Joel's Reinforcement Library

NEVER TAKE ANOTHER PUFF!

"I'm going to have to carry cigarettes with me at all times for me to quit smoking."

I hear this comment almost every time I start a new clinic. The smoker truly believes that if he does not have cigarettes with him, he will not succeed in quitting. His reasoning for carrying cigarettes is that he has to show himself that he is stronger than the cigarettes, or that if he is faced with some traumatic stress he will need a cigarette to survive through the situation. Both of these beliefs carry serious implications, which almost guarantee failure at permanent cessation from cigarettes.

The first hypothesis—that the smoker must show he is stronger than the cigarette—assumes that the smoker believes he is stronger than his cigarettes. This is the gravest mistake the smoker can make. He is not stronger than his addiction. The day he admits this fact will be the day he has a fighting chance at quitting, the day he forgets it will be the day he again is caught in the grip of addiction.

If he were stronger, he would have been smoking one or two cigarettes a day whenever he wanted. But by the time he enrolled in our clinic he was probably smoking twenty to thirty times that amount. If he were stronger than cigarettes, he would never have showed his face in a smoking clinic. He would have just stopped. But at the time he joined, he recognized he was not in control. He was probably out of control for many years. And as with any other addictive drug, he would never be in control again. Once he forgets that cigarettes controlled him, he will probably smoke his first cigarette. That will be a tragic day when he relapses into his past addiction and he may never be able to muster the strength necessary to break free from cigarettes again.

The second idea - that cigarettes are essential to overcome life's traumas - will almost certainly result in smoking within days of trying to stop. No matter how thorough the smoker is at planning a tranquil period when stress is at a minimum, stress will occur. With cigarettes present, one is sure to be taken. Even if he overcomes that one situation, the idea that cigarettes are capable of making life bearable is a false and dangerous belief.

The smoker feels he needs cigarettes to function properly in our world. Then he takes it one step further, he begins to believe that he will not only be less effective at functioning, he will be totally incapable of surviving. He is giving up the substance that makes life possible. With this belief present, he has about as good a chance of giving up smoking as he has of giving up breathing or eating. If cigarettes are essential to maintain life, quitting is a futile effort. But this is just not true. Everything a smoker can do with cigarettes he can do without them, but he will not learn this or believe it until he successfully quits and starts dealing with life without smoking.

Don't ever forget how cigarettes once controlled your behaviors and beliefs. When you quit smoking you admitted cigarettes controlled you. You were literally afraid that one puff could put you back. That was not an irrational fear. One puff today will lead to the same tragic results as it would have the day you quit. Cigarettes were stronger than you before, and, if given the chance, will be stronger than you again. If you want to show you are now in control, do it by admitting you can function without having cigarettes as a worthless and dangerous crutch. To permanently stay free from cigarettes, all that needs to be done is to NEVER TAKE ANOTHER PUFF!

Joel