

How Hypnotherapists Can Profit from Individual, Group and Corporate Smoking Cessation

There are many methods by which people stop smoking. In 1992, scientists at Iowa University studied the results of 600 studies of nearly 72,000 people in Europe and the USA who had successfully quit smoking. They found that hypnotherapy was the most effective method by which those people had successfully quit smoking, superior to aversion therapy, acupuncture, nicotine gum, books and mail order advice, and willpower.

Yet despite this scientific proof, and the enormous pressures being placed on smokers to quit the habit, hypnotherapy has not yet achieved the approval of “officialdom” (government, the medical profession, health promotion agencies, and so on) as an effective means of smoking cessation. As a result, each hypnotherapist has to go through the long, painstaking process of building up a reputation for enabling smokers to quit, which in turn brings more clients through word of mouth from satisfied clients, referrals from health professionals, media publicity and other promotional means. Any hypnotherapist who has built up a practice which enjoys a steady stream of smoking cessation clients has had to “reinvent the wheel”. He or she has had to develop and use therapeutic techniques which enable people to stop smoking and stay stopped permanently. He or she also has had to develop marketing techniques which educate smokers about what hypnotherapy is, and how it can help them become non-smokers. Most importantly, he or she also has to convince those smokers to pay money to the hypnotherapist for it. It is a long, difficult and uphill struggle. Unfortunately, many committed, well-meaning hypnotherapists fall by the wayside and drop out of the field because they don’t get enough clients to make it worthwhile. Certain local hypnotherapists have undoubtedly built an individual reputation for getting results with smoking cessation, but this has not necessarily translated into hypnotherapy *in general* becoming an officially approved technique for smokers who wants to quit.

There are several reasons for this. First, the word “hypnotherapy” covers many therapeutic approaches which only have in common the fact that they use communication with the client’s unconscious mind. With authoritarian hypnosis, the therapist pro-actively guides the client towards the desired outcome and forcefully and directly tells him or her what to do. Hypno-analysis involves searching the client’s past for the root cause of a problem and understanding that cause differently before moving forward towards a solution. Hypnosis is used as part of, or based on, therapeutic schools such as cognitive therapy or Jungian analytical psychology. Hypnosis can be used as a means of transmitting concepts from Eastern mysticism, such as the chakras (from yoga) and meditative states (from Buddhism). Transpersonal and esoteric hypnosis involves past life regression, astral travel, communication with the spirit world, channelling, and transferring the client’s consciousness to an entity such as a “power animal”, a tree or the planet earth. My favourite approach is Ericksonian hypnotherapy, which recognises that the client already has the resources for transformation at an unconscious level, and seeks mobilise those resources in order to enable the client to achieve the desired goal in a way unique to that particular client.

So a session of “hypnotherapy” for smoking cessation could involve many different experiences, depending on the training and preferences of the person doing the therapy. Now with most issues with which the hypnotherapist deals, there are many possible ways to achieve a successful result for the client. Each approach within hypnotherapy can and does help clients achieve emotional well-being, confidence, weight loss, freedom from a phobia, better skin, pain management, improved sports performance and so on. With these areas, there are many possible desirable outcomes, and many possible ways of getting there.

With smoking, it is different. Smoking is unique because there is only one acceptable outcome: the client must stop smoking and stay stopped for good. If the client goes to hypnotherapy in order to stop smoking, and feels emotionally happier as a result, but goes back to smoking the following day, that is no good. If such a client experiences a deep trance in which he or she feels a mystical connection with the entire universe, but continues smoking 20 cigarettes a day, that is no good. Conversely, if a client thinks that he or she “wasn’t hypnotised”, or feels emotionally no different, but does stop smoking and stay stopped, that is a successful result.

The hypnotherapist has to enable the client to both stop smoking in the session itself and know how to stay a non-smoker permanently by being prepared for every situation in daily life after the session. First, the therapist has to effectively communicate with the client at an unconscious level so that the desired

internal transformation is achieved and the client becomes a non-smoker. The therapist must use a reliable trance induction and a powerful message once the client is in trance in order to do that. Second, the therapist has to educate the client in techniques to gain control over his or her experience in the moment and make improvements to it. Approaches such as neuro-linguistic programming (NLP), cognitive self-talk, self-hypnosis, and stress management have many such techniques. Once the client knows them, he or she will be well prepared to stay a non-smoker in every situation in daily life where the temptation to smoke “just the one” cigarette might arise. If the client uses these techniques, he or she will overcome that temptation and stay a non-smoker. Every element of the session must both connect with the client’s experience and guide the client towards his or her new non-smoking life.

