heroin and the US government got very concerned about this, they were convinced there was going to be this epidemic where 100,000 GIs would come back to the country and suddenly you have 100,000 heroin addicts who needed to be weaned off the drug, and they were worried about the public health implications.

They were terrified that this would actually cost many, many, many millions of dollars, and that would flood hospitals and so on. And so this was a public health concern, so at the end of the war, these GIs did come back, normally the rate of relapse when you are a heroin addict is about 90%. Of these GI's only 5% used heroin again when they got back into the country, and the doctors were totally puzzled by this and so was the government, they were like, "Was there something wrong with the research? We don't understand what's going on. We must be missing something." And the answer was that you took them out of that context, moved them into a completely new context. Now if you're a drug addict and you go back into that context where you took the drug, it inspires you to take it again, it kind of primes you for it, it makes you want the drug, your body starts remembering all those cues. But if you go from the lush jungles of Vietnam and you settle back into your hometown in the United States with your family, completely different context... Most of them went back to jobs, they had full lives and some degree of social support, most of their psychological needs were met here and so they didn't need the drug and they didn't feel like they needed to go back to it.



And one thing we learned from that incredible study, that low rate of relapse is context matters an incredible amount. That it's not so much about these addictive personalities, it's about putting people in the right place or the wrong place at the right or wrong time. We happen in the year 2020 to be living in an era where we're in the wrong place at the wrong time. If we're trying to avoid screens and these hooks that we've been talking about, it's really difficult for us to do in a way that it wasn't for these Vietnam GIs who are coming back into the United States.

Shawn Stevenson: Yeah. Oh man, that's powerful. And you reiterated that with different animal studies that they were doing as well, and the number of GIs... This wasn't like a small percentage, we're talking like, I think it was 35 to 40% of the GIs there, admittedly used heroin, but those are just the guys who admitted it. And so they were really expecting this huge wave of a problem to take place that didn't take place. Of course, society has evolved and had many other problems since, and by the way, I just want to put a little side bar that heroin was created essentially by scientists and used in medicine for a long time. And these are just kind of the remnants of different... Well, earlier stages of a medical model that we're still trying to filter our way through and treating symptoms, trying to figure things out instead of removing root causes of things. And this is why I love this work, and we're going to get to some of the things we can do about this, but I think we really need to get face-to-face with the problem. You said something earlier, you mentioned interaction. Our interactions are different. We're at the wrong place at the wrong time, but we don't have to be a victim. Especially if we become aware. And what really got me, and I was just like, I have to talk to Adam immediately, was the impact that is happening with our children.

It's tough, it's tough. Even especially right now in this moment, my nine-year-old son, and there's so much social-emotional mental development that takes place really every day for children when they're at these ages, when you know, what we call elementary age. And even beyond that, but especially now, just to be able to talk to other peers, to be able to read emotional cues and get feedback from the things that you're doing. He's having school online. His school is shut down, he's having his social interaction through a computer screen, so he's been inundated and of course, me being aware of this, I've done things that try to counterbalance it. But just the nature of how quickly this happened, we're still adjusting and trying to figure it out. But children are especially, especially vulnerable to addiction, especially children. So I want to talk about what's changing. We know it as adults, but what's changing with kids social interactions, and I think a lot of adults listening don't really fully understand.

Adam Alter: Yeah. I think there are really two things that we really need to focus on. The first is the



self-control issue, that we as adults have some resources to control ourselves, some willpower resources, they are greatly diminished in kids, that part of the brain that does all of that kind of monitoring and control, is much less developed in kids. So asking them to just use willpower, it just doesn't work. And we know that kids are really impulsive in a way that adults aren't, in the same way, so that's part of it. But the other part of it is when you're young, as you said, you said it so well, it's about trial and error, it's about being face-to-face with other people and looking at their emotions in real time, and you can do that on a screen better than you could do it without a screen. But it's not the same, it's not as faithful as looking directly into someone's eyes.

