

# **Achieving Freedom from Nicotine Addiction**

Rocky Rosen

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# Introduction

**M**y name is Rocky Rosen. I'm a personal stop smoking trainer. I get people off nicotine, no matter how they consume it today. And just so you know, nobody's happy to be reading this because nobody really wants to stop using nicotine. You think you know how a nicotine cessation program may go, but this is not going to go anything like that. You may think you're one of the few people who use nicotine, but according to the World Health Organization, over 1.3 billion people are abusing nicotine today. They say the number is going up because of all the different forms of nicotine abuse today. When I started doing this, it was pretty much just cigarettes. But today we've got vapes. We've got nicotine gum, nicotine patches, Zyns, and Snus. We've got all these different nicotine formats that people get hooked on.

## **Do You Use Nicotine?**

My question is, "Do you use nicotine?" Are you at a point in your life where you really, really wish you could kick nicotine out of your life? And the truth is, if the answer is no, then you don't need to waste your

time here. You don't want to stop. But, if you're at a point in your life where you really, really wish you could kick it out of your life, I might have something for you. And I promise you, throughout this process, I will bust my ass to help you get free. But I can never fight harder for you than you're going to be willing to fight for yourself.

And what you're going to hear from this program, you're only going to hear from this program. Good, better, and different. This is how I got myself nicotine-free, and this is how I'm going to help you get nicotine-free. However you think a nicotine program might go, it's not going to go anything like that.

This book is a companion to a four-day program. It follows the flow of that course. We don't get to the point of stopping using until the third day, which connects roughly with Chapter 5. So, I don't want you to think you're not going to be using nicotine right away. Be patient and do the work with me here, and we will help get you off nicotine.

### Feel Free to Use Nicotine While You're Reading This Book

I want you to feel free to use it while you're reading this book. If you smoke, you can pause it or take it outside with you. If you vape or use nicotine in any of its various formats, you're welcome to do it inside, outside, however you normally do it. Don't sit there jonesing and not hitting it. If you want to hit it, go ahead and hit it. But, I bet when it comes to the idea of not using it anymore, of using, you feel absolutely stuck in the mud. You can't get any traction. You keep trying, but when it comes to stopping using nicotine, you're just stuck in the mud. Well, think of this program as your personal AAA. We're going to pull you out of the mud here. And the truth is, if you do use nicotine, you may want to hang around.

My service is referred by top physicians around the USA, and indeed around the world. They refer my services to their patients, psy-

chologists, chiropractors, therapists, personal trainers, and nutritionists. I've been featured in the media, and my clients have included top people in the world of business and the Hollywood elite. My clients are my neighbors down the street.

This is not to impress you, because honestly, it doesn't mean a freaking thing. The only thing that's going to matter these next few days is whether we can help you get free. And I'm talking to you directly. And wouldn't it be great if you just read a book and then could then stop using nicotine? That a book could be your Superman? Well, that's not going to happen. This book is not going to be your Superman. You're going to be your own Superman. It may seem like a lot of words on the page, but this book is meant to trigger a dialogue that you're going to have with yourself.

## **My Story**

Let me tell you where I'm coming from. I was a diehard, got to quit, can't quit, must quit smoker. I'm desperate to quit. Who was I kidding? I was a "never quit smoking" kind of smoker. I started smoking the summer I was 12, hanging out with kids in a park near my house. By the time I turned 13, I was smoking every day. In a short time, it became obvious to people that I was having negative side effects from my smoking. I kept lying to people about things I had done to try to stop smoking. By the time I was in my mid to late teens, I had made promises that I would quit.

I would try going cold turkey. However, cold turkey, I would run out of cigarettes, and I would promise I wouldn't buy any more. Ever do that? I did that many, many, many, many, many, many, many times. I tried hypnosis for over 14 years. I went not to one, not to two, but

three different hypnotists, maybe they could unlock it for me. I would pray to God, help me get rid of this obsession. I went to stop smoking groups that were popular in the 70s and 80s. I went to Schick. I went to Smoke Enders. I went to the Physician's Clinic. Two of these programs were taught by people who didn't smoke. And I always say, trying to learn how not to use nicotine by somebody who's not a nicotine addict. It's like trying to learn how to swim from somebody who's never gotten wet.

Injections freak me out. I cry like a little baby every time they draw blood or give me a shot. But I had some guy put needles in my ear, and I tried acupuncture. I read books. I took pills and potions. I tried nicotine gum, which you could only get by prescription. And, doing all these things and swearing to God, this time it's really going to be different. I'm really going to quit. Sometimes, I got a day off, maybe a week. And, I did once pull over two years off from late '79 to early '82. But you know what? I kept lighting back up, and I didn't get it. So, you want to know why I make this my life mission and help people get nicotine-free as much as possible? Because I spent nearly 20 years wishing I could be free.

When I was 32, my doctor said, "Rocky, if you don't stop smoking, you'll never see 40. I guarantee you'll never see 50." My situation was not a secret. I had a horrible cough, the kind of cough that makes your friends worriedly whisper behind your back that your days may be numbered.

I coughed that cough if I walked up steps, if I sat, or if I was being intimate with a woman. I remember going to see the third Star Wars movie in 1983 at Groman's Chinese Theater in Hollywood, one of the grandest theaters in the world. The next day, I got a phone call from a friend saying, "Hey Rocky, you saw Star Wars last night." I said, "Yeah." And he went, "Yeah, I knew that was you. I could hear you coughing."

And, I was thinking to myself in this huge theater with John Williams, the orchestra, and John and George Lucas sound effects. It couldn't drown out the fact that somebody said, "Oh, that's Rocky's cough."

None of this stopped me from smoking, but I thought about it. So, while we're working together, if anything I say sounds like BS to you, put the book down. But if what I say makes sense to you, I bet we can have you off nicotine in two days. No tricks, no gimmicks, no drugs, no hypnosis, no therapy, and no nicotine replacements.

Now, understand that nicotine is not the cause of all death and disease, but it will promote any diseases our body might be susceptible to. All I want you to do is forget about everything you think about when it comes to quitting nicotine. And just give me a little bit of your time and your intention, and I bet in a couple of days, we can give you back the rest of your life. This process can work. Today, 50 was 23 years ago for me.

## **What's Inside This Book**

This book is not a gentle guide. It is not going to hold your hand and tell you that quitting nicotine is easy, or that the right patch or piece of gum will make the urge disappear. What it is going to do is tell you the truth—about addiction, about the lies you've been told, about the ones you've been telling yourself—and give you a practical, repeatable way to walk out the other side.

Here's how it's organized.

**Chapter 1: Getting Started on Day 1** doesn't ease you in slowly. From the opening pages, you're asked to get honest about what nicotine has actually cost you—not in dollars, but in quality of life, self-respect, and freedom. We look at the two biggest lies people believe

about quitting, examine why nicotine addiction shares more in common with OCD than most people realize, and begin to ask a genuinely uncomfortable question: “Does nicotine come before everything else in your life? Before people? Before pleasure? Before you?” The chapter closes with your first exercises and journaling prompts—because insight without action is just entertainment.

**Chapter 2: How This Program Works** introduces the core technique at the heart of everything that follows. You’ll learn a simple set of words to say to yourself before every nicotine session—words that sound counterintuitive until you understand exactly why they work. We also do some imagery work, getting familiar with what an urge actually feels like in your body, so it stops being something you fear and starts being something you simply notice.

**Chapter 3: Committing to the Quitting Mindset** takes on one of the most common mistakes people make when they try to stop: substituting one thing for another and calling it progress. It doesn’t work, and this chapter explains why. Using the metaphor of a painful breakup, we look at what it really means to change your relationship with nicotine—and why avoiding people and situations you associate with use is exactly the wrong strategy. The chapter introduces a quieter, more powerful approach: dealing with one single urge at a time.

**Chapter 4: The Guidelines for Quitting Nicotine** is where the practical framework comes fully into focus. Three specific guidelines shape the entire quitting process, and the first one will probably surprise you: live your life exactly as you always have. No hiding, no avoiding, no dramatic lifestyle overhauls. We look at what your life actually consists of—the two circles that define your daily experience—and introduce a thirty-minute technique that becomes a cornerstone of how you manage the hardest moments. We also talk

about what the word "can't" really means, and why it may be the most dangerous word in an addict's vocabulary.

**Chapter 5: If You're Not Making Mistakes, You're Not Really Trying** addresses something most cessation programs won't touch: what happens when you slip. Rather than treating a relapse as a catastrophe or a moral failure, this chapter reframes it as data. Through vivid metaphors—fire that is always hot, a skyscraper you can't half-dive off of, a pregnancy that simply is or isn't—you'll come to understand the binary reality of nicotine addiction and why "just one" is never just one. The chapter also looks at running the actual numbers on your use, takes you through your last hit, and introduces a three-word framework that can stop a relapse before it starts. Thomas Edison makes an appearance here, too, for good reason.

**Chapter 6: Your Mind Isn't Always Your Friend** closes the book with one of its most important truths: nicotine will always try to seduce you back. The chapter traces a brief history of how tobacco captured the world, borrows a lens from Sigmund Freud to understand the unconscious pull of addiction, and reminds you that what you've built here is not a finish line you cross once—it's a practice you return to every day.

That practice is the point. Freedom from nicotine isn't a destination. It's a decision you make, and then make again.

What that in mind, let's begin.

## Chapter One

# Get Ready. This Will Be Uncomfortable.

**L**et me be straight with you from the very first page.

If you're going to stop using nicotine—really stop, not just white-knuckle it for a few days before sneaking back—it is going to be uncomfortable. I'm not going to dress that up for you. I'm not going to hand you a pamphlet full of cheerful affirmations and call it a program. You've had enough of those. You know how they end.

The discomfort is real. I lived it. I know exactly what it feels like when your body is screaming for a hit, and your mind starts negotiating, whispering all the perfectly reasonable-sounding reasons why right now is the wrong time to quit. I know what it's like to be so deep in the grip of nicotine that stopping feels not just hard, but genuinely impossible. It's like trying to outrun your own shadow.

So, yes. It's going to be uncomfortable.

But, here's what I also know, and what I want you to sit with for a moment: you wouldn't be reading this if you weren't already uncomfortable. You're uncomfortable right now. The cough that won't quit, the guilt every time you reach for your vape, the way you disappear from your own life—from dinner tables and kids' games and conversations—to go be alone with your nicotine. The way you talk to yourself about what you're doing to your body. The way you feel when someone looks at you a certain way, or when your doctor says those words you keep dreading. That discomfort? It's already here. It's been here for a while.

The question isn't whether you're going to feel some discomfort. The question is which discomfort you choose.

Think about the discomfort of not using nicotine: the withdrawal, the urges, the irritability, the strange feeling of living without something that's been glued to your identity for years. That discomfort is a completely different animal from what you're living with right now. One of them leads somewhere. One of them is building something. The other is just burning you down, slowly, reliably, day after day, with your full cooperation.

If you come to this with an open mind (skeptical is fine, skeptical is actually great, I'd rather have your honest doubt than your performed enthusiasm) I believe we can do something real together. I believe we can shift the inner dialogue. From "nicotine is fucking me up" to something cleaner, something that puts the power back where it belongs: with you.

Just: fuck nicotine.

That shift is everything. And it starts here.

## The Two Big Lies You Keep Telling Yourself

Before we go any further, I need to address the two lies. You know the ones. You've been telling them to yourself for so long, they've started to feel like the truth. They're not. And until we call them out clearly, they're going to keep sabotaging you.

### **The first lie is: "I've got to quit."**

How long have you been hearing that voice in your head? Months? Years? Decades, maybe? I've got to quit. I need to stop. I'm going to stop. And yet, here you are. Still using. Still reaching for it without even thinking, the way you reach for your phone or your keys. Still telling yourself the same thing tomorrow that you told yourself today.

Here's the truth buried under that lie: you don't have to quit. Nobody is making you. You are not a five-year-old being sent to your room. You are a grown adult with full autonomy over your own choices. No one is standing over you with a rulebook. You can use nicotine anytime you want. You could use it right now. And if you hate yourself for it, well, you'll still be able to use it tomorrow too. "I've got to quit" is a phrase that sounds like motivation but functions like paralysis. It keeps you locked in a loop of shame and self-judgment that actually makes quitting harder, not easier.

We're going to replace "I've got to quit" with something much closer to reality. Something that gives you back your agency instead of stealing it.

### **The second lie is: "I don't want to use anymore."**

I hear this one constantly. And I understand why people say it. They're suffering. They're tired. They desperately wish things were different. But, it's not the truth. And, as we all likely know, building a strategy on a lie is like building a house on sand.

The truth—the real, honest, unvarnished truth about you and me and every person who uses nicotine—is that at times, we do want to use. We genuinely want it. That's not a moral failure. That's addiction. The substance has hijacked the part of your brain that processes desire and relief and reward, and it's made itself feel necessary. Wanting to use is not the problem. It's the condition.

What we actually don't want isn't the using itself. What we don't want are the consequences. We don't want the way vaping makes our throat feel raw and strange. We don't want the way pouches tear up our gums and turn the soft tissue white. We don't want the smoker's cough that wakes us up at night, or the shortness of breath, or the quiet, constant fear that the bill is coming due. We don't want what nicotine costs us. But the hit itself? Part of us still wants that.

