

Former



EVA
JANSSEN
Inside
Business

smoker found quitting

Smokers, don't even think about throwing away your cigarettes just yet. Peter Lambert can turn you into non-smokers while letting you puff away.

It may sound impossible, but Lambert, who heads X Smokers, a smoking-cessation program in London, insists his method, that gradually weans smokers off cigarettes, is easier than going cold turkey, as many do with New-Year's-resolution bravado. Those who ditch the dependence all at once are often overwhelmed by their psychological addiction and the resolution goes up in smoke, Lambert says.

His own battle with tobacco lasted at least a decade, but when he finally won - smoking his last cigarette March 16, 1977 - he decided to help other smokers, founding X Smokers in 1978.

"Gaining control of an addiction has nothing to do with intelligence or education," Lambert says. Rather, it's about a psychological need that disguises itself as pleasure. "Every smoker thinks he or she enjoys smoking."

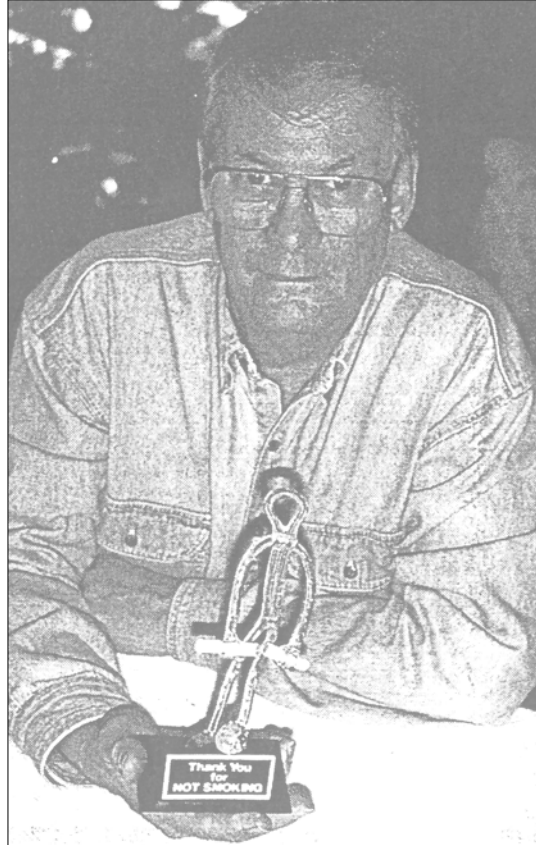
But they will go to all lengths to get their fix, Lambert says. "A coffee is not a coffee without a cigarette. A meal is not ended unless you have one or two cigarettes. A car won't start until you light up first. This is just the

smoker's thing."

Like many smokers, he got hooked early. At 10, he took his first puff and by 18, he was smoking steadily. For the next 25 years, Lambert grew more addicted. He estimates he tried to quit 30 to 40 times. Stopping immediately - known as cold turkey - was too hard a shock to his system. So, he tried hypnosis three times, nicotine replacement pills and a church-run program that tried to scare smokers with horror movies and doctor lectures. Nothing worked for more than two weeks.

He was so addicted, he installed a device on his bathroom wall so he could smoke in the shower. Toward the end, he smoked two packs a day, hating it yet yearning for it and fearing a future without cigarettes. "I would go to bed at night kind of looking forward to the next morning when I could smoke again."

Finally, out of desperation, he researched smoking addiction and decided to try a behavior modification method. After a coffee, he would wait 15 minutes to light up, extending the period gradually until he could go without a cigarette. He applied the same exercise to other activities and gave himself four weeks to quit: It worked, largely because he came to understand his addiction, he says.



EVA JANSSEN The London Free Press
Peter Lambert founded X Smokers after perfecting a smoking cessation program

Now, he considers himself, not an ex-smoker, but a non-smoker. The difference, he says, is an ex-smoker still gets tempted on occasion - he doesn't.

Buoyed by his success, he tried his method on a group of 51 smokers who signed up for his eight-week program. Forty-nine quit completely and, five years later, 31, or 63 percent, were still not smoking.

Success rates

Lambert says the one-year average success rate of 70 per cent is higher than with other methods, that range from books and audio/video tapes to electronic and "thought-changing" products, all available on the Internet.

For every smoker, it seems, there is a program or

product. Several agencies, including the Lung Association, provide treatment and at least one program, titled Out and Free, is geared to gays and bisexuals. The Quit Smoking Company in Georgia offers a CD-ROM program that gets smokers to relax so they'll quit in seven days, an "Instant Quit Smoking" computer program that provides techniques and analysis as well as video game sections, a smokeless cigarette substitute, and a hand-held computer that tells you when to smoke, gradually reducing the number of cigarettes.

Lambert gets smokers to understand why they smoke, how to lose the urge and how to deal with stressful events that call for a cigarette. He has worked with about 5,000 smokers. Some

work

clients smoked three or four packs a day, and one man claimed he smoked five packs - half a carton - daily.

The trick, Lambert says, is to convince people they have the ability to take charge of their lives. Helen Selkirk, an 84-year-old who graduated from the program 15 years ago, says she felt stronger after dumping a 54-year habit.

"I've never been really afraid since then, because if you can face up to that and win it, I feel (you) could fight anything else."

She started smoking at 16 and eventually couldn't stop. Selkirk smoked close to a pack and a half a day by the time she joined Lambert's program. "I just felt I had had it up to here," she says, motioning with her hand. "The smell of your clothes, the holes burned in them, it got to be more expensive ... All of a sudden, I was sick and tired of smoking."

Selkirk says she couldn't set a goal when she tried on her own to quit. It was hard

X SMOKERS

A smoking-cessation program that teaches people to modify their behavior so they lose their desire to smoke

Based: London

Owner: Peter Lambert

Background: Founded in 1978 after Lambert tested method on himself and won

Contact: 457-6399

even in a program and Selkirk says she sometimes phoned Lambert for encouragement. But since her last cigarette, she has saved time and money for other interests, she adds.

Lambert has not returned to smoking either, but his business has reduced in

recent years. Initially a part-time venture, X Smokers grew rapidly in the '80s, drawing an average of 50 participants per course. (They were allowed to smoke during sessions.)

In the early '90s, Lambert gave up his camera and photo repair shop and turned

full time to X Smokers. At its peak, the business had five instructors and netted Lambert a reasonable income. But then, as suddenly as it lit up, it soon flickered close to bankruptcy. "The nicotine patch had arrived. It was seen as a magic cure, not just by smokers but by

the medical profession," Lambert recalls.

Also, many of the remaining smokers aren't sure they want to quit, he adds. About 25 per cent of Canadian adults still smoke regularly.

Lambert says today, he barely covers his costs. He teaches his program four

times a year and averages about 20 people per class.

"It's still a shadow of its former self," he says. "People are still looking for that magic instant cure."