And also, kids need to take another kid's toy when they're young, and see what happens and physically interact with other kids in ways that are impossible behind a screen. So I think... I'm glad that we have these screens. If this pandemic, had hit us 20 years ago, we'd be in a less advantageous position. We have at least the ability to teach classes through Zoom. They're not perfect, of course, but we have that ability, and we wouldn't have had that 20 years ago. But at the same time that the social interactions the kids are having through those screens are obviously greatly diminished because they're through screens.

Shawn Stevenson: Yeah. And that's the beautiful part about your work as well, is that you mentioned there is an upside as well and, but for me, the thing that I want to point out was the fact that it's a portal. Now that he's online more, it's a portal, there's buttons right there. And for the kids, their little recesses is to Play Roblox, and when you get into these universes. It's just more hooks. And so, even though there's this upside in positivity, there are so many potentials for things to spiral out of control, and I think that most importantly, of course, is developing an awareness. Not just for ourselves, but in particular for our children and as their brains are developing, because that space is open even more so for these hooks to get into our kids even deeper. Now, our children also require, as I mentioned, quite a bit of face-to-face time feedback, and it's great that we have things like Zoom and Skype and kids can hop on, we could talk to our friends and family on other sides of the planet. It's such a beautiful opportunity, but we want to keep this in context, and I believe one of the tips too, is to not just have our online friends and interactions, but to have offline, to proactively make sure we get plenty of offline friends and interactions.

Adam Alter: Yeah, it's critical. Obviously these are strange times, and so more than ever we don't have that option, many of us don't have that option to the extent that kids can play with other kids in person, that's really important for their well-being. And during non-pandemic times, obviously, that's something that should be encouraged. At the

moment we do the best that we can with what we have. I have little kids as well, and they're in the same position. I'm lucky they have each other, but they've spent the last six months with adults and then with one other young kid, and that's good, 'cause it's good to have another young kid around, to have that socialization process continue with. But, it's not the same as being surrounded by a series of people with different personalities, needs, desires, emotions, personalities. And so, yes, absolutely, I think it's really important to encourage that kind of face-to-face interaction where it's possible, where it's safe.

Just a moment...

Shawn Stevenson: That was perfect.

Okay, I found this on...

Adam Alter: That's my... I think Alexa thought I was asking her a question, when I wasn't. Sorry about that.

Shawn Stevenson: Alexa, what's up?

Adam Alter: Yeah. How did she think I said, "Alexa, that's..." That is perfect.

Shawn Stevenson: My Alexa just said, "What's up." It's talking back. This is freaky right now, Adam. We're in the future.

Adam Alter: It is.

Shawn Stevenson: Alexa! Shut off! Please. Alright, so, another big obstacle I feel, and by the way, I just want to reiterate, incredibly important, especially as we transition, we move past this current situation, bringing this piece of data with us to make sure that we get out more often play, connect. And even right now, I truly do, man, every day I just give thanks. Prior to this we lived in Missouri, we lived literally in the woods. And by the way, everybody listening, some people have this mental picture of Missouri being like a bunch of woods and corn fields. We're a bustling city, alright. We just happen to live in a part where... We did live in the woods and so, but we were distanced from neighbors, it was even a pretty long walk. But recently, about a year ago, we moved to our neighborhood here in Los Angeles. And we have a family next door and their son is literally three days apart in birthdays from my son, and for them to have each other has been the greatest fortune and just blessing, I've been so grateful for that.

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And, even... You've got your two kids and them being able to play together so any... But, even if you don't have that situation, make the best of this however you can. So, even when... If my son's best friend Avery, if he's not free to have recess on their time, I'm going to do something with them. We're going to do something real in the real world, whether we go outside and throw the ball around, whether we play a little foo... Playing the foosball, whatever it is, we do something. So, just do the best that you can to spend a little bit of time offline. We'll come back to some more tips in a moment, so I just want to reiterate that. But, with our kids and us too. I want to talk about how our smartphones might be making us dumber, actually... I think you call it digital amnesia.

Adam Alter: Yeah.

Shawn Stevenson: Talk about that.