And that's okay to admit. In fact, it's essential. Because, until we're honest about what we're actually dealing with, we can't deal with it. We can only pretend, and pretending has never gotten anyone free.

## **Quitting Is Not an Event. It's a Process.**

People come to me expecting a moment. A dramatic before-and-after. A switch they flip and walk away from. That's not how any of the meaningful things in life work, and it's not how this works either.

Think about the things in your life that actually matter. If you're married, your marriage wasn't an event. It was a ceremony, yes, but the marriage itself is a daily ongoing process of choosing each other, negotiating, growing, sometimes struggling, always continuing. If you're a parent, parenthood wasn't an event. The moment your child was born may have been a moment, but the actual being-a-parent part

never stops. It's a process. Your career, your health, your relationships — all of it is process, not event.

Getting nicotine-free is the same. It is not a moment you cross through, and then you're done. It is an ongoing, daily, sometimes hourly practice of making a particular choice. And I want to be honest with you about what that process looks like, because I think the truth, even when it's not comfortable, is always more useful than a fantasy.

There will be times in this process when getting free from nicotine will feel like one of the most significant and valuable things you've ever done for yourself. You'll breathe easier, literally. You'll taste food differently. You'll have money in your pocket that used to go up in smoke or get dissolved into your bloodstream through your gums. You'll stop calculating when you can get your next hit. You'll feel a kind of self-respect that's hard to describe until you've experienced it. It's the specific satisfaction of knowing that you did a hard thing, and that you didn't flinch.

There will be other times when it feels like one of the hardest things you've ever done. When an urge hits at the exact wrong moment, and you're not ready, and everything inside you is pulling in one direction. That will happen. Let's not pretend it won't.

But, here's what I've learned from decades of living this and from working with people through it: the hard moments don't last. The urges don't last. And most of what makes those moments feel unbearable is not the urge itself. Rather, it's the story we tell ourselves about the urge. The meaning we assign to it. The terror we feel at the idea of sitting in discomfort without reaching for relief.

We're going to change that story. That's the work.

## The Magic Trick

You want the secret? I'll give it to you right now, because I'm not in the business of making this more mysterious than it is.

The entire trick — the whole mechanism — is this: whenever you're ready, just don't take the next hit.

That's it. That is genuinely it.

Getting nicotine-free is that simple. It is not that easy — I'll never tell you it's easy — but it is that simple. There is no complicated biochemical protocol. There is no perfect day you have to wait for. There is no special sequence of events that needs to fall into place first. There is just this moment, and the next one, and the choice that lives in the space between the urge and the action.

### **Don't take the next hit.**

Now, I know what your mind is doing right now. It's saying sure, but what about when I really want one? What about stress at work? What about after dinner, when the craving is strongest? What about the way I've used nicotine to manage boredom and anxiety, celebration and grief, and everything in between for however many years? How do I just not take the next hit when the hit is the only thing that feels like it will help?

That's exactly what the rest of this book is for. Over the next chapters, we're going to take the simple truth of "don't take the next hit," and we're going to make it not just simple, but genuinely doable. We're going to get underneath the urges. We're going to understand what they actually are, what they're made of, and why they have so much power over you. And then we're going to take that power back.

But the principle itself? It never changes. Every person who has ever gotten free from nicotine did it the same way: they just didn't take the next hit.

I want to say something about timing, because it matters. Every person who uses nicotine today will stop at some point. That is not inspirational guessing. That's just statistics. You will stop using nicotine. The question is whether you stop while you're in good health, on your own terms, with your quality of life intact — or whether you stop because your body has finally sent you a bill you can't pay? Because that's what the other option looks like. That's where the road goes if we stay on it.

I think about it this way: when I was using, it was like a bullet had already been fired in my direction. I could wait around and hope it missed me, or I could get out of its path. The bullet was already in the air. The only question was what I was going to do next.

## **Does Nicotine Come First?**

I'm going to ask you a question, and I want you to really sit with it before you answer.

In your life, right now — who or what comes first?

When I ask my clients this, I get the answers you'd expect. My partner. My kids. My faith. My health. Myself. And I believe them when they say it. I believe that's how they think about their lives, how they've organized their values, what they care most deeply about.

And then I ask: if that's true, why are you still using nicotine?

Because here's the thing about addiction that's hard to look at directly: when nicotine calls you...when that urge arrives, that pull in your chest or your hands or the back of your throat, you will walk away from every single one of those things faster than you'll walk away from nicotine. You leave the dinner table. You step out of the conversation.

You drive somewhere, or you excuse yourself, or you find five minutes you didn't think you had. You will go be with your nicotine.

You never consciously decided it would be this way. You never sat down and thought, "I'm going to make nicotine the most important thing in my life." Nobody does. That's not how addiction works. It doesn't announce itself. It just gradually, quietly, completely re-arranges your priorities until one day you look up and realize that everything in your life gets organized around this one thing — when you can have it, whether you have enough, what you'll do if you run out.

Think about what happens when you run out. What occupies your mind? How long before getting more is all you can think about? And think about what happens when you have plenty of it with you. You think about everything else. You think about work and family and what you want for dinner. The nicotine is there in the background, but it's not consuming you because the supply is secure.

That's why I tell the people I work with to keep their nicotine with them, even after they've stopped using. *Especially after*. Because the moment you're without it is the moment your mind fixates on it completely. Having it with you means you're making a choice, not managing a scarcity. And choice is what this whole thing is about.

You never gave nicotine permission to become the most important thing in your world. But if you're honest, really honest, that's what it's become. And recognizing that isn't a reason to hate yourself. It's a reason to understand what you're actually dealing with. You're not weak. You're not stupid. You're not broken. You have a real addiction to a real substance that was specifically designed to create exactly this kind of dependency.

My mother used to smoke. My grandmother on her mother's side lived to ninety-three. Her grandfather lived to a hundred. My mother

died at seventy-five from breast and lung cancer. She outlived neither of her parents. She smoked.

My mother was not a punchline. She was the most vivid, real, full person I have ever known. And nicotine took twenty years from her. I don't tell that story to scare you, though maybe fear is useful sometimes. Maybe her story should scare you a little. I tell it because I know what's at stake here. I know it personally, in the most permanent and irreversible way possible.

My mother finally did stop smoking. The last time she smoked was when she was cremated.

I told you this would be unfiltered.

## **Understanding the Addiction: The Physical and the Mental**

There are two sides to nicotine addiction, and understanding both of them is essential to getting free.

The physical side is the one most people know about. Your body becomes dependent on the substance. It reorganizes around it. When the nicotine isn't there, you feel it: restlessness, irritability, a creeping discomfort that your body has learned to interpret as urgent. This is real. It is physiologically real. And it is also, in the grand scheme of things, relatively short-lived.

Here's something that surprises most people: within twelve hours of your last hit, the vast majority of nicotine is already out of your system. Within seventy-two hours (three days), it is not traceable in your blood or urine. It is physically gone. The acute physical withdrawal, as uncomfortable as it is, resolves within a matter of days.

Three days. That's the physical timeline.

But then there are the urges. And the urges don't follow that timeline. The urges don't read the chemistry textbooks. The urges show up whenever they want — days later, weeks later, years later. They can arrive like a freight train out of nowhere, triggered by a smell or a memory or a certain time of day or a moment of stress. Or they can arrive so quietly you almost don't notice them, like a low-grade background hum that's always there if you pay attention.

That's the mental side of the addiction. And it's the part that lasts. Not because it's undefeatable, but because the brain doesn't unlearn associations the way the body clears substances. The neural pathways that link nicotine to relief, to pleasure, to comfort, to reward — those don't just dissolve. They fade. They become quieter. But they don't disappear overnight.

So, which side of the addiction is more powerful? Most people say the physical. But I'd argue the mental side is the one that actually keeps people using. Because by the time the physical withdrawal is over, the mental game is still fully in play. And if you're not prepared for that—if nobody told you that urges can arrive years after you've stopped using and that doesn't mean you've failed, it just means you're an addict like me—that surprise can knock you back to the beginning before you know what happened.

Here's what I want you to understand about urges: they're your condition, not your problem. Wanting to use nicotine is something that will be part of you for a long time. Maybe forever, at some level. That's not a tragedy. That's just the honest reality of having been addicted to this substance. The problem isn't the urge. The problem only starts when you act on it.

Here's what you need to know about that: once you've crossed the line from social use to addiction (and you've crossed it, or you wouldn't be here) you can never go back. Being a social smoker, the

occasional vaper, the person who uses it once in a while without thinking much about it is not available to you anymore. A grape can become a raisin. A raisin cannot go back to being a grape. You might look like a grape from the outside. You might even feel like a grape sometimes. But all it takes is a little concentrated nicotine, and you're right back where you started.

One hit is not a slip. One hit is a reboot. I've seen it happen too many times to think otherwise.

## **Nicotine Addiction Is OCD**

Let me offer you a frame for understanding your addiction that I think changes everything.

Nicotine addiction, at its core, is an obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD).

I know that might sound strange. But think about it honestly. Have you ever been in a situation where you were obsessed—genuinely, uncomfortably obsessed—with the thought of using? Where the thought wouldn't leave you alone, kept circling back no matter what you tried to focus on? And did you feel compelled to use, even in moments when part of you genuinely didn't want to? Even in moments when you were aware, in real time, that you were about to do something you'd told yourself you wouldn't do?

That's the obsession and the compulsion. That's OCD.

And here's the loop: throughout the day, your nicotine level drops. As it drops, you start to feel a discomfort. It's subtle at first, just a kind of restlessness, a pull. The discomfort grows. You use. The discomfort goes away. You feel relief. And then the cycle begins again, and will

continue beginning again, every few hours, every day, for as long as you use.

You think you're using nicotine for the pleasure of it. And sometimes that's part of it. You want that first hit of the day, or after a meal, or in a moment of high emotion. But, most of the time, if you're really honest, you're not using for pleasure. You're using to make the discomfort go away. You're using to chase zero. Not to get high. Just to get to baseline. Just to feel normal.

Think about that for a moment. All this, from the expense, the health consequences, the social stigma, the self-judgment, the logistics of always having enough, and always knowing where you can use, to always calculating when your next hit can be, is occurring for the privilege of feeling normal.

That's the trap. And naming it clearly is the beginning of getting out of it.

## Quality of Life vs. Poison

Let's talk about what nicotine actually is, because I think most people have a surprisingly fuzzy understanding of the substance they're putting in their bodies every single day.

Here's the dictionary definition of nicotine. This comes from standard reference material, not from an anti-tobacco advocacy group: "Nicotine is a colorless, oily, highly toxic liquid alkaloid found in tobacco and valued as an insecticide."

### **An insecticide. A highly toxic insecticide.**

The amount of nicotine you put into your body over the course of a single day, if you took it all at once, in a single dose, would kill you. Quickly. That's not an exaggeration. The dose that you ingest

gradually, spread over twelve or fourteen waking hours, is lethal in a single exposure. You've built a tolerance to something that is, by any objective measure, poison.

And whether you're smoking it, vaping it, or tucking a pouch under your lip, you're not just getting nicotine. When you smoke, you're releasing thousands of compounds — formaldehyde, benzene, lead, cadmium, carbon monoxide, hydrogen cyanide, ammonia, arsenic — over seven thousand compounds in all. Vaping produces fewer of them, yes, and pouches fewer still, but none of these delivery systems are good for you. None of them. The "safer than smoking" label on certain products doesn't mean safe. It means less immediately catastrophic. That's not the same thing.

Nicotine raises your blood pressure every time you use it. Always. It's always a stimulant, even when it feels like it's calming you down. What it's actually calming is the withdrawal that began the moment after your last hit. It's not relaxing you. It's returning you to where you were before it created the problem it's now solving.

Tobacco and nicotine products are, remarkably, among the only consumer products sold legally in this country that are not required to fully disclose their ingredients. They are also, uniquely, the only products legally sold here that, when used exactly as intended—not abused, not misused, but used exactly as directed—are designed to harm the consumer. There is a surgeon general's warning on the package. Has been for decades. We know. We've always known.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, tobacco and nicotine use is the single largest preventable cause of disease, disability, and premature death in the United States. More than 480,000 Americans die prematurely from nicotine-related disease every year. To put that in perspective: if you add up all the deaths from fire, suicide, and homicide, then add car accidents, plane crashes,

and train wrecks, then add all deaths from drug and alcohol abuse (including opiates and fentanyl) then add every American death from September 11th and from every war we've fought in the decades since — you get roughly 345,000 deaths a year. Nicotine kills more. Every year.

More than sixteen million Americans are currently living with the chronic diseases caused by nicotine — COPD, heart disease, stroke, various cancers, and diabetes. Living in hospice. Living in long-term care. Still here, but diminished. Still breathing, but not fully alive.

I'm not telling you this to make you feel terrible about yourself. I'm telling you this because you deserve to make choices based on accurate information. And because the frame I care about, the frame that I think actually changes behavior, isn't quantity of life. It's quality.

My goal isn't to live forever. My goal is to be fully present for the things that matter to me. These include my daughter, my son-in-law, my dog, my music, and my friendships. My biggest fear isn't dying young. My biggest fear is living a long time with no quality left to the life I'm living. That fear was a much more powerful motivator than any statistic. And I think it might be for you too.

## **Getting Ready to Start**

Now we get practical. And I want to tell you upfront that some of what I'm going to suggest is going to go against everything you've ever been told about how to quit.