It is essential to know how to enable the client to become a non-smoker, and to be able to modify the approach to the unique requirements of every client. Each individual is unique, with a particular model of the world. Each smoker adopted the habit in unique circumstances, has a distinct relationship with the habit, and unique internal resources which can be mobilised to enable him or her to become a non-smoker. The therapist has to find a balance between ensuring that every element of the therapy gets across to the client and tailoring session so that everything connects with the client’s experience. Any “mismatches” between the client’s experience and the message being received from the therapist will undermine the credibility of the process. The client might think, “That doesn’t make sense to me – this whole hypnotherapy business is obviously rubbish” – and the client is likely to stay a smoker. Every link in the chain must be strong. Every aspect of the client’s experience must be dealt with fully and his or her creative faculty mobilised in order to enable him or her to become a non-smoker.

Another vital aspect of success is the therapist’s attitude. With scientific and psychological studies of hypnosis, the experience of hypnosis is standardised and objective. The researchers “keep their distance” from the subjects and take an attitude of “let’s see what happens”. The results are then recorded objectively. This is perfectly fine for scientific studies.

The hypnotherapist who wants to be as effective as possible takes a very different approach. The therapist recognises certain facts. The client used to live as a non-smoker, before taking up the habit and perhaps after having quit before. The client consciously wants to become a non-smoker. The client has all the resources – at both a conscious and an unconscious level – which are required in order to become a non-smoker. The skilled therapist knows how to access those resources using communications tailored to the individual client. Therefore the therapist commits to doing whatever it takes to work with those facts and enable the client to become a non-smoker. Before the session, the hypnotherapist uses self-hypnosis to build up his or her own subjective belief in, and passion for, the client’s success in becoming a non-smoker. During the session itself, this belief and passion manifest themselves in the headlong emotional force with which the therapy is delivered. While the therapy is delivered with precision and congruence with the client’s experience, this emotional force and enthusiasm itself “infects” the client and acts as a gateway to the client’s unconscious resources. Effective hypnotherapy is never merely about reciting words on paper. This emotional power of unshakable belief in the client’s capacity for transformation is equally vital.

This commitment does not stop at the end of the allotted time for the hypnotherapy session. At the end of the session, the therapist checks his or her work to ensure that the client is now a non-smoker and knows how to stay one in all situations. If there is anything less than certainty on the client’s part that the desired result has been achieved, the therapist continues the session until both therapist and client know that the session has been successful. If that means extending the length of the session by fifteen, 30, or even 60 minutes, so be it.

If, after the session, the client reverts to smoking, then the therapist *never* takes the attitude, “Oh, well, that’s your look-out – it’s no skin off my nose.” Instead, the therapist offers a follow-up session in which the relapse is reframed as feedback, not failure. At the follow-up session, the therapist questions the client as to how, precisely, he or she reverted to smoking. Where, when, and in what situation, did the client light up that cigarette? What was going through his or her mind when it happened? Then the therapist shows the client how he or she could have used the techniques taught in the first session to have stayed a non-smoker in that situation. By careful examination of the client’s description of his or her experience, both the therapist and the client can gain precise information about how the client relapsed. The therapist can show the client how to work with the techniques of NLP, cognitive self-talk, self-hypnosis, stress management, or whatever is most useful for that client, in order to stay a non-smoker permanently this time. In effective hypnotherapy, nothing is ever random, haphazard, or left to chance.

The hypnotherapist who is seriously committed to the client’s success accepts no limitations on what approaches to use – provided that they are effective. The therapist pro-actively assumes success and is

willing to use whatever approach is most likely to bring that success. For smoking cessation, it is useful to rely at least partly on an authoritarian approach. My own view is that with issues other than smoking cessation, permissive and indirect techniques are generally preferred to authoritarian and direct ones. With smoking, however, permissive and indirect techniques are all too often interpreted by the client's unconscious as granting permission to continue smoking. So with smoking, it is essential to get the message across in an authoritarian and direct manner. People do respond positively to such a commanding approach in certain contexts. A sergeant-major uses an authoritarian approach in training and leading his troops. He does that to get the best performance out of those troops, who respond to the discipline by becoming more effective soldiers. It is much the same with the smoking client. The client knows that the habit is already damaging his or her body, and is potentially fatal. The client knows how much money he or she has already wasted on cigarettes, and other disadvantages to being a smoker. The client has already been encouraged to quit by public health advertising, medical professionals, and perhaps also employers, family members and other influential people. So the client will accept a high degree of authoritarian command to stop smoking and stay stopped, and his or her unconscious will respond positively by finding the way to make that happen. Telling the client in trance to stop smoking in a direct and authoritarian manner works well as a part of a comprehensive approach that deals with every aspect of the client's experience of the smoking habit.

