

INTERVIEW WITH DAVE GIBSON

As an ex-smoker, how much did you smoke and how hard was it to quit?

As a real heavy ex-smoker, smoking for twelve years, the irony is that I never planned to become a smoker. I never made a decision that 'this is cool, I want to do this.' I think I thought, like a lot of people probably, 'oh a harmless cigarette here or there is not going to hurt' and then I had a few of those 'harmless' cigarettes and before I knew it, I was smoking a packet a day. But because I was young, I was like twenty-one or something, I thought 'that's fine, I'll probably quit.'

I made all these rules for myself. The first rule was 'OK, I'll keep my smokes for a year and then I'll quit. Easy.' So a year came around and I managed to break that rule and come up with some new rule, which was, 'by the time I'm twenty-five, I've still got plenty of time to get my health back and be young and fit so twenty-five is fine for quitting'. Then twenty-five came around and I think by that stage I was a pretty serious smoker and had been smoking a pack a day for three to four years. At that point it was just like, 'fuck it, thirty, thirty will be it.'

So thirty went past and that's when the guilt about smoking, about slapping my good health in the face, started getting desperate. I was aware of my smoking but I didn't know how to get out of it. I was aware that I don't really even notice most of the cigarettes I'm smoking because they're just so subconscious. I do it without even thinking and afterwards I'm like, 'you're so stupid Dave. You're not getting any benefit from this cigarette at all, you're not getting high, you're not even having a change of state.'

Yeah, it was weighing on me and like most smokers I was also very fearful about the day that I stopped because you forget that life is great without cigarettes. All the things you naturally did before you started smoking, like conversations, like cups of tea - like this cup of tea I'm having right now. Once you get into the smoking trap, it's like 'I obviously have to have a cigarette with my cup of tea'. I'd be going, 'this cup of tea is great, this is all cool but it'd be better with a cigarette' but actually it isn't. It doesn't enhance shit, it's a subconscious thing. You start to realise these things.

What do you think about that image of being 'a rebel' that seems to go with smoking?

It's not about being a rebel because rebels have freedom to do what they want and be free from the establishment and from rules, and when I need to smoke I'm just not free at all. I'm trapped, you know? I can only go to certain cafés that I know have got a smoking section. I spend the whole time in a bar unhappy because I'm either outside smoking and going 'I wish I was inside having a drink' or I'm inside having a drink and thinking 'I wish I was outside smoking.' I'm conflicted the whole time. I'm never talking to people for more than ten or fifteen minutes. I'm always saying, 'oh good to see you man but I gotta go out and have a smoke now'. If they were a smoker that'd be fine but there's a whole bunch of people that I am friends with who don't smoke. Now that I quit smoking

I'm at ease when I go out. I can be social. I can have a beer. I was at the last Silver Scrolls and I ended up in a conversation with Adam, who's the head of our work label, and I actually had a massive talk to him for about an hour. but that would never have happened before because I would've only had ten minutes before needing a cigarette.

The funny thing, or the irony about all of this is the freedom I feel from quitting as opposed to what I assumed would be a lacking or a wanting feeling from not smoking.

If you could go back in time, what would you say to yourself when you were smoking a pack a day?

I would've said, 'that's a long time to fuck up your body - that's a lot of abuse'. That's putting twenty-five cigarettes into my body every single day for twelve years. You don't feel cool. I never felt cool, I just felt like a dumb arse, like, I'd never have told anyone that but I did. I'd probably tell my younger self that I was just stupid and that there's never going to be a convenient time to quit smoking. There's not going to be this perfect nice day like New Years Eve. I had tried to quit on a bunch of New Years Eves, as everyone does. I think I tricked myself so the next day I was like 'well this is still kind of New Years Eve night so the second is the day when it begins', stuff like that. It turns into a decade real easy man.

Tell us how you quit...

I did have to have a few goes at it. I think I tried to quit a few times really badly but I don't think I was psychologically ready. Then I read the Allen Carr book and that really helped for about a year. I can't remember exactly when that was - maybe when I was twenty-seven. Then I fell into another four years of smoking because I had just one cigarette one night after that year and it was my downfall. I didn't really even want that cigarette or need that cigarette, I just did some weird psychological thing in my head where I said to myself, 'I don't want to be scared of cigarettes' and I had a cigarette at Dragon Bar behind Poppa Jacks, and bang! A week later I was smoking again.

My most recent attempt to stop, which feels different and amazing was also with Allen Carr, but going to the course. It's kind of like going to a triple A meeting. It feels like you're with a whole bunch of real hardcore addicts. I'm feeling really, really good about that and really hopeful and, you know, free. As I was saying before, there's a genuine sense of freedom from quitting. That's a whole different thing for me because now when I look at a smoker, I don't wish I was them. I actually feel like man I'm glad that I'm free from that. I'll walk to my café in the morning and I see this one guy who's trying to get in a cigarette just before work at 8.50am and then he'll go through nicotine withdrawal until the next time he gets his cigarette fix, which is at lunchtime. When I see him, I'm so glad I'm free from that.

So when you were quitting, was it important to have support around you from other non-smokers or ex-smokers?

Yeah, there were a few of my friends who went along to the Allen Carr meeting as well. So there were about five or six of us that went who had all tried to quit before and were feeling pretty desperate. I think that did help because we're all a crew and so far every single one of those people has been sweet, not even one cigarette. But the idea is that when you do quit you're not quitting it in a way that makes you want it like chocolate or ice-cream or sex or something. Psychologically you need to get to a point where you understand that this thing is fooling you. It's fooling you on every single possible level. It's a deception and if you can truly believe that, then you're ready. People might say that I'm brainwashed and I'm like 'well if I am, I'm stoked about it because I really believe now that there're no possible advantages to get from cigarettes or nicotine.'