Most conventional approaches tell you to announce your quit date to everyone you know, so they can support you. To throw away all your nicotine. To identify your triggers and avoid them. To replace nicotine

with something else, and proceed to walk, deep breathing, into some form of nicotine replacement.

I'm going to suggest something different. Almost the opposite.

Keep it to yourself. Don't tell everyone you're stopping. Or, if you must tell someone close to you, say only this: I'm going to try. I'm not making any promises. Because here's the thing about publicly declaring a quit: it puts the motivation in the wrong place. You end up doing this for other people. For their pride in you, for their relief, for their approval. And other people, no matter how much they love you, will at some point frustrate you. They'll say the wrong thing, or they'll be watching you too carefully, or they'll catch you in a weak moment, and the shame will be so overwhelming that "screw it, I already failed" becomes the easiest thought to have.

Do this for you. Then for them, if you want. But you first. Always you first.

Don't throw away your nicotine. This one surprises people the most. But think about what happens when you don't have it: all you think about is getting it. Having it with you means you're making a choice in every moment. Choosing not to use when the nicotine is sitting right there is a completely different and much more powerful act than not using because you don't have access to it. One is deprivation. The other is freedom.

Don't try to avoid your urges. This might be the most important one. Every approach that tells you to distract yourself from urges, to run from them, to fill the space with something else—that approach is treating urges like threats. Like things that will destroy you if you look directly at them. They're not. The urge is not your enemy. The urge is just information, information that you have a condition called nicotine addiction. That's all it is. We're going to turn toward the

urges, not away from them. We're going to learn to sit in them, to observe them, to let them move through us without acting on them.

That's the skill. That's the thing we're going to build together.

I also want to address the fear. Because there's so much fear wrapped up in the idea of stopping. Fear of failure, again. Fear of how bad it might feel. Fear of who you'll be without this thing that has been such a constant presence in your life. Fear that the urges will never stop, that you'll spend the rest of your life white-knuckling it, forever on the edge of relapse.

I've heard "fear" broken down as: False Evidence Appearing Real. And that's exactly what's happening with most of the fears around stopping. Everything you're afraid of is about the future. It's not about right now. Right now, in this moment, you can read this. You can breathe. You can think. The suffering you're afraid of — that's a projection, a story your addiction is telling you to keep you from leaving.

Here's a promise I can make you: you can always use nicotine again. It will always be there. I'm not asking you to give it up forever in one enormous act of willpower that you have to sustain for the rest of your life. I'm asking you to not take the next hit. Just that one. And then the one after that. And so on, one decision at a time, for as long as you keep choosing freedom.

This is not a quitting program. I want to be very clear about that. Quitting implies deprivation. Quitting implies sacrifice. Quitting makes it sound like you're giving something up.

What we're actually doing is getting out of a bad relationship you never meant to get into. Think of it like a divorce from something that has been controlling you, draining you, demanding your time and money and attention and health, without giving you anything real in return. You didn't choose this relationship consciously. You drifted

into it, the way we all drift into the things that end up holding us. But you can choose differently now.

This is about reclaiming what was always yours. Your health. Your attention. Your money. Your time. Your self-respect. Your quality of life.

You were not born addicted to nicotine. There was a version of you that existed before this substance got its hooks in you, a you who breathed freely, who didn't organize the day around hits, who wasn't a slave to a master who doesn't care whether you live or die.

That version of you is still in there. That's who we're working toward.

Now let's go get free.

## **Exercises**

Before we move on, I want you to do some writing. Not because journaling is magic, but because putting words on paper forces you to be honest with yourself in a way that thinking alone doesn't. The thoughts stay slippery in your head. Written down, they become real. You can look at them.

### **Exercise 1: The Honest Accounting**

Write down, without censoring yourself, exactly what nicotine costs you. Not just money—though write that too—but everything. Time. Health. Self-image. Relationships. Anxiety. Write for as long as it takes to feel like you've been genuinely honest. Don't skip the things that are uncomfortable to admit.

### **Exercise 2: The Two Lies**

Write down the last time you said "I have to quit" or "I don't want to use anymore." What was happening? What triggered it? And what

did you actually do next? Be truthful. The gap between what we say and what we do is where the work lives.

### **Exercise 3: What Comes First?**

Write an honest account of a day in your life organized around nicotine. When was your first hit? What did you leave or interrupt or postpone to use? How many times did you think about it when you couldn't use? What does this tell you about where nicotine actually ranks in your life versus where you'd like it to rank?

### **Exercise 4: Your Quality of Life**

Write about what you actually want from your life. Not what you're supposed to want — what you genuinely want. Who do you want to be present for? What do you want to be able to do physically? What do you want to feel like when you wake up in the morning? Keep this somewhere you can return to. These are the things we're working toward. These are what's on the other side.

## Chapter Two

# How This Program Works

Let me be direct with you from the start of this chapter: what I'm about to teach you is probably the opposite of everything you've ever heard about quitting nicotine. No willpower contests. No white-knuckling through cravings. No pretending you don't want it. None of that. What I'm going to show you instead is how to use the force of the urge against itself—how to take that craving that's been controlling your life and flip it into a tool that sets you free.

But, before we get there, I want to ask you a simple question. Actually, let me ask you a series of them.

Where, in your daily life, can you truly not use nicotine?

Think about it honestly. Can you smoke on an airplane? In a restaurant? In someone's car, their house, their office? Can you light up in a movie theater, a supermarket, a school, a doctor's waiting room? If you vape or use Snus or Zyns, you might be thinking you have a little more flexibility, and maybe you do, sometimes. But here's the truth that applies to all of us, no matter what form our nicotine

takes: despite the rules, despite the social pressure, despite the health warnings plastered on every package, you *can* use. You might face consequences. You might get asked to leave, or fined, or arrested on that airplane. But the physical act? It's still a choice you're making. Every single time.

Now contrast that with a place where you genuinely *cannot* use.

You can't use nicotine when you're sleeping. To consume nicotine in any form requires a conscious, deliberate decision to put it in your body. You can't vape underwater. And here's the one I want you to sit with for a moment: imagine you're locked in a prison cell. No nicotine anywhere. And through the bars, you can see other inmates using. You can see your brand, your device, your preferred product—right there—and nobody will give you any.

How does that feel?

I know how it feels. Trapped. Furious. Helpless. Obsessive. Anxious. Like the walls are closing in. Like your skin is crawling. Like the one thing you need more than anything else in the world is being dangled just out of reach. That churning, suffocating, desperate sensation? That's deprivation. That's what it feels like to have no choice, no control, no freedom.

Now here's the part I want you to hold onto, because this is the moment where everything starts to shift.

Those feelings of being trapped, frustrated, helpless, obsessive, anxious, like you're losing your mind? Do those feelings sound familiar *outside* the jail cell? Because if you're being honest with yourself, you've felt all of those things while you're still using. The grip nicotine has on your life—the way you have to plan around it, hide it, step outside for it, worry about it, spend money on it, hate yourself for it. That's not freedom. That's a different kind of prison, just one with no

bars, and a door that's technically unlocked, but one you've convinced yourself you can't walk through.

This is where I need you to stop and really hear me: **every feeling you're afraid you might feel if you stop is already a feeling you're experiencing because you use.** Read that again if you have to. The fear, the anxiety, the obsession. Nicotine is not relieving those feelings. It's causing them.

## **Write This Down: I'm Nicotine Addicted. I Want to Use...**

Here's where we start the actual work. And I mean that literally. I want you to get something to write with.

The single biggest obstacle between you and being nicotine-free is a feeling called deprivation. It's that voice that says *I can't have this. I've already stopped. I shouldn't want this.* That voice is what makes quitting feel like punishment. That voice is what sends people back to the gas station at 11 pm, swearing it'll be the last time.

So here is what we're going to do instead.

Before every single nicotine session—before you take that first drag, before you pick up your vape, before you put that Zyn in your mouth—I want you to say these words, either out loud or to yourself:

**I'm nicotine addicted. I want to use. I can use. I don't have to stop. Think about my benefits. Make them large and powerful.**

I want you to write those words down right now. Put them on a card. Put that card somewhere you'll see it constantly. Because here's what those words are doing, and why they work when nothing else has:

They are telling you the truth.

You *are* nicotine addicted. That's not a judgment. It's a fact, and pretending otherwise is part of what's kept you stuck. You *do* want to use. Of course you do. You're addicted. Denying that want doesn't make it disappear; it makes it scream louder. You *can* use. Nobody is stopping you. And you don't *have* to stop. Not right this second. Not ever, technically speaking. The man at the convenience store will happily sell you whatever form of nicotine you prefer until the day you die.

But, make your benefits large and powerful.

Those benefits—that's the other side of the card. Write these down, too: Better health. Better life. Breathe freely. More energy. Less fear. Vanity. Your family. Freedom. Quitting, which is a huge accomplishment. Add whatever else is personally true for you, because your benefits belong to you and nobody else.

Now I want to say something about those benefits, because I think we tend to treat them as vague, distant abstractions. "Better health" sounds nice, but what does it actually mean in the life you're living right now? Maybe it means not coughing when you walk up a flight of stairs. Maybe it means not having that low hum of health anxiety playing in the background of everything you do. Maybe it means your kid not smelling it on you. Maybe it means looking in the mirror without that particular kind of self-disgust.

And the freedom—God, let me tell you about the freedom. My number one benefit since the last time I used isn't that I breathe better, though I do. It isn't that I saved money, though I have. My number one benefit is that I no longer have to quit. I don't spend another day in the cycle of trying and failing and hating myself and trying again. That alone? Beyond price. That alone was worth everything.

There is no price tag on any of these benefits—individually or collectively. How much is good health worth? How much is your

relationship with the people you love worth? How much is your own self-respect worth, the simple ability to look yourself in the eye and know that you are not owned by a substance?

Don't answer those questions in dollars. Just let them land.

## **Doing Some Imagery Work**

I want you to try something with me. I firmly believe that the things in life we try to resist will persist. The more we try to push something out of our minds, the more stubbornly it takes up residence there. So instead of teaching you to run from the urge, I'm going to teach you to turn toward it, and in doing so, to take away all its power.

If you're somewhere you can safely close your eyes for a minute, I'd like you to do that now. Take a couple of slow, deep breaths. And then, deliberately, I want you to imagine having an urge to use right now.

Where do you feel it? Is it in your mouth? Your chest? Your hands? Your head? Just notice where it lives in your body. Don't fight it. Don't try to make it go away. Just observe it the way you might observe a cloud passing.

If you could give it a shape, what would it be? A tight knot? A sphere? Something cloudy and shapeless? Does it have a color? A texture? Is it hard or soft, hot or cold? Does it hum or pulse or vibrate? Just sit with it for a moment. Let it be exactly what it is.

Now open your eyes.

Here's what I want to ask you: was that feeling the greatest sensation you've ever experienced? Of course not. But was it the worst? Was it unbearable in any real sense? No. Not even close. Because in your life, you have felt real pain: grief, loss, physical suffering, and genuine heartbreak. And you have also felt real joy. Real pleasure. Real

triumph. And this urge, this craving that has had a stranglehold on your life? It's just a feeling. It's an uncomfortable, unpleasant, deeply inconvenient feeling, but just a feeling.

The reason you've spent your whole life using nicotine is not because the urge is genuinely intolerable. It's because you've spent your whole life believing it was. And so every time it showed up, you fed it immediately, and you never learned—not once—that you could simply let it be there and survive.

Now here's the image I want you to hold onto. You've got a monkey on your back. I know you do. I had one too, for decades. And I know what every instinct in your body wants to do. It wants to ball up your fist and punch that monkey off your shoulder. But the harder you punch, the deeper it digs its fingers in. The more you fight it, the more it fights back. And the more you ignore it, the louder it screams.

Think instead about a young child, three years old, full of energy, absolutely crazy about you. You walk through the door, and this kid comes tearing across the room, arms out, bursting with love. Now imagine you shove that kid away. Tell them to leave you alone, you're not dealing with this right now. What happens? A tantrum. Screaming. Chaos. That child will not let you have a moment's peace.

But if you scoop that kid up, give them your full attention, say, "I see you, I love you, I'm here." After a while, they calm down. They feel seen. And then they wiggle down out of your arms and go find something else to do, because they got what they needed.

Your urge to use is that child. The more you fight it, deny it, pretend it isn't there, punish yourself for having it—the more it screams. But the more you turn toward it and acknowledge it—*I see you. I'm nicotine addicted. I want to use. I can use*, the less power it has. It doesn't disappear. I'm not going to lie to you and tell you it vanishes completely. But it loses the ability to run your life.

That's how I got free. Not by being stronger than the urge. By being honest with it.

## Exercises

Before we go any further, I want you to spend some time with the exercises in this section. They are not optional extras—they are the program. This is where the real work happens.

**The Card.** Make it physical. Write the technique on one side: *I'm nicotine addicted. I want to use. I can use. I don't have to stop. Think about my benefits. Make them large and powerful.* On the other side, write your benefits—not generic ones, but yours. The specific, personal, visceral reasons you're here. Keep this card with you. Say the words on it before every single nicotine session, starting today.