Getting individual clients

Millions of smokers who have been "sitting on the fence", perhaps intending to quit some day but not committed to doing so immediately, have already decided to make this year the one in which stop smoking. They are looking for ways of doing so. Every smoker knows – from advertising and public health promotion - about Nicorette patches and other nicotine replacement therapies from widespread advertising. They have probably heard about Zyban and other drugs available only on medical prescription.

There are numerous independent and unofficial smoking cessation services, such as reading the late Allen Carr's *The Easy Way to Stop Smoking*, group therapy sessions based on Mr Carr's techniques, acupuncture, laser therapy, self-help CDs, cognitive therapy, and the 12-Step Programme (Nicotine Anonymous). There is also hypnotherapy.

In order to acquire clients for individual hypnotherapy, you will have to convince them that paying the fee to you is the best possible use of their money, and hypnotherapy is their best opportunity to become a non-smoker. Never take clients for granted. It is our job as hypnotherapists to provide continuous public education as to how they can achieve their goals – such as stopping smoking – through unconscious transformation via hypnosis. This education can be provided through public speaking, leaflets and brochures, press articles, your website and face-to-face meetings with both potential clients and health professionals who might refer them. The focus of this education should be on the individual and his or her potentials to achieve goals. Emphasise that "hypnosis" is only a label that we place on techniques for accessing those potentials. Give factual descriptions on how people start smoking and how they can stop and stay stopped through hypnotherapy. Do not seek to rush or high-pressure anyone: let them know that they can come to you when they are ready to do so. Do your best to ensure that in your local community, everyone who intends to stop smoking knows about hypnotherapy as a potential method of achieving that goal. Never denigrate other smoking cessation methods, or other hypnotherapists. On the contrary: praise and congratulate them on their success in helping so many people achieve freedom from smoking. Explain that different people stop smoking by using different approaches. Here is how hypnotherapy works and these are its advantages. Explain how the new laws banning workplace smoking present an excellent opportunity to commit to becoming a non-smoker. Encourage people to enquire with no obligation to buy, and answer their questions fully.

This process of public education will position you as an expert to whom people in your community can turn in order to become non-smokers. Make sure that you continue to actively educate the local population even when the clients start to flow in. There will still probably be quiet times of the year, such as mid-summer and the month of December, when few clients are coming in, so make sure you use that extra time productively by sustaining your promotional efforts.

Group smoking cessation events

Some hypnotherapists organise smoking cessation events where people pay a modest sum out of their own pockets to attend a seminar at which all attendees are hypnotised to stop smoking. Do be aware that this is not a project to be taken up lightly if it is to be financially successful. Certain individuals have made a name for themselves by organising smoking cessation groups (not necessarily using hypnosis). These names include Gillian Riley, Neil Casey and most famously the late Allen Carr. They achieved success with these seminars by running them consistently for year after year, building up a reputation for getting results, getting media publicity, and writing books and other “spin-off” products. It is this consistency and repetition of the same event in the same place again and again which gradually makes such events into an institution which everybody knows about, and from which significant financial returns can be gained. People like to be with people, and often prefer to hear your message live and in the company of others rather than reading it on paper or attending for one-to-one therapy. The late Albert Ellis, the psychologist who founded Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT), who is now in his nineties, held group events open to the public at his New York headquarters every Friday night for decades on end. At a cost of \$5 to attend, it is undoubtedly the cheapest night out you can get in Manhattan. Ellis, who was after all one of the world’s leading psychologists, knew that such affordable access to him directly benefitted both members of the public and practitioners of REBT.

If you are interested in running group smoking cessation events, make sure that you are committed to running them again and again, year after year. You may well be shocked at just how much effort, time and expense it involves to get people to know about your event and convince them to part with money to attend it. You are taking a significant financial risk with the cost of renting the venue and – especially – the printing and distribution of leaflets and any advertising that you do. Make sure that you cost it all out before proceeding. Do not risk money that you can’t safely afford to lose. You must recognise that organising a one-off smoking cessation group event is likely to either lose money or at most break even. If you can commit to running group event at the same place at regular intervals, so that word of mouth about your results spread, then in the medium-to-long term you can make good money from it. You can also acquire one-to-one hypnotherapy clients for other issues, sell products and attendance at seminars on other subjects, and otherwise benefit from “spin-offs”.

Corporate smoking cessation services

A hypnotherapist who wants to go beyond one-to-one smoking cessation would probably do better to focus his or her marketing efforts on organising corporate smoking cessation events. These are events where a group of employees – usually about ten at a time – attend a seminar where you take them through the entire process of becoming – and staying – a non-smoker. With the workplace ban coming into force, many companies are interested in a solution which enables their employees to quit smoking. Your task is to educate corporate decision-makers about how your seminars can achieve that goal, and convince them to take the decision to go ahead with the idea.