Adam Alter: There are a number of these really interesting effects that we've observed over time. I think one of the really interesting things that's happened is our threshold for boredom, for being bored and tolerating it has gone down pretty dramatically. So if you watch someone get into an elevator today, within one second, the phone will come out, that's almost a universal response, right? You get into the elevator, all the phones come out. And on the one hand, it's nice to have a device that means you won't be bored, but on the other, it's really important for us as humans to be able to tolerate boredom because that's when lateral thinking, creativity, inspiration, innovation, all of that comes from these moments of road blocks where you have... You're kind of butting up against a moment where you're like, "Oh, I don't know what to think about now." And your mind wanders a little bit and interesting things can happen. So you need that. This digital amnesia idea, I remember being a kid, and I knew probably 100 phone numbers. I just memorized them like every other kid. As a kid of the 80s, we all ran around like phone books, it was amazing.

And it was an incredible facility that we could all do that and it wasn't that hard, right? It was kind of automatic, you just knew certain phone numbers, and no one can do that today, I don't know anyone who knows phone numbers today, and I think that's not a huge deal in and of itself, but it's like a muscle, right? If you don't use that part of your brain that stores phone numbers in long-term memory, there are going to be other related skills that just aren't as developed, they're going to atrophy to some extent. And so this huge reliance on outsourcing to Google and to devices, I think is good because it leaves us free to do other things with our minds and that's beneficial, but at the same time, like if you only ever did math with a calculator, you won't understand the process

behind the math and you'll probably become less adept at very basic sums. So it's good to kind of engage your brain in that way sometimes, and we're not doing that anymore in the same way, because no matter where you go, you have access to the most incredibly sophisticated tools that used to take... The things that are on your phone, used to take up warehouses of space. If you wanted a calculator or a computer that sophisticated, you'd have to book time at a university to get access, and now we all have them and they're right next to us constantly.

Shawn Stevenson: Yeah so powerful. And especially if we're using them in the right context, but you just mentioned that we're able to kind of outsource some things to our phones and free up mental space, but we have to be conscious about what we fill that space with, that freed up database. We can put more Cardi B in there, or we can put in, no disrespect to Cardi B, or we can put in more things to help us to have a more fulfilling life and relationships. And not to say Cardi B can't do that by the way, but you get my drift. So we need to be more cognizant of what we're filling that space with as our smartphones we've outsourced a lot of other things. And one of the things you mentioned was the human of today really would rather be doing something than nothing, and you mentioned a study that most people actually prefer to do something, rather than nothing, to the degree that they were able to shock themselves once they felt like they were bored or that they wanted some kind of stimulation. And one of the kids in the study shocked himself 190 times, which was every six seconds, which basically the entire duration of the study, because he'd rather be doing something and feeling something than just being there doing nothing.

Adam Alter: Yeah, it's this crazy study where college aged students are left alone in a room and they're asked to just sit there in the room and they're given the choice between sitting there and doing nothing and just using their brains. They don't have phones, they don't have anything to actually know occupy themselves with, but in the corner of the room is a machine that administers electric shocks. So they have the choice between sitting there with their own thoughts being bored in effect, or they can go over attach themselves to this machine and shock themselves. And so this is a way of measuring what do people choose? Do they choose nothing or do they choose stimulation but it's negative stimulation, it's painful? And these shocks really do hurt, they're not pleasant, and you do see that this is more true of males than females, but it's true of both men and women, that they go over to the machine and they're curious about it at first, and some of them, even after the curiosity dies down, they're like, "I don't want to be bored. I'd rather do this." And they choose to do something even if it's aversive to doing nothing, that's just boredom is really unpleasant for them.

Shawn Stevenson: Wow, that's nutty as a fruit cake. And I've never said that before in my life. I don't even know if fruit cakes are nutty, but man, that is really crazy. We'd rather have negative stimulation than no stimulation. And I think this is one of the great obstacles of humanity right now and how we can evolve in a sense, is the ability to be with oneself and to be okay. I think that the way that things are structured is really kind of dissuading us, from just being by ourselves, and one of the things that you mentioned too, just having a time to do nothing, your brain actually switches in function and the default mode network, this newly termed aspect of the brain and processing kicks into gear, and this is where different creative ideas start problem-solving when you're trying to just focus on doing problem solving, we're usually looking at it through the lens of our general way of stress thinking. And when you can stop and just relax, step away from the stuff, that part of the brain kicks in and it's really, really helpful, but how often are we using it?