**Your Benefits List.** In a journal, I want you to go deeper than the card. Write about each benefit in real terms. Don't write "better health." Write about what better health looks like in your actual life six months from now, a year from now, five years from now. Write about the specific person in your life you're doing this for, and what their face looked like the last time your use caused them pain. Write about who you want to be. Make these benefits *real*. Make them so real and so large and so powerful that they are worth everything.

**The Deprivation Audit.** Sit with this question and answer it honestly in writing: What feelings have you been experiencing *because* of your nicotine use? The anxiety, the self-criticism, the hiding, the cost, the health worry, the shame—write it all out. Then look at what you've written and ask yourself: Is this the freedom you've been afraid to lose?

**The Imagery Practice.** Return to the urge visualization once a day. Sit with it. Get familiar with it. Learn what it feels like without running from it. This is not torture. This is training. Every time you sit with an urge and don't act on it, you are teaching yourself something profound: that you can.

I'm not asking you to quit today. I'm asking you to say the words. Every time before you use—say the words, think about the benefits, and then make whatever choice you make. That's it. That's how this begins.

I'll be with you through every step of what comes next.

Closing thought, inspired by Carl Jung:

*The things in life I try to resist will persist. The things I meet with honesty and courage—those I can move through.*

## Chapter Three

# Committing to the Quitting Mindset

**W**elcome back.

The fact that you're here, that you want to read more, tells me something important about you. It tells me you're serious. And I want to honor that by being equally serious with you. So before we dive in, let me ask you a few honest questions. Have you been saying the words before you use? Have you been sitting with your benefits, making them real and large and powerful? Have you been paying attention to your urges rather than running from them?

Because, here's what I want you to understand going into this chapter: by the time we're done, you're going to know exactly what to expect after you stop using nicotine. No surprises. No ambushes. And you're going to be more committed to this process than you were when you started. Not because I'm going to inspire you with a motivational speech, but because I'm going to keep telling you the truth—and the truth, it turns out, is the most powerful tool any of us has.

In the last chapter, we talked about deprivation, that crushing feeling of *I can't use, I have to stop*—and how to dismantle it by coming back to what's actually true: you can use anytime you want to. The man at the convenience store isn't going anywhere. Nobody is hiding your nicotine. You are always, always in control of that choice.

But today we have a different enemy to deal with. And this one is sneakier.

This one is the urge itself, and more specifically, everything we do to try to make the urge go away.

## **The Problem with Substituting Other Things for Nicotine**

Here's the thing about urges. We don't like them. Nobody does. They're uncomfortable and inconvenient, and they show up at the worst possible moments. So the moment one surfaces, every instinct in our body starts scrambling for a way to make it stop. And over the years, we've collected a whole menu of supposedly expert-approved strategies for doing exactly that.

Eat something. That's a popular one. When the urge hits, grab a snack, nibble it away, redirect your mouth. And I understand the logic. It's doing something, and something feels better than sitting with the discomfort. But, here's the real problem with that particular substitute: a lot of people are already terrified that quitting nicotine will make them gain weight. And the truth is, nicotine itself doesn't keep you thin. What keeps your weight stable is your eating behavior. If you've been ending every meal with a cigarette or a vape session, that nicotine hit has been acting as a kind of period at the end of a sentence. It signals *done, stop eating now*. Take that away and suddenly

the sentence doesn't end, and people start eating more, and then the scale starts moving, and then they think, well, I better go back to the nicotine, or maybe try a different kind, maybe patches, maybe gum, maybe Chantix or Wellbutrin—both of which, I will just say plainly, come with side effect profiles that should give anyone pause. Look them up yourself.

Other substitutes I've heard people recommend with a straight face: suck on a straw, chew a cinnamon stick, put something else in your mouth. Keep busy. Go for a walk. Exercise through it. Pray. Meditate. Breathe deeply. Have sex.

I'm not saying those are bad things to do with your time. I'm saying none of them are solving the problem, because the problem isn't that your hands are idle or your mouth is bored or your lungs need something to do. The problem is the urge. And, when you try to substitute something else for the urge instead of actually meeting it, what happens is the urge doesn't disappear. It just gets bigger. And bigger. And bigger. Until it finds the moment you're most tired and most vulnerable and least defended. And then, it blows up, and suddenly you're at the gas station at midnight wondering what happened to all that progress you made.

You've had a deeply intimate relationship with nicotine. You've used it to celebrate, to grieve, to think, to relax, to get through the hard parts of the day, and to mark the good ones. You don't get out of a relationship like that by chewing a cinnamon stick. You get out of it by actually going through the feelings. Not around them. Through them.

There's also the "environment strategy." This manifests as, "I'm going to throw away all my cigarettes. I'm going to run out of them on purpose and just not buy more. I'm going to go on vacation—get

away from my normal life and use the change of scenery to change my habits.”

I've tried every version of this, and I'm guessing you have too. And you probably already know what happens. Within hours, or a day, or two days, you're back at the store. Or you stop at a gas station on the way home from the airport. Or you bum one off a stranger. And you stand there thinking: *what happened? I was doing so well.*

Here's what happened. You packed your bags, and you left, but you took your first toe on your left foot with you. And that toe goes everywhere you go. Your urges came on the vacation, too. They just waited, patiently, for the moment you let your guard down. And then they were right there.

## **Quitting Is Like a Breakup**

Let me put it another way, because I think this metaphor is going to land for most of you.

Have you ever been through a genuinely hard breakup? Not a mutual, amicable parting of ways, but the real kind, the kind that leaves a hole in your chest for months, where you see their name on your phone and your stomach drops, where certain songs become unlistenable for a while, and you catch yourself reaching for your phone to text them before you remember?

In those moments, was there a pill you could take to make it stop? A strategy, a substitute, a change of scenery that actually made the feelings go away? Or did you eventually have to conclude, with some resignation, that you were just going to have to feel your way through to the other side?

That's exactly what this is. Nicotine has been your companion, your comfort, your ritual, your reward. It's been there in the morning and after meals, and when things got hard and when things were good. Breaking free from it is not a logistical problem you can solve with a new habit or a piece of nicotine gum. It's a relationship you have to grieve your way through, and the only path out is straight through the middle of it.

Trying to replace something that intimate with something else doesn't make the feelings smaller. It just postpones them and makes them angrier.

## **Avoiding Friends and Situations**

So if substituting doesn't work, and changing your environment doesn't work, what about just avoiding the things that trigger urges in the first place?

This is where I hear a lot of people say things like, "My friend smokes and we always smoke together, so I'm just going to avoid them for a while." Or, "I can't go to that party because everyone's going to be vaping and I'll want to." Or, "I can't have a beer right now because a beer always makes me want to use."

And I understand the thinking. It feels protective. It feels like discipline. But I'm going to tell you directly: it doesn't work, and it actually makes things worse.

Here's why: The moment you decide you can't be around a certain friend or go to a certain place because it will make you want to use, what you're really telling yourself is that you cannot live your normal life without nicotine. You're reinforcing the prison. You're drawing a

map where nicotine marks the boundary of every room you're allowed to enter.

Here's the practical problem: everything becomes a trigger. There's nothing in your life—no person, no place, no activity, no time of day—that will not, at some point, make you want to use. Because your relationship with nicotine is woven into everything. So if avoidance is your strategy, where does it end? You stay home to avoid your friend who smokes. But then you're home, and being home makes you want to use. You skip the movie. But then you're sitting in your living room and something on TV triggers the urge. You can't avoid your way to freedom because there's nowhere to run where your urges won't find you.

What I want you to do instead is the opposite of avoidance. I want you to go. Go to the party. Hang out with your friend while they're using. Sit with the want. Let your teeth shake if they're going to shake. And then say the words: *I'm nicotine addicted. I want to use. I can use. I don't have to stop.* And then make a choice.

What you're practicing—and it is a practice, I'll come back to that word—is the ability to want something and not automatically act on the want. That's the skill. That's the whole game. Not the absence of desire, but the presence of choice.

## **Deal with the Single Urge**

Now let's talk about how to actually face an urge without being overwhelmed by it, because I want to be honest with you, in the early days, the urges can feel relentless. They pile up. And when you're standing in the middle of what feels like an endless stream of cravings, it's easy

to catastrophize: *this is what every day is going to feel like forever, and I can't do this.*

Here's the image I want you to hold onto.

Have you ever walked into your kitchen and found a single ant on the counter? Just one. Pretty manageable, right? Annoying, sure, but manageable. Now imagine you walk into that same kitchen and there's a full swarm—hundreds of ants covering the counter, the floor, moving across everything. How do you feel? Overwhelmed. Panicked. Like there's no possible way to deal with all of this at once.

Your urges are the ants. And the swarm is what it feels like when you try to project into the future and fight all of them at once: *every urge I will ever feel from now until the end of my life.* That's impossible to fight. Of course, it feels impossible, because it is.

But a single ant? That you can deal with.

Deal with the single urge. Not the next one. Not the one after lunch or the one that's going to hit when you get in your car. Just this one. Right now, in this moment: *I'm nicotine addicted. I want to use. I can use. I don't have to stop. And I want my better health, my better life, my freedom.*

The next urge will come when it comes, and you'll deal with that one then. But right now there is only this one. And this one you can handle.

Trying to fight urges, I've come to believe, is one of the most futile endeavors a human being can undertake. It's like trying to fight the wind. There's nothing to grab onto. The urge pokes at you. You push back. It pokes again. You push harder. And eventually, after enough poking, you're exhausted and raw and the urge is still there and you collapse—and then you're crying in the parking lot of a CVS wondering why you couldn't be stronger.

Strength is not the answer here. Honesty is. Acceptance is.

## Learning from the Danger of the Ocean

Let me tell you about the first time a wave took me down at the ocean.

I was young, and I didn't know what I was doing, and a wave caught me completely off guard, and suddenly I was underwater, being tossed around, and I panicked. And in the panic, I fought. I thrashed and kicked and struggled against the water with everything I had. The more I fought, the worse it got. The water just kept pulling. I was completely helpless against it, and the fighting was making it worse, and I genuinely thought in that moment that I was in serious trouble.

A lifeguard came out and got me, and afterward he told me something I've never forgotten: when you get caught in a wave, you don't fight it. You let go. You relax your body, and you let the wave move through you. It will toss you around some. That part you can't avoid, but once it passes, you're in calmer water, and you can find your footing and make your way back to shore.

An urge to use nicotine is a wave. And everything you've ever done to try to fight it—the substituting, the avoiding, the white-knuckling—is the same as thrashing underwater. The wave doesn't care how hard you're fighting. It's just going to keep tossing you until it's done.

But, if you relax into it? If you say *okay, you're here, I feel you, I'm nicotine addicted, and I want to use, and I can use, and I don't have to stop, and here are my benefits, and I'm just going to breathe and let this pass*—the wave moves through. It really does. And then you're in calmer water. And then the next wave comes, and you let that one pass too. And eventually you make it back to shore.

This is not passivity. This is not resignation. This is the most skilled, disciplined thing you can do with an urge—meet it honestly and let it move through you without letting it move you.

## **A Whole New Practice**

Now, I want you to sit with a question for a moment. Are you good at driving? Are you good at your job? Are you comfortable as a parent, or a friend, or in whatever roles make up the core of your life?

Of course you are. Or, at least, you've gotten much better at those things over time. And how did that happen? Not through one big breakthrough moment. Not through sheer willpower applied once and then forgotten. It happened through practice. Thousands of small repetitions. Mistakes and corrections and adjustments and more repetitions. You got good at driving by driving, imperfectly, over and over again until the imperfect became fluent and then eventually second nature.

What I'm teaching you is a practice in exactly the same sense. The technique—*I'm nicotine addicted, I want to use, I can use, I don't have to stop, make my benefits large and powerful*—is not a magic spell you say once and then you're free. It's a skill you practice. Every urge is a repetition. Every time you say the words and sit with the discomfort and let the wave move through you without acting on it, you are getting better at this. You are building something real.

And here is what it looks like when it starts to work: You know how I described the ants earlier? Each urge, instead of being pushed down and plugged up in your head—getting bigger and bigger and adding to the pressure until the whole thing explodes—each ant, when you meet it with the words and the benefits and the willingness to feel it,

attaches to a little balloon. And it floats. It just kind of drifts up and out and away, into the universe, gone. And then another ant comes, and that one floats away too. And then another. And none of them accumulate, because you're not blocking them—you're letting them move.

I want to say one more thing before we close this chapter, and it's about attitude. How well we do with anything in life depends almost entirely on the attitude we bring to it. You've probably sat through a long movie you didn't want to see. It was ninety minutes that felt like three hours, checking the time, miserable, waiting for it to be over. And you've probably sat through a movie you loved, and looked up startled when the credits rolled because you couldn't believe ninety minutes had already passed. Same length. Completely different experience, based entirely on what you brought into the theater with you.

Your urges are going to come whether your attitude is good or bad. The question is what the experience is going to be like while they're there. If you fight them and hate them and treat them like enemies—and enemies, I want you to hear this, control us—you are going to suffer. But if you can shift, even slightly, to treating the urge as something neutral, something that's simply passing through, something that's already in the house because you invited it in years ago, you will have a completely different experience.

You don't have to love your urges. But you do have to stop treating them like enemies. Because the enemy framing is exactly what makes them so powerful. And the acceptance framing—*you're here, I see you, you're not going to kill me, let's do this*—is exactly what takes that power away.

This whole new practice, repeated one urge at a time, is how the monkey comes off your back. Not because you beat it. But because you stopped fighting it, and it stopped needing to hold on so tight.

