

STEP ONE

We admitted we were powerless over nicotine -- that our lives had become unmanageable.

Step One was not an intellectual exercise. It was a feeling in our bones, in our hearts, and in our stomachs. It was a gut-wrenching coming to terms with the fact that we were hooked on a drug. We became willing for the first time to give up any notion of controlling the use of nicotine. We took a realistic look at the power nicotine had over us and we saw that its control was absolute.

It was very hard to admit anything about ourselves, much less that we were powerless over nicotine. We smoked and loved to smoke for many reasons -- because it made us look sophisticated, made us feel good, reduced stress, helped us concentrate, had a calming effect, and so on. But for one reason or another, nicotine eventually stopped working: health fears, feelings of self-loathing, guilt, pressure from friends. Life as a smoker became unbearable. We began to think about stopping.

Desperately, we tried modifying our nicotine use by not using it at work or in the bedroom or in front of the children, sitting only in a particular chair while we smoked, or only when out of doors. We switched brands, used tar reducing cigarette holders, smoked only "natural cigarettes," smoked only at certain times of the day, with certain people, at special events. Then we began to consult the experts. We sought help from physicians, hypnotherapists, psychiatrists, acupuncturists, self-help books, and countless smoking cessation programs. Sometimes we were able to quit, but we could not stay quit. Nothing worked.

Deeply demoralized, we turned to Nicotine Anonymous as one more possible solution. To our great surprise, we found people who were not using nicotine because they had admitted they could not stop. They accepted their utter lack of control over nicotine, and offered us support by inviting us to join them and do the same. There was support from the group, and as the use of the pronoun "we" throughout the Steps suggests, the process of recovering from nicotine addiction was not and is not a journey that one travels alone.

We realized that we were truly addicts and that we used nicotine for the same reason that alcoholics drink -- because we could not stop. Left to our own devices we would continue to

smoke, continue to destroy our bodies, suppress our feelings and alienate our families, lovers and friends.

Joining Nicotine Anonymous involved acknowledging that we alone could not solve our problem with nicotine. After the countless attempts to control our "habit," it was almost a relief to give up and seek help. We learned about turning the tables, surrendering, and admitting our powerlessness. We accepted our total lack of control over nicotine.

We realized that using nicotine was more than a bad habit; rather, it was a symptom that our lives were out of control and unmanageable. The destructive aspects of our addiction went far beyond the obvious damage we did to our bodies. The more we looked at the role nicotine played in our lives, the more we realized how much it controlled us. Nicotine determined when we would take breaks, where we would eat, who our friends, lovers, and associates were, how we spent our free time. We never went anywhere or did anything without first checking our supply. Yet we went to great lengths to conceal our addiction from others and ourselves. We used mouthwash, room spray, smoke-eating machines, to name but a few. Many of us even began to hide when we used -- avoiding the presence of friends and loved ones, or sneaking a cigarette in the toilet stall at work. There was no way to hide, and the very attempt was a lie. Our lives were lies. They were out of control -- unmanageable.

Understanding and experiencing both parts of Step One, that we are powerless over nicotine *and* that our lives had become unmanageable was the beginning. We were ready to take Step Two.

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