

## *Joel's Reinforcement Library*

**NEVER TAKE ANOTHER PUFF!**

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### *We Understand Why You Relapsed*

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There are times when a member of a support group relapses and another well-meaning member jump in saying that he or she “understands” the causes of the relapse. The well-meaning member feels that the person who has relapsed needs to be consoled and nurtured for the bad choice that he or she had made. I have even seen times when the forum's managers or seasoned group members have been criticized for not offering unconditional love and support to the relapsed person, as if these people don't understand or fully sympathize with his or her plight.

Well, the fact is, in our case our management and our longer-term successful members all understand how the person relapsed, all too well in fact. The person violated the law of addiction, took a puff of nicotine, and is paying the mandatory penalty - relapse. We also know that any excuse that the person is attempting to give for having once again started up an active chemical dependency in his or her body is total nonsense. There is no justification for relapse.

Today, there are support forums on the Internet where, almost daily, you can watch relapsing members return and go unopposed as they attempt to convince the entire group that their justifications for relapse were legitimate. Should the people who just relapsed feel better after explaining and having everyone understand why they relapsed? That depends I guess. If the person has joined the group in order to feel better about smoking then, sure, he or she should be quite relieved. But if the person is participating because he or she trying to save his or her life, then I don't think he or she should take much comfort in all the hugs and well wishes he or she receives.

I guess it is like someone standing on a ledge of a building. Do you want the people standing on the ground giving the person on the ledge reasons not to jump, or after listening to all the woes in the individual's life saying, "Gosh, I understand what you are saying." "I feel that way too." "I guess if I were in your shoes I would jump too."

**“Don't feel guilty, though, we understand.”**

**I don't want this statement to be read like a mockery of those attempting to offer help. I am trying to illustrate an important point. Obviously, if the person on the ledge jumps he or she will die. But understand, that if a person relapses and doesn't quit, he or she is likely to face the same fate, just time delayed. Yes, if you saw a person on a ledge you would try to use empathy to coax him or her back. But, empathy would be in the form of explaining that you understand his or her plight but you totally disapprove of his or her current tactic for dealing with it. There are better ways to resolve these problems than committing suicide. The same concepts hold true for taking a puff of nicotine. You may understand the feelings the person had. You may have even felt them at some point yourself. But you don't give into the feeling because the implication is relapse to smoking, and that can lead to death.**

**I sometimes read posts indicating that there are other quit smoking message boards that are far more accepting of relapse, in fact they see it as a normal and acceptable process. It's a very accurate observation. I think that any member of an education and support forum who feels that the group's relapse policy is too "tough" should look for another site. The majority of members who join no nonsense education oriented support programs do so because they offer the type of understanding and support that the person couldn't locate elsewhere.**

**If you are dead serious about quitting smoking and involved in a program committed to the belief that there is “no acceptable excuse for relapse” then you are probably in the right place to be. But if you find a given group's relapse philosophy too restricting don't try to change it. Trying to alter the group policy is as unfair as members from the serious forum going into an unstructured site and trying to change their tolerance towards excuses being made for relapse. Groups should be tolerant of the other sites and fully appreciate that some people will be happier elsewhere. But each member needs to do an assessment of what type of group enhances his or her personal chances of success. A group that makes you just feel better may not be the group that is actually enhancing your chances of successfully quitting.**

**Hopefully, whatever group you end up participating in will help you remained focused on making it through today. Whether this is your first day or thousandth day not smoking, it will be a much better day if you walk away with the understanding that no matter what happens in your life, either issues of great happiness or sadness, importance or mediocrity, exhilaration of sheer dullness, no matter what the circumstances, the only way to sustain your quit is to NEVER TAKE ANOTHER PUFF!**

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## **Joel**

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