So this is super fascinating stuff right here. Alright. I cannot let you go without talking about some solutions. Alright? Some of this could definitely be a little bit concerning, but in your book, you get into habits and architecture, and you start to break down some of the proactive, really simple... A lot of these things are very simple things that we can do to help us to be more human, which I think we really need a lot more of right now. So let's talk about some strategies like how can we better manage our use of our devices that have become so... Just a visceral part of our reality.

Adam Alter: So the last thing you want to do is rely on willpower. So all these solutions are designed to get around that so that you don't have to rely on self-control because that's never going to work in the long run. So... You mentioned behavioral architecture, this idea that you're essentially crafting an environment where you're minimizing your exposure to your phone. So one of the really important insights people had was that if you ask adults in the United States... And again, this is true across the world. How much of the waking day... Well, how much of the day, 24 hours a day, can you reach your phone without moving your feet? So it's effectively a part of your body. It's like an implant. Seventy five percent of adults tell us that they can access their phones without moving their feet 24 hours a day.

So that means the phone is in their pockets, they're sleeping with it on the night stand... No matter where they are... It's on the desk next to them, it's always available. And that's incredibly problematic because it basically means that... We know the rule is that the things that are closest to you in space and time and the things that you're... That are going to have the biggest effect on your well-being and on your experience of the world. And so if you allow your phone to occupy that much space and time, it's going to



encroach. And that's what it does. So what we have to do is circumvent that. There are a number of ways to do that. The first strategy when I work with people on this is to tell them to pick something that's constant every day. For most people that's dinner. Everyone has dinner at some point in the day.

Start there. During dinner time find a different room... Or if you're out to dinner in again, non-pandemic times, it's easier to do that, make sure that the phone is as far away as humanly possible from you. So lock it in a drawer or in a different room when you're having dinner. Make it nowhere near your dining room. Some people have a little box... I know a lot of families have a little box. They'll put their phones in their box. There's a great company called Intentionally Unplugged, they sell these boxes that are really cute, beautifully made, kids love them they throw their phones in them. So you can do that. And what you'll find is it's hard at first, and it should... That's again, the kind of addiction idea that you get withdrawal. You wonder what you're missing out on.

You have massive doses of FOMO, and you're like, "I feel uncomfortable not having my phone." But if you're alone, you get to think freely. If you're eating dinner with family, you actually get to engage with the other people. Your kids might push back initially, but eventually it becomes this time of day that's cherished, that is... It's precious. It's a time of day where you connect with people in a way that you can't otherwise. And what I've noticed, which suggests this works is that once people do this for a little while it expands. So they start doing it with the bedroom. They say, I'm not going to have the phone in my room... Say, 90 minutes before bed and for the first hour when I've woken up I don't want to have the phone anywhere near me. So that's one thing they do.

Another thing they might do is on the weekends, they might put their phone on airplane mode. So they have access to the camera, they can use the phone as a camera, and in an emergency they can use the phone if they need it but it's not going to continually intrude on their... Whatever they're doing with themselves, their families, their friends. And so more and more of the week becomes reclaimed from screens. And it's the best way to do this. Is just to build these habits in, where any time of day... You should basically be asking yourself any time of day, right now do I need to be able to reach my phone? If the answer is not absolutely, yes, put it far away. If it keeps pinging you and there are notifications turn all of the notifications off.

If every time you turn the phone on you see all your icons for social media platforms and your email and so on, bury them in the fifth page on your phone so that when you turn it on all you see are the utilities. There's Google Maps, there's my clock. The basic things that you need every time you turn on your phone. Make sure you make it as hard



as possible for yourself to use your phone for as many hours of the day as possible and you'll find that you enjoy that. It's good for you. You feel better as a human being, happier, healthier because you've distanced yourself from that device. And you haven't had to rely on willpower because it becomes a habit, it becomes a matter of architecture.

Shawn Stevenson: Yeah, I love that so much. One more thing that I was pleasantly surprised to see in your book, as well, is the connection to tech in our sleep. And I've been promoting this for many years about having a little bit of a screen curfew before bed, because there's such an intimate connection with that. Can you talk a little bit about some of the things that you have come across in your research?