What did you replace smoking with to get through the hard times and the cravings during quitting?

During the course we got to a point where we looked at what a nicotine craving was and forced ourselves to overcome it. Just imagine if a nicotine craving was a smack in the face that would actually hurt and feel more intense than those nicotine cravings. If someone said to me, 'Dave, you've got to get twelve smacks in the face, I'm going to hit you in the face twelve times and then you'll be free from smoking.' You'd probably go 'yeah OK, I can do that.' You just wait for the cravings to come and then let them pass each time and then you're like 'ah sweet.'

So you still get that nicotine craving but then if you go 'how painful is it actually if I don't have a cigarette?' because the pain is just a psychological 'snap' that you feel. If you can get to the place where you're like 'OK I feel it but I'm not going to have a cigarette and I'm going to kill that nicotine craving just a little bit each time' then it gets easier. Two days of that and knowing that after those two days I'd be free, and that the cravings are not as bad as a smack in the face meant in about a week I was starting to act normally and thinking less and less about cigarettes. What you've got to understand is that our smokers go through this the whole time. All a smoker does all day is get that craving and try to relieve it with a cigarette; another nicotine pang, another cigarette and so on.

Do you have any advice for people who haven't tried quitting yet or are currently trying to quit?

Yeah I'd definitely recommend trying the [Allen Carr course](#) and reading the book. I'm sure there are [plenty of other ways](#) that people have quit too.

The thing about smokers is that every single smoker thinks they're going to quit. In their heads they're thinking, 'I'm not going to quit now mind you' or 'I'm not going to quit in the near future but I'm going to definitely quit at some point.' Most smokers have this massive internal struggle of wanting to keep smoking and wanting to stop smoking as

soon as possible. There aren't many other activities in life that you have that type of conflict going on in your head about. There's definitely no positive activities in your life that have that conflict.

Now that you're a non-smoker, how do your smoking friends and other smokers act around you?

The funny thing is nobody's even noticed the difference in my behaviour. If you ask some people, they probably still think I smoke, do you know what I mean? My life is still the same, I still go to the same places, I still go to the same café. I still sit in roughly the same seats, although I can sit inside now if it's cold. I still go to the same bars, I still do the same things, still talk to the same people, you know? Yeah, the acceptance of being a non-smoker is sweet. I think people don't really notice it. If I was there freaking out going, 'oh man I'm dying for a cigarette' then they'd probably notice that, but so far (fingers crossed) I'm not worried about that.

Do you think your friends who still smoke are happy smoking or do you think they want to give up?

Most of my friends that I talk to, they've got that conflict, you know. They think they're happy but they also want to stop. There's no one I know who says 'I'm going to smoke the rest of my life, just going to smoke until I'm dead.' Everyone says, 'of course I'm going to quit.' It's just how long are you going to take?

How are you feeling about being a non-smoker?

I feel great. I don't feel like Superman - I'd be lying if I said that because I haven't all of a sudden put steroids into me but I have taken out a really harmful thing in my body and I notice the difference. I used to be quite lethargic, especially when I was on tour, and any time we got into a town I'd want to go to sleep. I was like, 'what time's sound check?', 'OK, sound check's at 4pm, it's midday, sweet, I can get two to three hours sleep.' I'd just go to sleep and then I'd go to sound check and I'd probably try and go to sleep after sound check too depending on what time we played.

It was amazing because I was in Wellington recently, we just played a one-off show down there at this tattoo convention. We got into Wellington and the guys are like, 'let's walk into town' and I was like, 'yeah, I want to do that too.' I didn't connect straight away that this was because I'd stopped smoking but as I was walking into Wellington, which is a really cool town I was thinking, 'man I'm missing out on enjoying all this kind of cool shit' as I would usually not care and just go to sleep because I wouldn't be up to doing anything.

That heavy and lethargic feeling has left me and that's one thing I have noticed substantially. Things like walking and experiencing towns that I'm in. Before, I travelled all around the world and went to sleep in really cool places. You could say smoking is really super cool and shit like that and it makes these things more romantic, but not if

you're asleep, you know? Psychologically, it's helped me too because it's quite a negative way to live – you're beating yourself up and you feel a massive amount of guilt and you just feel stupid.

What was one of the hardest things about being a smoker?

I think the worst thing was the constant cloud, it was almost like a depression about not being able to quit this thing, how stupid this thing is, how you wish you had never started this thing. That's just constant and you'd have little breaks from it where you'd manage to forget about it for a little while. But it's still a constant there in the back of your mind, this heavy dark feeling saying 'you're fucken stupid for doing this and you know it's not doing jack for you at all.'

So what's changed?

I feel clear. I get things done quicker because smoking is also quite time consuming. You spend a lot of time smoking. It's not very productive. The productiveness now is good.

What are your thoughts on the tobacco industry?

I wish they didn't exist! It's nasty and horrible and it's amazing that a drug that kills so many people is completely legal everywhere. Especially compared to other harmful drugs, which are often illegal but kill hardly anybody. I wonder how society would react to banning the industry completely given the fact they are here and people do smoke and if they were banned maybe there'd be some kind of underground black market of cigarettes. But I do wish they didn't exist. I think the people who run tobacco companies and market cigarettes ... well that's a pretty heavy burden on their shoulders. I wouldn't want to be in their shoes. I certainly wouldn't want to be sleeping in their bed.