

Caring for Our Recovery

by [John R. Polito](#), founder of [WhyQuit](#) and author of "[Freedom from Nicotine - The Journey Home](#)"

The recovered alcoholic, the heroin addict, the nicotine addict, deep down each knows the "Law of Addiction." They've heard it over and over again. Just one sip, one tiny fix, or one little puff of nicotine, just once, that's all it takes and the addict is back! They know that either immediately or in a short period of time they'll once again be slaves to their old level of drug use or greater. We know the Law of Addiction so why do we break it?

There are three primary factors associated with relapse: (1) rewriting the law of addiction; (2) an excuse; and (3) a vague memory. It doesn't matter if it happens within two hours, two days, two weeks, two months, two years, or twenty, the factors remain the same and apply to all of us. Rewriting the law of addiction is easy and you don't need a pencil, paper or computer to do it.

Amending the Law of Addition

"Just one puff" and then "do not pass go, do not collect \$200, but go directly to the addict's prison and surrender your freedom for good." It isn't that the recovering nicotine addict doesn't know or believe the law of addiction because we do. It's just that we begin to believe that we're the exception. We convince ourselves that we're stronger and smarter than those who discovered the law, and wiser than all addicts who came before us. We amend the law. We put ourselves above it. "Just one, it'll be ok, I can handle it, I'm stronger than the others, a little reward, it's been a while, I've earned it."

I'm sorry. As soon as such thoughts begin infecting the mind they tend to start feeding on themselves and in all likelihood your body's period of healing and freedom is over. Your dreams and hard work are all being thrown into a dirty toilet that one puff of nicotine is about to flush.

Instead of saying that you can handle "**just one**," a truthful statement would have been "I can handle them all, give them all back to me, my entire addiction, all the ashtrays, the coughs, the stink, the endless stream of 4,000 plus deadly chemicals that come with each puff (including up to 81 known cancer causing agents), the constant gradual destruction of every cell in my lungs and the gradual clogging and hardening of every blood vessel in my body, the 50/50 chance of killing myself 13-14 years early, all the money it will cost me to stay enslaved for years and years to come (together with massive future price increases designed to get me to quit), the growing social pressures that will make me feel even more like an outcast, I want it all back, all of it!"

It's far easier for the junkie mind to create a one puff or one cigarette exception to the law" than

admit the truth. A one pack a day addiction is 7,300 cigarettes a year. Don't picture smoking just one. Instead, picture yourself sticking at least a year's supply into your mouth all at once. Try fitting them all into your mouth because in truth that's exactly where they'll be going, year after year after year. "To thine own self be true." You deserve the truth - you paid the price - you earned it.

The Perfect Excuse

The excuse can be anything. Usually the addict waits for that great excuse to come along, but some get tired of waiting and any old excuse will do. Even joy! A reunion with an old smoking buddy, a few drinks with friends, a wedding, a graduation, or even a baby's birth and a free nicotine laden cigar, or trying a harmless looking new nicotine delivery device like the 27 flavors of suckers, the straw, lozenges, candy or even nicotine water or soda, why not! But joyful or even stupid nicotine relapse is harder to explain to yourself and those you love.

The smart nicotine addict waits for the great excuse, the one that we know we can sell to ourselves and others. As sick as it may sound, the easiest to sell and the best of all is the death of a loved one. Although everyone we love is destined to die and it'll happen sooner or later, for the reformed addict it's the perfect excuse for relapse. I mean, who can blame us for ingesting highly addictive drugs into our bodies upon our mother's death. Anyone who does would have to be extremely insensitive or totally heartless! Right? Losing a job, the end of a relationship, serious illness, disease or financial problems are all great excuses too - it's drug time again! The addict is back!