Adam Alter: Yeah, so I'm sure you know all about this work, the idea that the color of the light that humans experienced at night time historically in the evolutionary past again, was basically reddish to yellow. Maybe it was the light of a fire or something like that. It was a low grade, it didn't intrude in the way that a lot of the very bright lights in our homes do. And so our bodies got very used to this idea that the blue or white light that we associate with daytime, that full spectrum light, signals daytime. And so melatonin, which obviously encourages us to sleep, the production of melatonin is suppressed by these bright blue and white light. Turns out the phone admits that kind of light naturally, it's designed to be bright, so you can see it in the dark.

And so if you're on your bed and you're looking at your phone and it's hitting you with this bluish white light, you're effectively inducing jet lag every time you do that. So if it's 9:00 PM, you're telling yourself it's actually daytime. So you may be in the US but your body thinks you're in Australia. And if you do that over and over again, you just constantly disrupt your sleep patterns. It's a major issue.

Shawn Stevenson: Yeah, and they... Actually they feed into each other as well, because our tech can cause massive problems with our sleep. And by the way, one of the craziest studies was like, they found that every hour you're on your device in the evening, you're suppressing your melatonin production for about 30 minutes. And so just say you're on your device for three hours, which is pretty typical, and then you go to bed because you're exhausted, your melatonin production still hasn't really kicked into gear for about an hour and a half after you lay your head down on the pillow. And for us, it's not the fact that you're unconscious, it's going through your sleep cycles appropriately.

And there was a study and how it feeds into each other, this study is published in the Journal of Applied Psychology, found that less quality sleep, number one, and also



restriction of sleep, the more this happens for people, and basically what they found was that, the more people were missing out on sleep, the next day, they were engaging in what was called "Cyberloafing." And the connection was basically for every hour of disturbed sleep that they had, they were cyberloafing for about 20% more of their assigned task the next day. And we know this.

Adam Alter: So it's a feedback loop. Yeah.

Shawn Stevenson: And then the next day, it really feeds into each other, because now we're sleep-deprived, we're going to have a tendency to get back on the internet, which is going to affect our sleep. And so just taking back control, using some of these simple things you've shared about, some of the timing of the things. And I love the tips about, "with dinner" that's amazing. And there's so many other insights like this. You dive in and really break down addiction and behavioral addictions in so many different dimensions, so many wonderful, colorful stories. And if you could, could you share... I want to know personally, for yourself, what is the model that you're setting for other people with how you live your life personally, especially after imbibing all of this data?

Adam Alter: There are a few things I do. I moved with my family from New York City to the suburbs, which is not the right move for everyone, of course. But I was feeling the nature deficit, and my kids were as well, they wanted to run around. They'd run up and down the corridor in our apartment block. And it just wasn't right for me anymore, and so I was willing to sacrifice the commute to be able to have some greenery, some green space, we live quite near the water, so to have access to water... I run almost every day. And part of the running is because I want to exercise and it's important to me to move my body. But a big part of it is that it's beautiful and it's replenishing, and the opposite of tech time, of screen time is really time in natural environments and time spent with people you love.

So I try to maximize both of those throughout the day whenever I can. And then the things that I mentioned earlier about trying to distance myself from my phone, I do that as much as possible. I try not to keep the phone in the bedroom, I try to stop using the phone a little bit before bed so that I don't have this melatonin suppression issue. And then I try my best on the weekends to just leave my phone either at home completely or to put it on airplane mode when I can. It's not always easy to do, I fail a lot of the time because I'm a human as well, but I really do my best, and... It certainly improved... Since I started studying this, it's improved my digital hygiene, my relationship with my screens, and I think therefore my relationship with my family and with friends as well, has improved as a result of it.

Shawn Stevenson: I love that. We just got a new terminology today, "Digital hygiene."

Adam Alter: Yeah.

Shawn Stevenson: Thank you so much. Can you let everybody know where they can pick up your book and where they can get, just more information about you, and check you out online and get more information?

