

Joel's Reinforcement Library

NEVER TAKE ANOTHER PUFF!

Individual Approaches Used to Motivate Smokers to Quit

Every now and then, someone informs me of an original technique they devised or heard of to help motivate family and friends to quit smoking or to at least consider getting outside assistance to break free from this deadly addiction. I feel that since the majority of people who have given up smoking have done so on their own without any professional intervention, these approaches are often viable alternatives for smokers who wish to quit or for you as ex-smokers to use to help significant others stop smoking.

Most recently, a clinic participant told us of a friend who wanted to convince her husband to give up smoking. She considered his chemical dependency not only to be deadly but also wasteful and expensive. To illustrate her point to the husband, every time he purchased a new carton of cigarettes she promptly went to the nearest sewer and deposited an equivalent amount of money. This was making the poor husband sick. He usually retorted, "Why don't you at least donate it to a worthy cause?" She would reply, "At least my way of wasting money isn't hurting anyone." This activity went on for a little over a month, at which time the husband, realizing the real waste of his addiction to nicotine, decided it was time to stop. He made it. Not only was he saving money, but, more important, he was saving his life. I give the wife a lot of credit for having the guts and perseverance to continue this unconventional practice to motivate her husband to help himself.

At all my clinics, I always tell the story of the lady who eight years ago had a circulatory condition, Buerger's disease, and had to have her right leg amputated. As you may recall, she quit smoking and had no further circulatory complications for three years.

Then one night at a party, a friend offered her a cigarette. She figured that since she had been off cigarettes for so long, she now had control over her addiction. If she liked

the cigarette, she would smoke one or two a day. If she didn't like the cigarette, she just wouldn't smoke anymore.

Well, she took the cigarette. She didn't particularly like the cigarette, but the next day she was up to her old level of consumption. Four days later she lost circulation in her other leg. She knew the reason. After three years with no problem and only four days after going back to smoking her circulation was affected. Her doctor told her that if she did not quit immediately, she would probably lose her other leg.

She enrolled in a smoking clinic that week and quit smoking. Almost immediately her circulation improved. The doctor took her off anti-coagulant drugs. She no longer needed them. Soon, things were back to normal.

Nine months later, I called to ask her to serve on a panel. At that time, she replied, "I can't come. I have been in the hospital the last two months." When I asked what had happened, she replied, "I had my toes amputated." She had gone back to smoking. She tried one because she just couldn't believe she would get hooked again. She was wrong. She lost circulation, had her toes removed and eventually had her leg amputated.

I have had other clinic participants with similar experiences. The reason I talk about this story is I again ran into her about 3 years ago, at which time she told me she had finally quit smoking. I told her I was surprised, I thought she had permanently lost control. After all, she had her leg removed, the toes from her other foot, and eventually her second leg. When I confronted her with that information she replied, "The doctor finally convinced me. He said, 'You might as well keep on smoking, I'll just take your arms off next.'" That scared her into quitting smoking. Her next comment to me was unbelievable. She looked me straight in the face, dead seriously, and said "I didn't need a house to fall on me to tell me to quit smoking!"

I still have periodic contact with her, and whenever I bring up that conversation, we both find ourselves amazed that she could ever have made such an irrational statement. She happens to be a very rational, bright and inspirational individual. She gets around on wooden legs, socializes, and even occasionally sings and dances on stage. Once she had broken free of the drug's effects and the smoker's psyche, she knew she could do anything.

Frequently, I encounter people who quit smoking on their own. When I ask how they did it, they tell me of this marvelous lady they met who told of how she used to be hooked on smoking. Hooked so bad, in fact, that she had her legs amputated from a smoking related illness. It usually turns out to be the same person. By spreading her story, she offers inspiration and hope to countless smokers to break the addiction

before the addiction breaks them.

You, too, probably have stories you can share with your smoking friends of your past experiences smoking, or of people you met in your clinic. Maybe you know of ways to help motivate family and friends to quit. Try to help those people most important to you. If they try to stop but can't on their own, remember, we are always out here to help them. You can really make a difference in their lives. Share your knowledge. For friends who have already quit, as well as for yourself, don't forget to reinforce the one principle - NEVER TAKE ANOTHER PUFF!

Joel

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Page last updated by [Joel Spitzer](#) on August 25, 2003

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