## Exercises

Before the next chapter, I want you to carry these exercises with you, not just as written tasks, but as lived ones.

**Welcome every urge.** Your job between now and the next time we meet is not to stop using. It's to be willing to feel the urges. Every time one comes up, say the words. Don't fight the feeling—notice it. Where does it live in your body? What does it feel like right now, in this single moment? Practice the wave. Relax into it and let it pass.

**Go where your urges are.** Don't cancel plans. Don't avoid your friend who uses. Don't skip the situation you're afraid will trigger you. Go. Be there. Want to use. And practice the choice. What you're building is the knowledge that desire and action are not the same thing—that you can want something with your whole nervous system and still decide, in this moment, not to act on it.

**The ant practice.** When an urge comes, visualize it as a single ant. Not a swarm—just this one. Say the words. Watch the ant attach to a balloon. Let it float. Don't reach for it. Just let it go.

**Write about your substitutes.** In your journal, make an honest list of every substitute strategy you've tried in past attempts to quit. Be specific. Then, next to each one, write what actually happened—not what you hoped would happen, but what did. What you're looking for is the pattern, which is probably consistent: the urge didn't go away. It just got bigger and waited.

**Your benefits, again.** Come back to that list. Every day. Multiple times. Not as a task to check off, but as something to genuinely feel. Pick one benefit today and write a full paragraph about what it actually looks like in your life—what it would mean, who it would affect, how it would feel. Make it real. Make it yours.

The practice is the point. And you're already in it.

## Chapter Four

# The Guidelines for Quitting Nicotine

**B**efore we get into what happens on the day you stop, I want to give you something practical to hold onto. Let's call them guardrails. Call them a philosophy. I call them guidelines, and I want to be clear that these aren't rules handed down from a twelve-step pamphlet or a doctor's waiting room. These come from lived experience. My own. And from sitting with thousands of people, just like you, who were trying to figure out how to walk through the world without nicotine.

Understanding these guidelines before you stop, not after, is essential. Because the moment you take your last hit, the world doesn't pause. Life keeps moving. People keep irritating you. Traffic still happens. Your boss still sends those emails. Your kid still leaves their socks on the floor. So let's talk about how to live in all of that without reaching for nicotine.

## **Guideline #1: Live Your Life Like You Always Do**

This is the first guideline, and it might be the most counterintuitive one I give you: just live your life exactly as you always have.

Eat what you eat. Drink what you drink. Go where you go. Be with the people you're with. Don't suddenly start avoiding your favorite bar because you used to smoke there. Don't skip your morning coffee because it's tied to your first cigarette of the day. Don't start going to bed an hour early because evenings are when you used to chew. None of that. Just live.

Here's why this matters so deeply. I know something about your life — I know this regardless of whether you've been using nicotine for a week or for forty years. In your life, there are moments when you get hungry. There are moments when you feel emotional, when things get under your skin, when you feel frustrated or restless or irritated. You have days when you can't sleep. Days when fatigue wraps around you like a wet blanket. Days when something goes sideways and your nervous system lights up like a switchboard.

That's just life. That's what it is to be human.

And here's the part your nicotine-addicted brain has done very efficiently over a very long time: every single one of those moments has been linked to nicotine. Hungry? Nicotine. Frustrated? Nicotine. Can't sleep? Nicotine. Just finished a meal and feeling satisfied? Nicotine. Got a ticket? Nicotine. Had a great day? Nicotine. The brain is extraordinarily good at making these associations — it's one of nicotine's most insidious tricks.

So why do I tell you to keep living your life? Because those associations are going to follow you wherever you go. You can't outrun them. You can't build a new, nicotine-free version of your existence by rear-

ranging your furniture or changing your schedule. The associations live in your nervous system, not in your coffee mug.

There's something else I want you to understand about your mind. Your brain never shuts off. Ever. Not for a second. And there's a very good reason for that. It's a survival mechanism. A brain that goes quiet is a brain that doesn't see the predator coming. A brain that goes quiet doesn't keep you safe. So your mind runs constantly, all day and all night, processing, narrating, warning, suggesting.

And since survival isn't actually a twenty-four-hour emergency for most of us anymore, since we're not outrunning wolves or foraging for food, that busy mind turns inward. It starts talking to you. And I'll tell you something that may sound strange but is absolutely true: my mind says things to me that I would never, ever permit another human being to say to me.

My mind tells me I'm not enough. My mind tells me things are going to fall apart. My mind tells me I'm exhausted and stressed, and I deserve a break—and that nicotine would give me that break. I don't argue with it anymore. I just notice it. I let it talk. And then I do something else.

Because here's what your mind is going to do after you stop using nicotine: it's going to try to convince you that nicotine is a good idea. It's going to be creative about it. It's going to make the argument sound reasonable, even compassionate. It's going to sound like your friend.

I'm telling you this now, in advance, so that when it happens, you won't be surprised. You'll just recognize it. That's my mind doing what minds do. And then you'll have a choice.

## **Guideline #2: Check Everything Around Your Urges When They Happen**

The second guideline is this: check everything around your urges when they happen. Become an observer of your own experience.

I always tell the people I work with that the only urge you ever have to deal with is the one you're feeling right now. Not the urge you had this morning. Not the one you'll feel after dinner. Right now. That's it. But — and this is important — it helps enormously to know where your urges tend to live.

For me, I know there's an urge shortly after I wake up. That one's been there since I was a teenager. I know there's an urge after I finish a meal. I know that if I get pulled over and ticketed, if I have a difficult phone call, if I'm waiting at an airport — I know those moments carry urges. Not because I'm powerless in the face of them. But because I've mapped my own territory.

When you know where your urges are, you're not ambushed by them. You're ready to practice. And what you're practicing, what we're going to talk about in depth, is the technique of acknowledging the urge, being honest about it, and then making a choice.

An urge is not a command. An urge is not an emergency. An urge is just a signal — a feeling in your body, a thought in your mind, a familiar pull. It rises. And then — if you let it — it passes. Every urge you've ever had in your life has eventually passed, even the ones you gave in to. You can't sustain an urge forever. Urges are temporary. What you do in response to an urge determines whether nicotine stays in your life.

So pay attention. Notice the texture of your urges. Notice when they come, what triggers them, how they feel in your body. Do you feel them in your chest? Your hands? Your throat? Does your mind

suddenly get very loud, very insistent? That's all information, and information is power.

The more you understand your urges, the less frightening they become. And the less frightening they are, the easier it becomes to stand in the middle of one and still make a free choice.

### **Guideline #3: Don't Deprive Yourself of Anything That Gives You Pleasure**

The third guideline might be one that surprises people: don't deprive yourself of anything that gives you pleasure.

Enjoy everything you love in life. But don't begin to overindulge. There's a difference, and it matters.

If you like a glass of wine at night, enjoy your glass of wine. What you don't want to do is turn that glass into a bottle because you're using alcohol to fill the space where nicotine used to be. That's not pleasure. That's substitution, and substitution doesn't heal the underlying habit. It just gives it a different shape.

Here's a question I want you to ask yourself whenever you're uncertain about whether to do something: Will I be reaching for nicotine after doing this?

If the answer is yes. If you know from experience that having three drinks makes you want to smoke, or that hanging out in a particular situation always ends with you using, then think carefully before putting yourself there, at least in the early days. If the answer is no, then enjoy yourself without guilt. And if you genuinely don't know, err on the side of caution. That's not deprivation. That's wisdom.

I also want to talk about how you treat other people during this time, because this is where some folks stumble. It is completely nat-

ural, when we first stop using nicotine, to feel a little edge to us. A little rawness. Things that didn't bother you before might bother you now. People might grate on you. And there's a very real temptation to let that rawness bleed outward.

Don't.

I'll give you a simple example. Imagine your kid leaves their socks on the floor, which is a perfectly ordinary kid thing to do. Before you stopped using nicotine, you might have handled it calmly. You'd pick up the socks, put them in the hamper, and tell your kid not to do it again. But now, in the early days without nicotine, there's a chance that those socks feel like a personal offense. Like a provocation. Like the last straw.

Here's my advice: pick up the socks anyway. Put them in the hamper. Tell your kid, calmly, not to leave their socks on the floor. Treat people the way you want to be treated, the way you would treat them if you weren't going through this. Because here's the truth: how you treat the people around you is going to affect your life long after this transition is over. Don't sacrifice relationships on the altar of your quit.

## **The Two Circles of Your Life**

I want to share a symbol with you, something I've been using to understand my own emotional landscape for a very long time.

Picture two concentric circles. An outer circle and an inner circle.

The inner circle is where I feel best. Life is centered. The people I love are safe. My finances aren't keeping me up at night. There's a sense of ease and rightness in my days. I'm operating from my values, not from my fears. That's the inner circle.

The outer circle is the edge. That's where I've been pushed to my limit. One more thing goes wrong, and I might lose it. The outer circle is where I'm reactive rather than responsive, where I stop thinking clearly and start acting from pure emotion.

Life will push you toward the outer circle. Life does this reliably and without apology. Traffic pushes you there. Arguments push you there. Loss and grief and fear and exhaustion push you there. And when you're out there, at the edge, your addicted brain is going to tell you very loudly that nicotine would bring you back to center.

It's a lie. But it's a convincing one.

So here's something I want you to carry with you. It's a belief I've held since June 17, 1987, the last day I smoked:

*Once we make the decision to get nicotine-free, there will never be a situation so good or so bad that to use more will only make my life worse.*

Read that again. Let it land.

There is no situation, no celebration, no crisis, no tragedy, no triumph, that nicotine will improve. It will not make the good things better. It will not ease the weight of the hard things. What it will do is add one more chain to the ones you're trying to break.

## **What We Can Learn from Peter Jennings**

I want to tell you about Peter Jennings.

Peter Jennings was the anchor for ABC News, one of the most respected journalists of his generation. By all accounts, he had managed to put twenty years between himself and tobacco. Twenty years. That is not a small thing. That represents thousands of individual moments, over the course of two decades, in which Peter Jennings chose not to use.

And then September 11, 2001 happened.

On that day, it is said that Peter Jennings bummed a cigarette from one of his colleagues. And within a week, he was back to more than a pack a day. Within three years, Peter Jennings was dead from lung cancer.

I tell you this story not to frighten you, but to make something absolutely clear: the rules of nicotine addiction do not expire. Twenty years of freedom does not grant you immunity. You cannot take 'just one hit' and stay free. There is no controlled use for a nicotine addict. There is use, and there is not using. That's the whole equation.

When Peter Jennings lit that cigarette on September 11th, did the Twin Towers stand back up? Did those who died come back to life? Were those who were shattered made whole? No. Nothing changed in the world outside. But something changed in Peter Jennings, because within days, he was no longer a man who had been free for twenty years. He was an active nicotine addict again.

The tragedy didn't call for nicotine. The tragedy called for all the things we reach for in hard times: community, presence, meaning, and resilience. Nicotine offered none of those things. It never does. What it offered was the familiar, the chemical relief of a drug he'd known since youth. And that was enough.

In the recovery community, there's an acronym I want to adapt for you: HALT. It traditionally stands for Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired. It's a reminder that these states make us vulnerable. When you're too hungry, angry, lonely, or tired, the reasons you wanted to stop can start to feel distant and abstract.

We can add a few letters to HALT and make it more suited to our own situations. I think about the full range of states that can push us to the outer edge of our inner circle. Scared. Stressed. Sad. Stoned. Happy. Hateful. Anxious. Ashamed. Lonely. Livid. Lusty. Tired. Thrilled.

Tipsy. Bashful. Bored. Beside yourself. Enraged. Excited. Exasperated. Down. Depressed. Drunk. Feeling like a million bucks. Feeling like the whole world is ending.

All of these states are moments when your addicted brain will make the argument for nicotine. And for each of them, the answer is the same:

Once we make the decision to get nicotine-free, there is no situation so good or so bad that using more will only make our lives worse.

Peter Jennings had twenty years. He lit one cigarette. Three years later, he was gone.

Now let me be equally honest with you about the other side of this coin. What is the worst-case scenario of not using nicotine? What is the absolute bottom of the barrel?

You might cough more in the early days. You might catch a cold. You might get a headache or a stomachache. Your skin might tingle. You might feel a little lightheaded. There may be some digestive discomfort. That's a real thing. Your body is adjusting. You might feel frustrated, restless, a little raw around the edges.

That's it. That is the worst of it.

There is no emergency room visit coming. There is no IV, no hospitalization, no straitjacket. There is no medical catastrophe waiting at the end of your first day without nicotine. The very worst you are going to feel is uncomfortable. Temporarily. Physically uncomfortable, and mentally a little loud.

And we're going to deal with that. Together. Right now.

## **The 30 Minute Technique**

Here's what I want you to do between now and when we meet again: set a timer on your phone to go off every thirty minutes.

When it goes off, I want you to say this — out loud if you can, silently if you have to:

*I am nicotine addicted. I want to use. I can use.*

That's it. Those three sentences. Every thirty minutes. Except when you're sleeping. I learned my lesson on that one the hard way after a student set his alarm every thirty minutes through the night. I promised myself I'd always specify: except when you go to bed.

Now, one of two things is going to happen when you do this.

