

## *Joel's Reinforcement Library*

**NEVER TAKE ANOTHER PUFF!**

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# *New Reactions to Anger as an Ex-smoker*

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Dealing with emotional loss has similarities to dealing with anger in regards to smoking cessation and its aftermath. When smokers encounters a person or situation that angers them, they initially feel the frustration of the moment, making them -- depending on the severity of the situation -- churn inside. This effect in non-smokers or even ex-smokers is annoying to say the least. The only thing that resolves the internal conflict for a person not in the midst of an active addiction is resolution of the situation or, in the case of a situation which doesn't lend itself to a quick resolution, time to assimilate the frustration and in a sense move on. An active smoker though, facing the exact same stress has an additional complication which even though they don't recognize it, this complication creates significant implications to their smoking behavior and belief structures regarding the benefit of smoking.

When a person encounters stress, it has a physiological effect causing acidification of urine. In non-active tobacco users, urine acidity has no real perceivable effect. It is something that internally happens and they don't know it, and actually, probably don't care to know. Nicotine users are more complex. When a person maintaining any level of nicotine in his body encounters stress, the urine acidifies and this process causes nicotine to be pulled from the bloodstream, not even becoming metabolized, and into the urinary bladder. This then in fact drops the brain's supply of nicotine, throwing the smoker into drug withdrawal. Now he is really churning inside, not just from the initial stress, but also from the effects of withdrawal.

Interestingly enough, even if the stress is resolved, the smoker generally is still not going to feel good. The withdrawal isn't eased by the conflict resolution, only by re-administration of nicotine, or, even better, riding out the withdrawal for 72 hours. This totally eliminates nicotine via excretion from the body, metabolizing it into by-products that don't cause withdrawal. Most of the time, the active smoker uses the first method to alleviate withdrawal, taking another cigarette. While it calms him

down for the moment, its effect is short lived, basically having to be redone every 20 minutes to half hour for the rest of the smoker's life to permanently stave off the symptoms.

Even though this is a false calming effect, since it doesn't really calm the stress, it just replaces the nicotine loss from the stress, the smoker feels it helped him deal with the conflict. It became what he viewed as an effective crutch. But the implications of that crutch are more far-reaching than just making initial stress effects more severe. It affects how the person may deal with conflict and sadness in a way that may not be obvious, but is nonetheless serious. In a way, it affects his ability to communicate and maybe even in some way, grow from the experience.

Here is simple example of what I mean. Let's say you don't like the way a significant other in your life squeezes toothpaste. If you point out how it's a problem to you in a calm rational manner, maybe the person will change and do it a way that is not disturbing to you. By communicating your feelings you make a minor annoyance basically disappear. But now let's say you're a smoker who sees the tube of toothpaste, gets a little upset, and is about to say something, again, to address the problem. But wait. Because you are a little annoyed, you lose nicotine, go into withdrawal, and before you are able to deal with the problem, you have to go smoke. You smoke, alleviate the withdrawal and, in fact, you feel better. At the same time, you put a little time between you and the toothpaste situation and on further evaluation, you decide it's not that big of a deal, forget it. Sounds like and feels like you resolved the stress. But in fact, you didn't. You suppressed the feeling. It is still there, not resolved, not communicated. Next time it happens again, you again get mad. You go into withdrawal. You have to smoke. You repeat the cycle, again not communicating and not resolving the conflict. Over and over again, maybe for years this pattern is repeated.

One day you quit smoking. You may in fact be off for weeks, maybe months. All of a sudden, one day the exact problem presents itself again, that annoying toothpaste. You don't have that automatic withdrawal kicking in and pulling you away from the situation. You see it, nothing else affecting you and you blow up. If the person is within earshot, you may explode. When you look back in retrospect, you feel you have blown up inappropriately, the reaction was greatly exaggerated for the situation. You faced it hundreds of times before and nothing like this ever happened. You begin to question what happened to you to turn you into such a horrible or explosive person. Understand what happened. You are not blowing up at what just happened, you are blowing up for what has been bothering you for years and now, because of the build up of frustration, you are blowing up much more severely than you ever would have if you addressed it early on. It is like pulling a cork out of a shaken carbonated bottle, the more shaken, the worse the explosion.

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**What smoking had done over the years was to stop you from dealing with feelings early on. Instead, they festered and grew to a point where when they came out, it was more severe than when initially encountered. Understand something though. If you had not quit smoking, the feelings sooner or later would manifest. Either by a similar reaction as the blowup or by physical manifestations which ongoing unresolved stress has the full potential of causing. Many relationships end because of clamming up early on effectively shutting down conflict resolution by communication between partners. There's only one way to guarantee that early nicotine withdrawal never interferes with your conflict resolution and communications skills again, by keeping in practice your commitment to NEVER TAKE ANOTHER PUFF!**

**Joel**

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