It is often claimed that the moment you mention the words “hypnosis” or “hypnotherapy” to corporate decision-makers, they will refuse to have anything to do with your services. I disagree. I think that you need to educate these corporate people just as you have to educate individual potential clients who pay for hypnotherapy out of their own pockets. Given that individuals are happy to attend for hypnotherapy when they recognise the benefits of doing so, there is every reason that corporate decision-makers should respond in a similar way. People do not become members of a different species when they rise up the corporate ladder. They respond to benefits and take decisions which they are convinced will benefit their companies and workforces. If, as a result of your educational efforts, they come to believe that hypnotherapy is a means of achieving a smoke-free workforce, then they will order your seminars. Explain that you provide smoking cessation seminars for corporate clients, and that you use the methods which are known to be most effective in helping people stop smoking, including NLP, cognitive therapy, stress management and hypnotherapy. These methods are used because of their effectiveness, not simply because you have a taste for the bizarre.

Once you achieve positive results with the first batch of a company’s employees, they will encourage more employees to attend further seminars, and are also likely to recommend you to corporate decision-makers at other companies to provide the same service there. It can provide a knock-on effect which can provide you with a good income for life – provided that you continue to deliver successful results time after time.

Therefore, your educational efforts directed towards the corporate world should meet the decision-makers where they are. The business world hears a great deal these days about concepts such as “ethical entrepreneurship” and “corporate social responsibility”, in which businesses are encouraged to take a broader view of their impact on the community and the environment than merely the financial bottom line. While it is certainly a good idea to mention that angle while approaching the corporate world, it is much more likely that in practice they will buy from you when you show them the financial savings they will gain from a non-smoking workforce. By quantifying and monetising the amount the company will save from each employee who quits smoking, you will encourage the decision-makers to order your product. (They may then justify the decision by talking about “ethical entrepreneurship” and “corporate social responsibility”!)

Once you have received an order for your smoking cessation services from a company, make sure that you are ready to go immediately. You should have PowerPoint slides, handouts, CDs and equipment for the seminar ready all the time in case some company calls you in response to your promotion and wants a smoking cessation seminar for their staff this Thursday afternoon. Once you have a commitment and a date for the seminar, make sure that everything is prepared thoroughly. You must convey an impression of organisation and professionalism to everyone in attendance – and that impression must be accurate. Also, you must get good results. Offer attendees back-up support by phone or e-mail, a follow-up seminar, even one-to-one therapy – whatever they require to stop smoking and stay stopped. Providing that you are getting positive results and turning smoking employees into non-smokers, the corporate world will pay you substantial fees. Whatever you are charging will be small change compared to the increased value to the company of each employee who successfully quits smoking as a result of your efforts.

Ultimately, success in hypnotherapy in the era of the workplace smoking ban – in one-to-one therapy, with groups and in the corporate sector - depends on three things.

The first is a thorough mastery of the techniques which actually produce results. Not only must you have an effective system, it is also equally important to learn from every single client who attends for hypnotherapy to stop smoking. Your clients will provide you with an education in what techniques are actually effective with real people in the real world which you won't get from any hypnotherapy textbook (useful though it is to study the key books in the field). Indeed, it is from the more “difficult” clients that you learn the most. They will challenge you to find ways to stretch your ability, and to think creatively in applying techniques in a different way or developing new methods of your own. When you are working with groups - whether at your own event where attendees have paid out of their own pockets, or for employees of a particular firm – build up a group dynamic and camaraderie in which attendees provide mutual support and a positive atmosphere. Strike a balance between communicating with the group as a whole and ensuring that each individual attendee is benefiting from the event.

Second is the knowledge of how to market your individual, group and corporate services. Some hypnotherapists seem to be under the impression that there is one secret “key to the universe” in marketing which by itself will result in a flood of individual, group and corporate clients. In reality, no such “key to the universe” exists. Successful marketing derives from presenting your message in a variety of formats (leaflets, brochures, public speaking, networking, mailings, press articles, Internet and so on) in which you explain how you help people stop smoking in terms they understand. You must always emphasise the benefits of your services to the potential client, and only then explain how you can help them achieve those benefits. You must then repeat that message again and again to new audiences so that every potential client and company in your locality knows what you have to offer and how it can help them. You may well get fed up of repeating yourself to so many different listeners, but for someone hearing you for the first time, it is all new, and you must explain it in full with every message.

Third is your determination and commitment to see everything you do with individual clients, groups and corporate seminars right through to the finish every single time. You must strive to get every element right first time, every time. Successful hypnotherapy – especially with smoking cessation – does not leave anything to chance.

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