The first possibility: the technique actually creates a real urge. You say the words, and something in you responds, and suddenly there's a pull toward nicotine. If that happens, great. Use or don't use. You're still using right now anyway. But you've done something important: you've practiced the technique while the urge is real. You've learned what it feels like to stand in the middle of an urge and say these words out loud.

The second possibility: you say the words, and nothing much happens. The urge doesn't come. Maybe a faint flicker and then nothing. If that happens, that's even better — because you've just discovered that you have the capacity to call up the idea of an urge without actually being consumed by it. You're no longer just waiting, passively, for the urge to ambush you. You're going to it first. You're practicing when you're calm so that when the real thing hits, you already know the move.

Every thirty minutes. Use the timer. When it goes off, press it again immediately so the next thirty-minute cycle begins. Don't rely on your memory for this — your mind is busy enough.

The other thing I want you to do is put visual reminders around your environment. Post-it notes. Masking tape. Painter's tape is my

personal favorite. Stick it on your front door. Your back door. Your microwave. Your bathroom mirror. Your bedroom wall. Your steering wheel.

It doesn't have to say anything meaningful. It doesn't need a message. Just something out of place. Something that makes you look twice and think: why is that there? And then the answer comes: oh, right. I'm quitting nicotine. I'm working on something important this week.

Environmental disruption is a powerful thing. We move through our habits on autopilot, especially with addictive behaviors. A piece of tape in the wrong place breaks that autopilot for just a second. And that second is sometimes exactly what you need.

## **The Real Meaning of "Can't"**

I want to spend some time on a word. A word that seems simple but isn't. A word that we use constantly, often incorrectly, and almost always in ways that either give us false comfort or trap us unnecessarily.

The word is "can't."

"Can't" in its truest meaning means impossible. Unable. Without choice. Something you cannot do no matter what, because you are not built for it, and the universe will not allow it.

You and I cannot fly. Not without a machine. We can plummet. We can be carried. But we cannot take flight under our own power. We are not aerodynamic, we have no wings, and gravity is non-negotiable. That is a real can't. It is impossible. We have no choice about it.

But here's something I hear all the time: I can't quit. I can't stop. I can't go without it.

And here's what I want to say about that: no. That's not a real "can't." You can stop using nicotine. Physically, you are capable of not putting it in your body. The action of reaching for nicotine is something you do, which means it is something you can choose not to do. It is not physiologically impossible, the way flying is physiologically impossible.

What you mean, usually, when you say I can't, is one of two things. Either: I don't know how. Or: the discomfort of not using feels so overwhelming that I don't believe I can tolerate it.

Those are very different statements from can't. And they have very different solutions.

Now, here's where it gets interesting, because "can't" does apply, in a very real sense, to the relationship between nicotine and health. If one of your reasons for stopping is that you want better health, a longer life, more energy and vitality, then I can tell you honestly: you cannot use nicotine and enjoy the best possible health. That's a real "can't." It is physiologically impossible. Nicotine is a toxic substance. It is a corrosive, carcinogenic compound. You are made of flesh and blood and living tissue, and that tissue cannot be exposed to nicotine indefinitely without consequence.

So yes, you can use nicotine. Nothing is stopping your hand from reaching for it. But you cannot use it and also have the best possible health. Those two things are mutually exclusive. Pick one.

I want to talk now about statements, the internal things we say to ourselves, and why some of them help us and some of them trap us.

There are statements that sound strong but are actually prisons. "I quit. I'm done. I will never use again. Forever." Sounds powerful, right? Sounds like conviction. But what you've actually done is painted yourself into a corner, and the paint will never dry. Because the moment you're at the outer edge of your circle, pushed to your limit,

hearing from your addicted brain that nicotine would fix this, the idea that you have committed to never, not once, not ever, for the rest of your life—that idea becomes a trap. And trapped animals panic.

There are also statements that sound defeated but are equally confining. "This will never work. I can't stop. I'll always be an addict." Different corner, same paint.

And then there are statements that sound wishy-washy but are actually the most honest and the most free:

*I hope I can do this. I'm going to give this my very best shot. I deserve better than this. I don't know exactly what's coming, but I'm going to meet it.*

That might not sound as dramatic as I will never use again. It doesn't have the same cinematic quality. But it's the truth. And for an addict, for anyone, really, the truth is the only solid ground there is.

Here's why the dramatic statement fails us: choice only exists in the present moment. You have no choice about your past. It's already happened. And, you have far less control over your future than most of us like to admit. Life is full of moments we never saw coming, moments that arrive without warning and rearrange everything we thought we knew.

Don't believe me? Ask John Lennon.

The only moment where choice is real and available is right now. This breath. This second. That's where freedom lives—not in some grand declaration about forever, but in the ten thousand small choices you make between now and the end of your life, each of them happening in a present moment that is always, only, now.

And the idea that after tomorrow you may never choose to use nicotine again — I'll be honest with you, that's a little scary. It should be. But here's the other side of that: the idea that you may never stop. That you may be tethered to this substance for the rest of your life.

That you may never feel what it's like to move through the world without that pull, without that dependence, without that cost to your health and your self-respect and your freedom.

That's terrifying.

So let's choose freedom. Not forever — just right now. And then right now again. And again after that.

## Exercises

Before you move on to the next chapter, please try the following exercises:

**Use the timer on your phone.** Every thirty minutes — except when you sleep — say the three sentences. I am nicotine addicted. I want to use. I can use. Say them whether or not you feel an urge. Call the urge up. Practice meeting it.

**Place reminders around your environment.** Tape, post-it notes, something out of place in every room you regularly occupy. Let your environment be a quiet, constant reminder of what you're doing and why.

## Chapter Five

# If You're Not Making Mistakes, You're Not Really Trying

**T**his chapter correlates with Day Three of the course. I want to say something right at the top, before anything else: you haven't stopped using yet. So please, don't panic. This isn't the moment to white-knuckle through anything. That moment is coming, and we'll get there together, but it isn't right now.

Before we dive in, I want to check in with you honestly. Have you been using? Did you say the words each time before you used? Have you been doing the technique every thirty minutes while you've been awake? Have you read through the material in this book?

And, how are you feeling right now? A little nervous? Maybe scared? Maybe doubtful that any of this is going to work? I'd expect

all of that. But I also want to ask: is there a part of you that's excited? A part of you that's quietly, maybe cautiously, hoping that today is the day things change? And underneath all of it — the doubt and the fear and the fatigue — is there a part of you that is just so damn tired of nicotine having this kind of grip on your life?

If that's where you are, then you're exactly where you need to be. Let's go.

Before we go further, I want to tell you something about my father.

When I was young, I worked in a family business. My father, my mother, my two older sisters, and I. We manufactured furniture in Los Angeles. It wasn't a glamorous business. It wasn't particularly profitable. And honestly, it wasn't a business I loved. But my father was one of the wisest men I've ever known, and he had a gift for saying things simply that other people spent their whole lives trying to say.

One of his favorites was this: "If you're not making any mistakes, you're not really trying. You're not doing anything."

He was never hard on me for making mistakes. But he had zero patience — zero — for someone who kept repeating the same mistakes. Making a mistake once is how you learn. Making the same mistake over and over again is a choice. It's the choice to ignore what experience is trying to teach you.

When I was twelve years old, I made a mistake. I was hanging out in a park with some other kids, and I started smoking cigarettes. That was the first mistake, the one that started all of this. And when I was thirty-two, after I'd managed to get two years away from cigarettes, I picked them back up again. That was the second mistake, the one that proved I hadn't yet learned what the first one was trying to teach me.

These were mistakes I made. I own them. And now, here, in this work we're doing together, the whole point is to learn from them. So let me ask you something directly: when you think back to when you

first picked up nicotine, do you recognize that as a mistake? And do you recognize that the days, months, and years that followed were a continuation of that mistake, a repetition of something that was never good for you?

Good. Then we're ready to learn from it.

My father had one other saying that I've carried with me for most of my adult life. He used to say: "Liars figure, but figures don't lie."

I never knew, when he first said it to me, that I would eventually build my entire career around those six words, but here we are. Today, I want to show you exactly what those figures look like, because they're going to matter enormously.

## **What Is Your Real Birthday?**

Let me ask you something. What's your birthday?

Mine is October 3rd. Every year, when October 3rd rolls around, it's my birthday. Same as it is for you on your birthday. Same as it is for everyone around the world on Christmas, on Valentine's Day, on whatever day holds meaning for them.

In America, Independence Day falls on July 4th. Every single year. That date means something specific. It marks the day freedom was declared. It marks the beginning of something new.

Now let me ask you this: what day is today?

Whatever the date is right now, wherever you are in the world, whatever is happening in your life, today is your Independence Day. Today is the day you declare your emancipation.

Emancipation is a long word for a simple idea: freedom from slavery. And what I'm inviting you to step into today is freedom from

one of the most quietly effective forms of enslavement that exists in modern life.

The date doesn't change. Your Independence Day is today. Mark it. Remember it. Because my father was right: liars figure, but figures don't lie — and the figures I'm about to show you are about to make the case for your freedom better than I ever could.

## **Running the Numbers on Nicotine**

Let's talk figures.

There are, minimally, 365 days in a year. Every four years, a leap year adds one more — you can track them by presidential elections and summer Olympics if you need a mnemonic. But let's work with 365 as our baseline.

Now ask yourself: how much nicotine do I use in a day?

When I was smoking, I was going through thirty cigarettes a day, a pack and a half. So for me, the math looked like this: 365 days times 30 cigarettes equals 10,950. I rounded up because some days I smoked more. That means I was smoking over 11,000 cigarettes a year. Eleven thousand times, I put a lit cigarette to my lips and inhaled. Every single year.

Your numbers will vary depending on your delivery method. If you're using nicotine pouches like Zyn or Snus, and going through a tin a day at fifteen pouches per tin, that's roughly 5,475 pouches a year. Call it 5,500. If you're vaping and going through a device every ten days, a device with 5,000 hits, you're at something like 182,500 hits per year.

One hundred and eighty-two thousand, five hundred times a year. Let that land.

Now imagine you went to see your doctor. You were sick, something chronic, something persistent. Your doctor examined you, wrote out a prescription, and then looked you in the eye and said: "You'll need to take this hundreds of times a day. Over the course of a year, you'll be taking this tens of thousands of times."

What would you say to that doctor? Would you nod and thank them? Or would you look at them like they'd lost their minds?

Here's what I want you to understand about nicotine: it is not a medicine, not in the way you're using it. It's not a vitamin. It's not a mineral. It's not something your body needs or was designed to process. It is a poison. A highly toxic insecticide. That is its primary identity in the natural world. It exists in the tobacco plant to kill insects, and you are using it tens of thousands of times a year.

Now, I'll acknowledge something, because I know how this conversation goes: some people will tell you nicotine has medicinal value. And technically, they're not wrong. Cocaine has medicinal value, too. It's a legitimate anesthetic used in certain nasal surgeries. A surgeon can pack your nasal cavity with cocaine-soaked cotton, shatter the bone in your nose to reshape it, and you won't feel a thing. That's the medicinal value of cocaine. But that's a far cry from what happens when someone abuses it.

There is some research on the potential benefits of very low doses of nicotine for certain cognitive conditions. The operative words are very low doses. The amount of nicotine a research subject might receive through a controlled patch is not remotely comparable to what a nicotine addict puts into their body every single day, at 5,000 or 10,000 or 180,000 doses per year. You can argue the medicinal angle all you want. The math doesn't care about your argument.

Liars figure. But figures don't lie.

Pull out your calculator. Multiply your daily usage by 365. Round up, because there are always the bad days, the stressful days, the days when you go through more than usual. That number, that honest, unvarnished number, is what you've been doing to your body every year. And it's what you're choosing to step away from today.

## **Exercise: Take Your Last Hit of Nicotine**

Right now, I want you to pause.

What I'm going to ask you to do is go take what you hope might be your last hit of nicotine. Not while you're reading. Not while you're half-distracted with your phone. I want you to put everything down, step away, and have a private moment with it.

This isn't a time for multitasking. This is a moment of ceremony, if you want to call it that. This thing, this substance that has been in your life for months or years or decades, has had an enormous amount of power over you. It has shaped your days, your habits, your routines, your self-image. And you are about to say goodbye to it.

So go say goodbye. Take your last hit. Be present for it. And then come back.

I'll be here.

Welcome back.

Now I want to talk to you about belief, because belief is the hinge that everything else turns on.

Here's something I've learned: we don't genuinely believe anything until our intellect and our experience agree. Until our mind and our gut are saying the same thing. You can know something intellectually. You can read it in a book, hear it from a doctor, understand it on

every rational level, and still not truly believe it, because your lived experience is telling you something different. Belief requires both.

## **When the Urge Comes, Remember That Fire Is Always Hot**

I believe, without any reservation, that fire is hot. I don't need to hold my hand over a flame to confirm it. Whether it's a birthday candle or a forest fire, if there's a flame, I know it's hot. I don't wonder if maybe this particular fire is gentler than the last one. Fire is hot. End of discussion.

Why do I know that? Because I've been burned. Experience and intellect are in agreement.

I believe, with exactly the same certainty, that I am a nicotine addict.

It's truer than my name. I can change my name. I can change my appearance, my religion, my address, or my partner. People change all kinds of fundamental things about themselves. But I cannot change my relationship with nicotine. That relationship lives in my nervous system, in the wiring of my brain, in the cellular memory of my body. I am a nicotine addict. I believe that the way I believe fire is hot.