Adam Alter: Yeah, the book's in all indie bookstores, find it there, if you can. Support the small book stores, if you can. If you can't, it's available at all the other usual large outlets. You can find me online. I have a web page, adamalterauthor.com. I'm on Twitter, although I don't use it all that much. [Adamlealter](https://twitter.com/adamlealter) is my handle. And I don't really use the other social media platforms as much, but those are probably the main places, yeah.

Shawn Stevenson: Awesome. Well, we'll link everything for everybody in the show notes, and Adam, thank you so much, this has been incredibly enlightening and insightful, and this is a conversation that... I didn't even tell you this, my wife has been... She mentioned you to me like, two years ago, and I put you on this shortlist of people that I wanted to talk to. And just with the nature of what's happening right now and so many people being even more invested in tech, I just wanted to make sure, that we come into this a little bit more cognizant of the potential good and the potential downsides and to be as human as possible through it all, and you were the perfect person who literally wrote the book on it, and I'm just grateful for you putting your time and energy into creating something like this. It's very special.

Adam Alter: Thank you Shawn, I appreciate it. Thanks for having me on and for inviting me.

Shawn Stevenson: Awesome, my pleasure.

Adam Alter: Alright.

Shawn Stevenson: Alright everybody, thank you so much for tuning in to the show today. I hope you got a lot of value out of this. This is one of the most important episodes of the Model Health Show. It's one of the most important topics of our time, because our connection to technology is not slowing down any time soon. And right now, we also have an opportunity, because it's not so integrated... We're a little bit of cyborgs now, as he mentioned. Like, having your phone within that distance for so many adults, we're kind of like cyborgs a little bit. We're kind of like Androids a little bit. And having an extension,

we have a... In a way, melded with technology, in the way that we think, in the way that things affect how we feel. They've come together and integrated.

It might not be literally implanted in your body yet, but right now, we have the ability to change our association with these things to a more helpful way. And there's so much more in the book, Irresistible, definitely check it out, it's such a great read. He even talks about how gaming... As of 2014, women over the age of 18 represent 36% of all gamers. Men over the age of 18 represent 35% of all gamers, making women the highest demographic of all gamers. What? Who knew? Who knew? It's just the accessibility of that phone, I was shocked to see friends of mine, their mothers and even older women in my family... They might be in their 60s, 70s and they're over there like gaming on their phone, and it's just like, "Shouldn't you be making a sweater?"

Times are different, okay? No stereotypes. She's not knitting sweaters, she's Candy Crushing, alright? It's because it's the accessibility. And again, these games get their hooks into us. And he also talked about the obsession... How does this happen with addiction with gaming, and what type of games should we be looking towards? The story of the World of Warcraft that he put in the book is absolutely fascinating, so... Just so many powerful things, powerful insights. We are hard-wired for some of these things. Even how Netflix goes right to the next thing. And the cliffhangers, our psychology, we have to close loops, we cannot have a question unanswered, we got to know.

And this is why it's so important to pose our own questions right now, to ask ourselves questions because our brains have to look for those answers. What is it that this time is giving me an opportunity to do? What is my biggest takeaway message from this episode? How can I create a healthier relationship with the technology in my life, with my phone? How can I have better digital hygiene? What are some of the action steps that I could take? And just to share with you really quickly some of the things that I do, and just over the years of being around this data, being around some of the experts, I picked up some of these pieces that have been very helpful, especially when creating, if you're a creative person, if you or even just wanting to get good work done, period, even if it's not like creative work, and it's just like, you need to lock in and get some busy work done.

When I go into my office, I make sure that my phone is not in sight, I go and put it on a shelf behind me so that I actually have to walk over and go and get it. Because just having the phone sitting there, you'll have a tendency, just to even just pick it up and check it. Right, we call it just checks, I'll just check really quickly, just check. And



sometimes because of the neural association, you could pick your phone up for a just check, think you're looking for the time and just swipe and just touch a app real quick. And something's going to get you. Right? So just, if you're working, keep it away from you. So that's one thing that I do.