Lost Memories

But an excuse doesn't work alone. It needs help. Failing memories of "why" we were willing to put ourselves through the anxieties and emotion of physical withdrawal, and weeks and weeks of psychological adjustment in order to break free, breathe fatal life into any excuse. Most of us failed to keep a detailed record of why we commenced recovery or what it was like. Instead, we are forced to rely upon our memory to accurately and vividly preserve the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. But now, the memory in which we placed all our trust has failed us.

It isn't that your memory is bad, faulty or doing anything wrong. In fact, it's working as it should to preserve in as much detail as possible the joyful events of life, while forgetting, as quickly as possible, all the pain and anguish that we've felt, including our disdain for the addict's life we lived. To have our brains do otherwise would make life inside our minds unbearable. If women were forced to remember the true agony and intense pain of childbirth, most would have just one. We are each blessed with the gift to forget.

So how does the reformed nicotine addict who failed to keep accurate records of their journey revive their passion for freedom and recall liberty's price? If we forget the past, are we destined to repeat it? Not necessarily. It doesn't have to be. But just as any loving relationship needs nourishment to flourish, we can never take our recovery for granted or the flame will eventually die and the fire will go out. We have to want to protect this glory until the day we die. We have to turn that "want" into action. If we do, we win. If not, our fate may be up in the air with serious risk of relapse followed by crippling disease or even a very early grave.

Whether it's daily, weekly or monthly, our recovery needs care. If you don't have a detailed log to regularly review when faced with adversity, upon each anniversary of your quit, or at each birthday, do your best to create one now. Talk to those still smoking and ask for help in revitalizing your memories. Encourage them to be as truthful as possible. Although they may look like they're enjoying their addiction to smoking nicotine, the primary joy they get is in keeping their body's blood serum nicotine level within the comfort zone, so as to avoid the onset of the anxieties and craves of early withdrawal. Show them your pen and paper and invite them to help you create your list. You may even cause a spark in them. Be kind and sincere. It wasn't long ago that those were our shoes.

Also, try envisioning the first week. What was it like? Can you still feel the powerful craves as your body begged and cried to be fed? Can you still feel the pain? Do you see yourself not being able to concentrate, having difficulty sleeping, feeling depressed, angry, irritable, frustrated, restless, with tremendous anxiety, a foggy mind, sweating palms, rapidly cycling emotions, irrational thinking, emotional outbursts or even the shakes? Do you remember these things? Do you remember the price you paid for freedom? Do you remember why you were willing to pay it?

If you have access to a computer, you won't need a smoker's help or even to recall the early days of your own journey. You can go on-line to scores of smoking cessation support groups and find thousands of battles being fought, hear tons of cries and watch hundreds struggling for survival as they cling to the promise of the rich sense of inner calmness, quiet and comfort that lies beyond. Visit as often as possible. Make a few posts to those in need. The most important thing you can tell them is the truth about why you are there. Tell them how comfortable and complacent you've become. It's what they yearn to hear! Many smoked their entire adult life and have a difficult time believing that withdrawal isn't permanent. Fear of the unknown is frightening. Help them and in doing so help yourself.

If you find yourself attempting to rewrite the law of addiction, stop, think, remember, read, revisit, revive and give to others, but most important, be honest with you. Terrible and emotional events will happen in each of our lives - such is life. Adding full-blown nicotine relapse to any situation won't fix, correct or undo your underlying concern. In your mind, plan for disaster today. How will you cope and keep your healing alive should the person you love most in this world suddenly die? What will you do?

Remember, we've only traded places with our chemical dependency and the key to the cell is one puff of nicotine. As long as we stay on this side of the bars, we are the jailors and our dependency the prisoner. We only have two choices. We can complete this temporary period of adjustment and enjoy comfortable probation for life or we can smoke nicotine, relapse, and intentionally inflict cruel and unusual punishment upon these innocent bodies for the remainder of their life, together with inviting a 50/50 chance that you'll be putting yourself to death. If the first choice sounds better - comfortable lifetime probation - then we each need only follow one simple rule - NEVER TAKE ANOTHER PUFF!

Breathe deep, hug hard, live long!

John