

Joel's Reinforcement Library

NEVER TAKE ANOTHER PUFF!

Why I don't speak at more sites on how to help people quit smoking.

During the week of the Great American Smoke-Out, I received two requests from local companies for free smoking lectures for their employees. I went to the first, a major insurance company with close to 3,000 employees on site. The company was anticipating at least 20 employees would take advantage of such a beneficial program offered at lunch time. I was armed with my slides showing the deleterious effects of smoking accompanied by the ever famous smoking bottle. I was prepared to deliver a dynamic presentation of facts and figures overwhelming any smoker with even the least bit of interest and with any cognitive capability to the realization that he or she should quit smoking or risk losing life, limb, self-respect and social status. I anticipated the skepticism I used to encounter when I first started a lecture to a group of smokers. When given an hour, though, to present the facts, the dangers of smoking usually become overwhelming and indisputable.

So here I was all revved up to attempt to break through the smokers' ever present denial and other defense mechanisms protecting his or her addiction. I sat patiently waiting for the onslaught of smokers, coming in with great anticipation and trepidation as to how we were going to treat them and the subject of smoking cessation. The first person to come into the room was the company contact person. She was an ex-smoker of about a year. She was only going to stay to greet the audience and introduce me.

Next came a former clinic graduate, coming to tell me she had quit almost five years ago and was very grateful for being able to stay off smoking all this time. She stated, as so many often do, that quitting smoking was one of the best moves she ever made in her life. She introduced me to a friend who had quit smoking almost three months prior while hospitalized due to

a major smoking related illness. The clinic graduate thought her friend would benefit from hearing my presentation to reinforce her ammunition and resolve to stay off smoking.

The time that the presentation was to have started had now passed. One more person, a young woman, came into the room. I asked her if she was coming in to quit smoking. It turned out she was a non-smoker. She had recently lost both her parents to cancer and was going to start volunteering for the American Cancer Society in cancer prevention. She was just coming to observe how to deal with smokers on the topic of quitting. No one else came to the program.

It was obvious that the materials I brought were unnecessary. I didn't need slides convincing my audience of the dangers of smoking. They already knew that smoking was deadly and had stopped or never started. The smoking bottle, too, was unnecessary, and, besides, I had no one to get a cigarette from even if I wanted to do the demonstration. I spent the hour talking about the nicotine addiction and the importance of relapse prevention.

A couple of days later I went to the second company. It was a much smaller employer with only about 100 employees on site. I was a little worried that with this small employee population it was quite possible that no one would show up for the presentation. Once again I set up my slides and was prepared to do my demonstration. This time, to my pleasant surprise, 15 employees came into the room. When I started to inquire on smoking histories, though, it turned out that 12 of them had never smoked, 2 had quit for almost 20 years each, and one was a current smoker who was dragged in and had no interest in quitting.

Normally, I would gear my presentation to the one smoker if she had wanted to quit. She had made it quite clear that she was there under protest. As you may recall from your participation in our clinic, we are there to help people who want to quit smoking not to force people to stop. The other 14 people came to hear the dangers of second-hand smoke. So, again, I disregarded my slides and bottle and proceeded to talk on a topic different from what I had prepared. I spent some time on relapse prevention for the two ex-smokers there and the remainder of the time on the dangers of second-hand smoke and how to deal with smokers.

While I don't want to draw any universal conclusions from only two local companies, I think a trend is becoming apparent in this area. Those who found it possible to quit on their own have stopped. We have many more non-smokers and ex-smokers now than we have smokers. Non-smokers and ex-smokers are becoming ever more interested in how they can

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improve their health and reduce their exposure to the dangers of tobacco smoke.

Unfortunately, the group who should be the most interested and take advantage of cessation programs are not doing it. They are so deeply addicted or so hopeless that they are afraid to stop on their own or even take advantage of convenient free programs offered to help. They are becoming more shunned and less tolerated by the new health conscious majority. They are not in an enviable position.

If you are currently a smoker, recognize that you are caught in the grip of addiction. Common sense is telling you smoking is expensive, socially unacceptable and deadly. Unfortunately, common sense is taking a back seat to the drug seeking behavior associated with addiction. It's time to override this deadly drug seeking mechanism. As a clinic graduate you are welcome to come in and start again free of charge. This time make it work. Your life may depend on it. Don't quit to be right to the majority, quit to be right to yourself.

If you are an ex-smoker, don't take not smoking for granted. Getting off cigarettes was only the start. Staying off is now equally important. You worked hard to get this far. Keeping it going now is relatively simple--all it entails is remembering to - NEVER TAKE ANOTHER PUFF!

Joel

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