And because I believe it, I am never surprised when an urge comes. An urge doesn't sneak up on me and catch me off guard anymore. I know I'm going to have urges. I know they're coming. It's just what happens when you're a nicotine addict who isn't using nicotine. The urge is not an emergency. It's not a catastrophe. It's just Tuesday.

Now, you might wonder why you have urges when most people around you seem to move through their days without any pull toward nicotine at all. What's the difference between you and them?

I could spend hours on that question. We could bring in psychologists, neurologists, geneticists, and sociologists. We could trace the environmental factors, the childhood experiences, the peer influences, and the neurochemical predispositions. We could fill a library wing with books on the subject, and many people have.

But none of that, not a single word of it, would actually help you stop using nicotine.

### **Three Words to Remember**

Here's what will help you. Three words.

Why am I an addict? Because I am.

Why do I want to use nicotine? Because I do.

Why do I want to use right now? Because it's now.

There is no epiphany coming. There is no moment of perfect psychological clarity that will arrive and dissolve the addiction. There is no insight deep enough, no therapy thorough enough, no book wise enough to reach back into your history and un-make the neural pathways that nicotine has built inside you.

What there is, is this: the ability to accept the fact of your addiction clearly and without drama, and to act accordingly.

I am a nicotine addict. When I use nicotine, I lose control. I go from one hit to thousands. That is how my addiction works. And because I am a nicotine addict, there are going to be moments when I want to use. That want is real. I'm not pretending it isn't there. I'm not fighting it or fleeing it or suppressing it.

I'm just not acting on it.

Because here's the hard, cold truth that most people dance around: I can still use. Even now, having not touched nicotine since June 17,

1987, I could use. Nothing is stopping me physically. I have a choice. And choice — real choice — is a two-edged sword, because it means I am responsible for what I do with it.

Some of us, myself included, may not have had the easiest childhoods. But a lot of us spent our adult lives acting like we were getting away with something, like the bill was never going to come due. And then one day it does. You get an X-ray. You get a blood result. You have a scare that stops your heart for a moment and reminds you of what you've been doing to yourself. And it may shock you. But it never fully surprises you. Because somewhere in the back of your mind, you've always known that bullet was out there. You just couldn't quite see it.

## **You're Either Pregnant Or You're Not**

I want to be honest with you about something that has taken me a long time to accept about myself: I cannot be just a little bit of a nicotine addict. I've tried. More times than I can count, I've tried to be a controlled user, someone who has one here, one there, who keeps it casual and contained. It has never worked. Not once.

There's a definition of insanity that gets passed around a lot — doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. Every single one of you knows exactly what that looks like when it comes to nicotine, because you've lived it.

Here's the simplest way I know to explain it: a woman is either pregnant or she isn't. There's no such thing as a little bit pregnant. A woman in her first week of her first trimester is every bit as pregnant as a woman in her final week. The state of pregnancy is the state of pregnancy. It's binary.

The state of nicotine addiction works the same way. You are either a nicotine addict or you're not. And if you are one — and you know if you are — then there is no such thing as controlled use. There is use, which leads to more use, which leads to thousands of uses per year. And there is not using.

Those are the only two options available to people like us.

## Diving Off a Skyscraper

Let me paint you a picture.

Imagine the three of us—you, a good friend of yours, and me—are standing together on the roof of a skyscraper. It's a clear day. You and your friend are deep in conversation about someone you both know. I've got nothing to add, so I wander toward the edge.

And then I tell you: I'm going to jump off this building, dive into the fountain at its base, and I'll be fine.

You'd probably look at me like I had completely lost my mind. You'd say: "What are you doing? You're going to die."

And I'd explain, very reasonably, that I'm a great diver. That the angle is perfect. That with the right trajectory and a bit of wind, I'll land gently in the fountain and walk away without a scratch.

You'd still think I was insane. Because you understand gravity. You understand that gravity doesn't care how good a diver I am or how optimistically I approach the jump. Gravity is a law, not a guideline, not a suggestion, not something that makes exceptions for people with positive attitudes or special circumstances. It is a force that operates the same way for everyone, every time.

Nicotine addiction is gravity.

The idea that I can take just one hit and walk away, that I can have just one, just this once, under just these circumstances, is exactly as rational as jumping off a skyscraper and expecting to be fine. Addiction doesn't care about my confidence. It doesn't make exceptions. It pulls you back, hard, every single time.

This isn't fear talking. This is physics. This is the law of addiction, as reliable and universal as any law of nature.

Lay's Potato Chips had a famous slogan back in the sixties: "Bet you can't eat just one." They understood something true about human appetite—that certain things, once started, create momentum. Have you ever sat down with a bag of chips and had exactly one? Have you ever cracked open a jar of peanuts and stopped at a single peanut? Have you ever taken one hit of nicotine and felt completely satisfied, with no desire for more?

I'm not saying it's impossible. I'm saying: I bet you can't. And for someone with the neurological profile of a nicotine addict — for someone whose brain has learned to respond to nicotine the way mine has — "just one" is not a real option. It's an illusion. It's the fountain at the base of the skyscraper, looking perfectly reachable from thirty stories up.

## **Ready for the Magic?**

I've been promising you magic since we started. Here it is.

Are you truly a nicotine addict? Do you believe, in your gut, not just your head, that there are going to be moments when you want to use? Do you also believe that you can use, that nothing is physically preventing you from putting nicotine in your body right now if you chose to?

If you believe all of that, then all you have to add is this:

*I am one hit away from using thousands and thousands of times per year.*

That's the whole thing. That's the magic.

This is not Rocky's law. I didn't invent this. It is the law of addiction — as powerful and immovable as the law of gravity. One hit, for a person like you and me, does not stay one hit. It becomes the next hit, and the next, and the next. It becomes the full spiral back into daily use, into thousands and thousands of doses per year, into everything you've been trying to escape.

And I want to be honest with you about how I feel about this line, because I think it matters. I hate it. I genuinely, personally hate this line. Because there is a part of me that feels, after everything I've been through in my life, that I've earned the occasional cigarette. That the universe owes me that much.

Since I last used, I have been through things that would have broken a lot of people. I left a family business after seventeen years. I started over from nothing. I got married. I got divorced. I watched my mother die. I became the go-to cessation trainer in Hollywood, then packed up my life and moved to Wisconsin for love, where I went from being a sought-after professional to selling auto insurance, and hated every minute of it. My daughter was born thirteen weeks premature. She wiped us out financially. I've been depressed. I've borrowed money. I've lost friendships, work, and a marriage of twenty years. I've watched my father die. I've been estranged from two of my three siblings.

And I have also had beautiful moments I wouldn't trade for anything. Sublime, quiet, perfect moments.

Through all of it, the worst of it and the best of it, I haven't used. And it's not because I'm special. It's not because I have superhuman willpower or some spiritual advantage that you don't have. It's because

I haven't taken the next hit. That's the entire secret. I simply haven't taken the next hit. Because I know, in my bones, with the certainty of fire being hot, that the next hit is the one that leads to thousands and thousands more. And those thousands are not worth any version of the relief that one hit promises.

It isn't the situation that gets us using again. It's that first hit.

Here is the complete technique I want you to use — the full version. Write it down. Memorize it. Carry it with you:

**I'm nicotine addicted. I want to use. I can use — I don't have to stop. Yet I'm one hit away from using thousands and thousands of times per year. For right now, I'm willing to accept this temporary discomfort for the benefits of not using.**

Is there any dishonesty in that? Read it again. Are you a nicotine addict? Yes. Do you want to use at times? Yes. Can you use. Does anything physically prevent you? No. When you do use, do you use thousands of times a year? Yes. And right now, in this moment, are you willing to feel something temporary and uncomfortable in exchange for your health, your freedom, your self-respect, your life?

Say it like you mean it. Not like a kindergartner reciting the Pledge of Allegiance without understanding a single word. Say it like an oath. Say it with the weight of everything you know about yourself and your addiction. Because every word of it is true, and that truth is what makes it powerful.

And I want to add something important: when we first stop, we tend to view every urge as a form of suffering. But the truth is that not every urge is uncomfortable. You might be at a party, feeling good, watching people use, and notice a pull toward nicotine — and that pull might feel almost pleasant. Almost nostalgic. The technique works for those urges, too. Because the technique isn't about managing discomfort. It's about telling yourself the truth.

When an urge does feel uncomfortable, I want you to think of a scab. When you skin your knee, it bleeds, and then — within minutes — a scab begins to form. That scab looks unpleasant. It might feel tight and itchy. But a scab is a good thing. It's your body healing. If you keep picking at it, you delay the healing, and you risk turning healthy skin into scar tissue.

Your urges are scabs. They're the healing process, not an obstacle to it. If you can shift your relationship with them, from viewing them as the enemy to viewing them as evidence that your body and mind are repairing themselves, everything gets easier. Not easy. Easier.

## **Make Your Choice**

Here's something I want you to do that might seem counterintuitive.

I want you to hold your nicotine. Put it in your hand. Don't hide it in a drawer. Don't throw it out in a dramatic gesture. Hold it. Look at it. And then make your choice.

Most people, when they decide to stop, immediately try to get away from nicotine, they throw it out, avoid any situation where it might appear, treat it like something dangerous that has to be kept at a safe distance. That approach has a name: deprivation. And deprivation, as I've said before, doesn't work. It makes nicotine feel more powerful, not less. It makes the urge feel like a beast behind a locked door, straining at the hinges.

I want you to hold it and feel the power of being able to say no. Not because you're hiding from it. Not because you've got it locked away where you can't reach it. Because you're holding it in your hand, you can see it clearly for what it is, and you're choosing not to use it. Right now. In this moment.

That pack, that tin, that device, whatever form your nicotine takes, is magical in a very particular way. You have enough nicotine right there to last you the rest of your life, if you simply don't take the next hit. Understand what I'm saying: it's not the supply that's the problem. It's the next hit. And the next hit is a choice.

Nicotine is going to try to seduce you. That's not dramatic language. It's accurate. It's going to whisper to you at the moments when you're most vulnerable. It's going to make the case for itself in your weakest hours. It's creative and patient, and it knows you better than almost anything else in your life, because you've spent years together.

Here's how I think about it: imagine you're at a party and you meet someone beautiful. You're drawn to them. They're drawn to you. And then your friend pulls you aside and says, quietly, seriously, "I need to tell you something. I know for a fact that this person has an incurable disease. They didn't mention it. But I'm telling you now."

Would you still go home with them?

Nicotine is that person. It's attractively packaged. It delivers a rush in the beginning. It seems to know exactly what you need and when you need it. But it has been promising you disease from the very first hit. That is its nature. That is what it does. It's not personal. It's just what it is. And when you can see it that way, clearly, without nostalgia, the seduction starts to lose its power.

## **Sometimes, Bad Things Happen Even After You Quit**

I want to give you full transparency about something, because I think honesty is the foundation of everything we're building here.

The way I've been framing this, it might sound like a simple bargain: stop using nicotine, and wonderful things will happen. Use, and terrible things will. But life isn't that clean, and I won't pretend it is.

If you use nicotine, something good will come from it. You will feel a moment of relief. And I mean relief in the most literal, physical sense — the tightening loosens, the edge softens, something that was coiled inside you releases. For a moment. That relief is real. I'm not going to tell you it isn't, because you know from your own body that it is.

But here's what comes with that relief. A wave of self-disgust that you couldn't stop. Damage to your health—physical, mental, emotional—that compounds with every use. The slow, steady diminishment of your quality of life, not just in years but in daily texture. The shame of using in front of people you love or respect. The sensation of being a prisoner who keeps agreeing to extend their own sentence. All of that, in exchange for a moment of relief that lasts for maybe the first two hits before it becomes just... using.

And if you don't use? You're going to feel uncomfortable at moments. I'm not going to pretend otherwise. You're going to have urges that are loud and insistent and uncomfortable. But what comes with that discomfort is something that the relief never delivers: self-worth. The feeling of having chosen yourself. The knowledge that you are not controlled by a substance. Better health, not just the absence of smoking, but the presence of energy and clarity and breath. The quiet dignity of not having to hide what you're doing or explain it or apologize for it.

My dream for you, what I genuinely want for you out of today, is a really good uncomfortable day instead of a really bad uncomfortable day. Either way, there's going to be discomfort. The question is which kind of discomfort you want to carry: the discomfort of freedom, or the discomfort of a cage.

The price of freedom is choosing to feel what you feel — and still choosing to be free anyway.

## **Learning from Thomas Edison**

Thomas Edison, one of the most prolific inventors in human history, liked to remind his colleagues of something: you have no idea how close you are to success when you give in to a moment of failure.

Edison knew, with a certainty that bordered on the mystical, that he could turn electricity into sustained light. He was absolutely sure of it. And he was right. But it took him over a thousand experiments before he found a filament that worked, before he understood that it had to be enclosed in a vacuum. If he had stopped at 999 experiments, if he had looked at the evidence and decided this wasn't going to happen, that the effort wasn't worth continuing, we might all still be reading by gaslight.

He didn't stop. Not because he was immune to failure or frustration or doubt. But because he understood that each failed experiment was data, not defeat. Each one was teaching him something. Each one was moving him closer to the answer, even when it felt like moving backward.

