

## *Joel's Reinforcement Library*

**NEVER TAKE ANOTHER PUFF!**

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### *Can we motivate a smoker to quit if he thinks he doesn't want to quit?*

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Over the years I have seen numerous smokers thrust into my program, totally against their will, who still manage to succeed in quitting smoking. I sometimes get young people who are being forced by their parents to attend. Sometimes it is adults who are forced in by doctors, while other times it is adults who have been tricked into coming to my seminars by family and friends who literally bring them to the program under some form of false pretense, such as they are just going out to dinner. While I won't say this tactic works in the majority of cases, it works far more often than most people would think.

To say that these people had no prior motivation or desire to quit smoking would probably not be true. I suspect most smokers have some level of motivation to quit, but motivation without an understanding of nicotine addiction and its treatment isn't enough to succeed. That is what I try to do in the first session of a clinic or in the single session seminars. I try to cram in four areas of information, all of which I think are crucial for the smoker to understand if he is going to have a reasonable shot at success.

The areas I try to cover are why people smoke, why they should stop, how to quit, and how to stay free. All four of these areas are crucial points of understanding for a person contemplating quitting. Without a firm grasp of each component, the smoker will be handicapped in his or her effort to quit.

Understanding why he or she smokes helps the smoker see that all the magical qualities associated with smoking were based upon false beliefs and feelings. While most smokers think they smoke because they want to, the real reason they smoke is because they have to. They are addicted to nicotine and their bodies are demanding that they smoke. They are drug addicts, plain and simple, and understanding this premise is the crucial first step. As with any other addiction or 12-step program, the

premise of being powerless over the drug is the first step in recovery.

I try to help them to see that while they thought smoking was keeping them calm, it was actually increasing their stress levels, or more accurately, their reactions to stress. While they thought smoking made them energetic, in fact, it was robbing them of endurance and energy. While smokers often felt that smoking allowed them to have fun and lead more socially active lifestyles, it was actually impairing and limiting their ability to engage in many activities and to develop new relationships. As opposed to enhancing their ability to be vibrant and active members of society, it was in fact causing them to resort to many antisocial behaviors. It led them to smoke in lieu of human contact, often leaving gatherings or refusing to attend functions where smoking was no longer permitted.

Why a person should quit smoking is probably the least surprising type of information, as most smokers already know that smoking is bad for them. The problem is that most people don't recognize how bad it is. Many attending are overwhelmed when they fully realize the true magnitude of the dangers from smoking. While I don't spend a great quantity of time on the issue, maybe only an hour and a half out of ten hours of presentation time, it is still one of the areas that many people refer back to years later as a major motivating factor in staying off nicotine. The recognition that quitting smoking is in fact a fight for survival is often of paramount importance in long-term success. This information is often critical for dealing with the occasional thoughts that are still triggered by circumstances and situations faced throughout the ex-smoker's life.

How to quit -- now this is a shock to most attending the session, especially if they did any research and reading prior to coming to the program. If they are medical professionals who have been bombarded with state-of-the-art smoking cessation techniques, what I am proposing is so radical that it takes them a few minutes to overcome the idea that I must be totally out of my mind.

After being presented with study after study and expert after expert saying to use nicotine replacement or other pharmaceutical aids, to come out and accept that the easiest and best way to quit smoking is simply to "quit smoking" seems totally simplistic and ludicrous. It is only when I have them think really hard of all the long-term (one year plus) ex-smokers they know, and how these people initially quit, that they start to realize that the vast majority of these people - and in many cases all of them - quit cold turkey. It is often like a light bulb goes off in their head as for the first time they see the obvious, even though it flies in the face of what they have been taught was conventional wisdom.

Finally, how to stay off, here is another remarkable revelation. Almost every piece of

professional literature on smoking cessation produced over the last 30 years has buried within it, or sometimes printed very prominently, one line of text that will undercut the most truly motivated and educated smoker. The line is "don't let a slip put you back to smoking." That makes as much sense as saying to a recovering alcoholic "don't let a drink put you back to drinking," or a heroin addict being given the message "don't let a little injection put you back to using." The message needs to be stronger than that. Not, "do not let a slip put you back to using," the message had better be - **DON'T SLIP!**

There is no such thing as a slip, or an accident, or a mistake, or a puff, or just one - they are all terms that are actually defining a **RELAPSE!** This point, more than any other is what is going to make a quit last. Forgetting this concept, or worse, never knowing it all but assures failure.

I have seen the power of education work thousands of times in helping properly prepare smokers to quit. Again, that problem is more than just teaching the physical dangers of smoking. It entails the smoker developing a full appreciation of the physical, mental, social, economic, and aesthetic implications of smoking. I have also witnessed personal understanding evolve into a powerful tool utilized by thousands of ex-smokers in maintaining their resolve to stay quit too. They will continue to maintain their resolve so long as they continue to appreciate why they quit in the first place, and keep those reasons in the forefront of their consciousness.

Can we motivate a smoker to want to quit? I think most smokers who have smoked cigarettes for any appreciable period of time are already motivated. While maybe not all smokers in general, it is likely that any smoker who shows up at a quit smoking clinic on his or her own accord, or who has typed the word "smoking" into an internet search engine, has some initial interest and wants more information on how to quit.

So basically, the answer to whether or not a person can be motivated to want to quit is "yes." In fact most smokers already have some motivation in place. The emphasis must be on helping to teach the smoker how to quit and then how to stay off. It's really an easy lesson to teach. It's a matter of helping the cigarette smoker understand that to quit smoking and stay quit is simply a matter of knowing to **NEVER TAKE ANOTHER PUFF!**

**Joel**

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