

# The real risk of entrepreneurial strengths becoming addictive weaknesses

[Business](#), [Entrepreneurship](#)



The ancients warned us of tragedy when personal strengths applied in one situation become an Achilles heel in another context. " If men had all they wished, they would be often ruined," warned Aesop.

Successful entrepreneurs run the show. Many have a hard time being told what to do, or when to stop, by anyone, including investors. That may cause dysfunctions to get out of hand, resulting in workaholism, alcoholism, promiscuity, gambling and so on. For some entrepreneurs, when they have truly become their own boss it's sort of like Superman meeting his kryptonite.

The reports how entrepreneurs' workaholism and obsessiveness are behavioral addictions. And why not? New wealth can attract the wrong people -- cocaine peddlers, prostitutes or casino operators. If the high-roller isn't careful, his alpha behaviors, such as competitive drive, could simultaneously become his vulnerability when applied in a darker setting.

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" In my experience, entrepreneurs are particularly at risk for substance abuse if they are responsible for sales, marketing or networking, as these are very social interactions in which alcohol is generally the lubricant," says Dr. Jason Powers, a member of Entrepreneurs' Organization and chief medical officer of network of substance abuse treatment programs in Texas . " In Russia, for example, you may be viewed as untrustworthy if you refuse an alcoholic drink. That would make a non-drinker dead in the water as an entrepreneur. It's much the same way in Japan. The point is that you can

almost count on not doing business if the people who interact with you view you as suspicious or unreliable."

Chemical addiction involves the despite their harmful consequences, according to American Psychiatric Association (APA). People with addiction focus on doing drugs or destructive behavior to the point where it takes over their life.

Business owners, in particular, can be susceptible to gambling, drug use and other vices because these activities mimic the highs and lows of turning a startup into a multimillion dollar enterprise. And most entrepreneurial journeys have their share of ups and downs, in the same way that your chip stack can undergo extreme variance at the baccarat table.

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Studies have shown that pilots, business owners, athletes and soldiers are more likely to patronize casinos than general audiences. When you've taken out a mortgage to fund a venture that's bleeding cash, there's a parallel to throwing your wallet on 16 red and 17 black on roulette. One is arguably a calculated risk, the other is pure gambling, but it can be hard to distinguish between the two.

" I think the main risk factor [for entrepreneurs] for substance abuse is that by being at the very top, nobody's looking at you," says Dr. Powers. " While your role may be to safeguard against any behavior that could be a detriment to the fiscal health of the company, if nobody's making sure *you're*

not drinking too much, not going to strip clubs too much, not doing cocaine too much, there's a lack of accountability. And that's their Achilles' heel."

Addiction is said to be a crisis of disconnection, and that the way out of unhealthy bonds is to form healthy ones. That's one of the conclusions by psychologist Bruce Alexander in his classic in which rats consistently reject drug-laced water as long as they are surrounded by a fun environment. That's because, for mice, a pleasant surrounding represents a much better alternative to doping, and many psychologists think the same holds true for people. Who knew that work-life balance and healthy relationships are key to entrepreneurs avoiding the junkie trap?

### **Here's how to spot the red flags.**

" Warning signs of addiction in entrepreneurs include behaviors that are out of character, such as being uncharacteristically late, making impulsive decisions with purchasing, or just taking huge risks within the entrepreneur's domain" says Dr. Powers, who has worked with many business owners as a member of Entrepreneurs' Organization. " Changes in weight, sleep and mood can also indicate a substance abuse problem."

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Business owners are not used to following orders so you may have to really press your case if something looks whacky. " If nobody has leverage on them, it's very easy to dismiss any advice, even from the most sincere well-wishers, if that advice is at odds with what the entrepreneur believes," adds Dr. Powers. " Like any addict, the entrepreneur thinks their alcohol or drug

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use is under control. Fortunately, there are treatments that are effective and, as an interventionist, I have found that with the right type of support system, training, patience and transparency, it's possible to help even the most stubborn among us."