That's where you are right now. You may have tried to stop before. Maybe many times. Maybe you've gotten an hour, or a day, or a week, or two years, and then slid back. And every single one of those attempts felt like failure. But Thomas Edison would tell you: you don't know how close you are. You don't know which attempt is the one that works. What you know is that giving up guarantees the answer never comes.

And then there's Helen Keller, who understood something about happiness that most of us spend our whole lives failing to grasp. She wrote that true happiness is not found in immediate gratification. It's found by staying true to a worthy purpose.

Nicotine gives you immediate gratification. It will always do that. It's one of the most efficient delivery mechanisms for chemical relief that humans have ever devised. But it will never make you truly happy. It cannot. Because happiness that is contingent on a substance is not happiness. It's dependence. And dependence, no matter how comfortable it becomes, is the opposite of freedom.

Staying true to a worthy purpose. That's what this is. Your health is a worthy purpose. Your life — in its fullness, its quality, its length — is a worthy purpose. The people who love you, and the version of you that you want to be for them, is a worthy purpose.

A few moments of discomfort in service of that purpose is not a bad trade. It's actually a pretty extraordinary one.

## **The Full Technique — Now Shortened to Four Words**

Between today and tomorrow, I want you to do the technique every twenty minutes instead of every thirty. The reason is simple: urges are like a balloon inflating inside you. If you check in with it every twenty minutes, you can let a little air out before it gets overwhelming. If you ignore it for two or three hours, it's going to hit you without warning, and it's going to hit you hard.

Every twenty minutes. Use your timer. Do the full technique if you have time. And if you don't, if you're in the middle of something and

the timer goes off, and you can only spare five seconds, here it is in four words:

*One hit. I'm done.*

Or if you prefer: one hit, thousands more.

Those four words contain the entire logic of your freedom. They are the compressed version of everything we've talked about. One hit leads to thousands. The whole spiral starts with one. And knowing that, truly believing it, the way you believe fire is hot, is what changes everything.

I also want to tell you what the worst-case physical symptoms of not using are, because I think it's important to have realistic expectations. You might cough more. You might feel a little congested or catch a cold. You might get a headache, a stomachache, some tingling or itchiness in your skin. You might feel lightheaded, or have some digestive disruption for a few days. You might be tired, or have trouble sleeping. You might feel frustrated, restless, and emotionally edgy.

That's it. That is the full extent of it. There is no emergency room visit coming. There is no hospitalization or medical crisis waiting at the end of your first nicotine-free day. The very worst you are going to experience is temporary discomfort — physical and mental. And discomfort, as we've established, is something you're going to experience either way. The question is what you're choosing to exchange it for.

## Exercises

Here's what I'm asking of you before you read the final chapter:

**Say the technique every twenty minutes.** Not every thirty — twenty. Set your timer. Reset it every time it goes off. The full technique when you have time; the four-word version when you don't.

Do this even when you don't feel an urge. Call the urge up. Practice meeting it when you're calm, so you know how to stand in the middle of it when it arrives on its own terms.

**Don't avoid your nicotine.** Keep it with you. Hold it when an urge comes. Look at it. Make your choice, consciously, with full awareness. That's where your power is — not in hiding from the substance, but in standing in front of it and choosing differently.

And understand this: if you don't use between now and tomorrow, that will be a genuinely good thing. If you do use, that will be uncomfortable, not because I'm judging you, but because you'll know what you're giving up. Either way, discomfort is on the menu. I'm just hoping you'll choose the kind that comes with freedom on the other side.

My father was right. If you're not making mistakes, you're not really trying. The mistake was picking up nicotine in the first place. But you are here, now, trying to learn from it. That means you're trying. That means you're doing something.

And you are closer to success than you know.

## Chapter Six

# Your Mind Isn't Always Your Friend

**T**ake a breath. Look at where you are right now. You have more than twenty-four hours off nicotine. When was the last time that happened? For many people who come through this program, the honest answer is: I can't remember. Or maybe: never. Not a full day with nicotine sitting right there, accessible, and still choosing not to use it.

That is not nothing. That is extraordinary. And I want you to sit with that for a moment before we move on, because your mind, and we're going to spend a lot of time on your mind in this chapter, is not always going to give you credit for what you've done. So I'm giving it to you now, directly: what you've done in the last twenty-four hours is real, and it matters.

Have you noticed anything different? A slightly different taste in your mouth. A subtle shift in energy. Something quieter around the edges of your anxiety. Maybe just the absence of a familiar weight, the ongoing calculation of when the next use is coming, how to make

it work around your schedule, what you're doing to yourself. That calculation has been with you for a long time. It's been running in the background of your days. And for the last twenty-four hours, it's been quieter.

Turn the volume up on that. Write it down if you need to. Because your mind is about to start working against you, and I want you to know what's coming before it arrives.

## **Nicotine Will Always Try to Seduce You**

Your mind is not going to be your friend all the time. I want to say that plainly, without softening it, because the people who get caught off guard by what comes next are usually the ones who weren't warned.

Your mind is going to get bored. It's going to get creative. It is going to generate arguments for using nicotine that sound, at various moments, completely reasonable. Some of them will sound like logic. Some will sound like wisdom. Some will sound like self-compassion. Your mind is very good at this. It has had years of practice finding ways to make using feel justified.

Here's a partial list of what it might say. You will recognize some of these. Maybe all of them.

- Nobody will know.
- I'm still healthy.
- I can get away with this a little longer.
- This is just who I am; it's part of my identity.
- There's a real camaraderie to using with friends.

- It's not that bad.
- I can always quit later.
- It helps me focus.
- It helps me relax.
- It helps me cope with stress.
- It's a reward.
- It's how I deal with boredom.
- It's how I deal with grief.
- One won't really hurt — I've got this under control.
- All the cool people do it.
- I'm a rebel; nobody tells me what to do.
- It would feel so good right now.
- We're all going to die eventually.
- I've earned this.
- I'm drunk. I'm stressed.
- I'm angry.
- I'm sad.
- Feeling sorry for myself.
- Just this once.

And sometimes, stripped of all rationalization, your mind will just say: forget it. I want to.

Your mind is going to run these commercials. Some of them will air at 10 PM tonight. Some will air ten years from now, on an otherwise ordinary Tuesday, completely out of nowhere. And the thing I need you to understand is that this is not a sign that something has gone wrong. This is just your mind doing what minds do: looking for relief, looking for the familiar, looking for the thing that used to work. The urge is not the problem. The urge is just your condition. Wanting to use is not failure. Using is the problem.

When those thoughts come, and they will come, don't argue with them. Don't try to logic your way out of them. Just recognize them for what they are: commercials. Your addicted brain advertising a product you've decided to stop buying. You can watch the commercial without picking up the phone to order.

## **A Brief History of Tobacco**

I want to give you a little context for what you're dealing with, because I think it helps to understand that this substance didn't just appear. It has a history, and that history tells you something important about the nature of what you've been up against.

Tobacco is a plant. It grew wild in exactly one region of the world: along the eastern seaboard of North America, from what is now Virginia and the Carolinas down through Florida, into New Mexico, Honduras, and Cuba. The leaves are enormous — three to four feet tall, nearly two feet wide. It's a striking plant.

Before Columbus arrived in the Americas, there were only two places in the world where smoking existed. In the Far East, people were

smoking opium. And among the indigenous peoples of the Americas, tobacco was smoked in ceremony, in what they called the peace pipe. This wasn't a daily habit. It was ritual. When the pipe was passed around a circle, it was a declaration: everyone in this circle is at peace with each other.

When Columbus and his crew made landfall, the medicine men and chiefs offered the peace pipe as a gesture of goodwill and trust. And Columbus, having no framework for what tobacco was, took a hit. It made him cough. It cleared his head. It gave him a jolt of something he'd never felt before. He thought he'd discovered a magical herb. The people on his ship described the experience in their journals as watching a man drink fire.

When Columbus returned to Spain, he brought tobacco with him and demonstrated it for the court of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella. He blew smoke and extolled its virtues, and they were enchanted. Within a generation, tobacco had become fashionable among the wealthy. Tobacco was a symbol of status, sophistication, something that set the rich apart from the people too busy surviving to indulge.

Within thirty years of that demonstration, tobacco had spread to every corner of the world. Every trading post. Every continent except Antarctica, where it simply won't grow. Thirty years, from the 1490s, to global ubiquity.

That is the thing you've been up against. A substance with five hundred years of cultural momentum behind it. A substance that was literally introduced to civilization under the premise that it was magical. You were never fighting a fair fight. And yet — here you are, twenty-four hours in, still standing.

## Learning from Sigmund Freud

There is a book called *Licit and Illicit Drugs*, published by the Consumers Union, that catalogs the major mind-altering substances and their histories. And in its discussion of nicotine, the authors chose one particular person as the defining example of what this addiction looks like at its most extreme: Sigmund Freud.

Whether or not you agree with Freud's ideas, the man was not a fool. He was one of the most analytically rigorous thinkers of the twentieth century. He spent his life examining the human mind, its defenses, its rationalizations, its extraordinary capacity for self-deception. And he could not stop smoking cigars.

From the age of thirty-eight until his death at eighty-three, Freud suffered from serious heart trouble. Forty-five years of it, beginning with arrhythmia, progressed to angina attacks and palpitations. He was a heavy cigar smoker throughout. He also endured sixteen years of oral cavity cancers: cancers of the gum, the tongue, and the roof of his mouth. Surgeons repeatedly removed tissue. Eventually, at the age of seventy-nine, they removed his entire jaw and replaced it with an artificial one that never properly fit. He lived in considerable pain for the last years of his life. He died of cancer at eighty-three.

And he never stopped smoking.

Here is the part I find most remarkable. Freud, the man who invented the concept of the unconscious, who spent his career unmasking the hidden logic of human behavior, described not smoking as a torture beyond human power to bear. Not the forty-five years of heart disease. Not the sixteen years of having his mouth surgically reconstructed piece by piece. Not the ill-fitting jaw and the daily pain. The torture, in Freud's accounting, was not smoking.

He also coined the term oral fixation, and he used it to explain his own inability to stop. The theory went that perhaps the cigar was a kind of surrogate object from infancy, that his compulsion was rooted in some deep developmental need. It may even be true, in some sense. But I want you to notice what he was doing: he was using his extraordinary intellectual gifts to construct a story that justified continuing to act like an addict. He was using genius-level rationalization in service of his addiction.

Your mind will do the same thing. It doesn't need to be a genius to do it. It just needs to be practiced, and yours has been practicing for a long time.

The lesson isn't that Freud was weak. The lesson is that intelligence, insight, and self-awareness are not immunity. Addiction doesn't care how smart you are. It doesn't negotiate with credentials. What it responds to is the simple, repeated decision not to take the next hit. That's the only thing that works. Not analysis. Not understanding. Not waiting until you've figured out exactly why you're an addict. Just: not the next hit.

## Chapter Seven

# Conclusion: This Is Really Just the Beginning

I want to be straight with you about something: I don't have anything left to teach you. Everything you need, you already have. The technique is yours. The understanding is yours. The twenty-four-plus hours of freedom—that's yours, and nobody gave it to you. You did that yourself.

This isn't the end. It's the beginning of what you're going to do with everything you've learned. And going forward, the practice looks like this:

For the first week, keep using the technique every twenty minutes as much as you can. After that, you can start to scale back, but I'd suggest at a minimum once an hour, indefinitely. Not because you'll always be in crisis. You won't. But because the technique is a reminder, and reminders matter. The urge to use will come back at unexpected moments — sometimes days from now, sometimes months, sometimes

years from now on an ordinary afternoon when nothing in particular is happening. The technique is your anchor. It takes twenty-five seconds. Say it when you notice the hour changing. Say it when you see someone else using. Say it when you drive past a gas station or a pharmacy. Let the world be your cue.

You may also have dreams where you use. Vivid, realistic dreams where you can almost taste it. You wake up, and for a moment, you think it really happened. Check yourself. Smell yourself. You'll realize quickly: I was dreaming. I'm still free. If those dreams start recurring, try this before you fall asleep: tell yourself you can smoke all you want in your dreams. Give your mind permission in sleep. That tends to take the power out of it. The addict brain stops bothering with the dreams when it realizes it can't get a reaction.

There's something else I want to name, because it's real and it happens and nobody warns you about it. When you were using, you probably had moments where you looked at yourself and thought: God, I wish I could quit. And now, on the other side, there will be moments where you look at yourself and think: God, I wish I could just use. I want you to recognize something: those are the same feeling. Just reflected. You were uncomfortable using. You'll be uncomfortable not using, at least sometimes. The discomfort doesn't prove that you made the wrong choice. It just proves that you're human, and that change is uncomfortable, and that your brain doesn't let go of old patterns without some protest.

The attitude you bring to that discomfort is everything. How well we do at anything is largely a function of how we orient ourselves toward the experience. A positive attitude about discomfort, viewing it as the cost of a life you actually want, makes it navigable. Viewing it as proof that something is wrong makes it unbearable.

You are not at the end of something. You are at the beginning of the version of your life that doesn't have nicotine in it. That version has more air in it, more money, more self-respect, more years. It doesn't have the constant background calculation of when and how. It doesn't have the shame. It doesn't have the slow subtraction that addiction makes from everything it touches.

One hit, and all of that is back on the table. So don't take the next one. Not forever — just not right now.

Right now, you're free. And that's enough.

*One hit. I'm done. Have a great life.*