Another thing that I'm not always perfect about, he mentioned this too, it's not about being perfect. It's about being aware, it's about doing the best that we can, is the first 30 minutes of getting up, I don't check my phone. So I, you know, if there's an alarm, or if I'm checking the time, cool, but I don't open up any apps, I don't dive into that world, that technology world for the first 30 minutes. And usually, I look for an hour, that's why I'm saying I'm not perfect, I'm really good with the 30 minutes, but an hour that's challenging, it can be challenging. So that's another thing.

And also dinner, oh my goodness, it's so profound, so powerful. We've been doing this for years now, we don't bring phones to the dinner table. And a couple of instances, even recently, the world's been so different, I've had my phone sitting there a couple of times. And I literally notice myself picking it up. And I'm just like, "What are you doing?" So we can't even... We don't even have it around, at the dinner table, we keep the phone somewhere else. And it's just so helpful just to connect and to be human. And so those are a few things that I do.

And one of the most important things, of course, is giving yourself a little bit of a screen curfew, you know, we talked about this a little bit. It's not just the blue light, we've got hacks for that, you can get, you know, there's like night shift on our phones where you can get in to nice, warm colors and kind of cool off the brightness of your screen. So that might give you a permission slip to go ham into the technology in the evening. It's great, it's definitely great to do that. But you have to understand that your brain, even if you're using your screen cooling apps, or your blue light blocking glasses, your brain is still firing in such a way that these pathways of addiction when we're talking about levels of dopamine, and even adrenaline and noradrenaline and just what's happening with your hormones and neurotransmitters by being on your device can have some effects on your sleep quality.

So this is why I'm a big fan of giving yourself an actual screen curfew. If you do have to be on, you know, if you're working or you know, even watching a show staying up a bit, definitely blue light blocking glasses are phenomenal. And I think that most importantly though, it's what you do... It's the rule and not the exception, right? It's what you're doing for the rule, what is your rule? What is the structure that you create for yourself, and giving yourself that screen curfew is a really, really good idea 'cause it just allows



your brain to shut down and get back to the real world so you can transition into getting some high quality sleep.

And that'll help you the next day because as we talked a little bit about, when you're sleep-deprived, or just overall not well rested or missing on critical time and sleep, that's going to lead you to cyberloafing more the next day. And if you've ever caught yourself doing this, you might not have known that you've done this. I know that I've seen myself doing it. If there's ever a situation where you're tired, we have a tendency towards getting on our phone a little bit more often or staying on our phone a little bit longer. So again, all of this is just bringing up an important conversation, important realization about our relationship with our tech, and how we can use this moving forward, just simple practical strategies to have some real-time in the real world with the people that we love. Alright? And these devices can help to connect us in some instances, but nothing will ever replace that real in-person human to human connection.

Again, these are great. I love the fact that I can FaceTime, you know, with my mother-in-law, it's incredible, in another state. It's a miracle we have that. This is like 'Kim Possible' level stuff, like 'Kim Possible' had video phone, alright, before it was a thing, okay, shout out to everybody who, you know, their kids watched 'Kim Possible.' But now we have it. It's real. This stuff exists, we're living in the future, you know, and it's powerful. But we just don't want to mistake the world of technology and viewing things through a screen for real life.

So I implore you to spend a little bit more time in real life, reduce the time that you're spending on social media, and be more social in the real world, if at all possible. There's different levels of that right now, at this moment. But take that on as we move forward so that we can maintain a sense of humanity because that, ultimately is what is the most important thing right now. I appreciate you so much for tuning in today. If you got a lot of value out of this, please share it out with the people that you care about. And you can tag me, I'm @shawnmodel on Instagram, @ShawnModel on Twitter, and Adam's on Twitter too, so you could tag him. And we're @TheModelHealthShow on Facebook. Alright, we've got some epic shows coming your way. Very important topics. And I'm just pumped, and I hope that you're ready. Take care. Have an amazing day. And I'll talk with you soon.

And for more after the show, make sure to head over to the [modelhealthshow.com](http://themodelhealthshow.com). That's where you can find all of the show notes. You could find transcriptions, videos for each episode. And if you got a comment, you can leave me a comment there as well. And please make sure to head over to iTunes and leave us a rating to let everybody

know that the show is awesome. And I appreciate that so much. And take care. I promise to keep giving you more powerful, empowering, great content to help you transform your life. Thanks for tuning in.