

Interview with Jerome Ropati

Interview by Matai Smith

How would you describe your smoking status?

Ex smoker. I started and stopped smoking within the one year when I was 12, which was quite young. I was a bit of a bad boy back then. My cousin got me in to smoking, I thought everyone around my age group was doing it so I thought I'd join in, be part of the clan, be cool. I thought I would be looked at as strange and weird, be left out if I didn't.

What prompted you to try to quit?

What prompted me to try to quit was getting caught by my parents. I did not want to let them down because I knew if they found out they would be very disappointed and I just didn't want to see my parents like that but I was quite fortunate that I got sick before they even found out.

You didn't start up after that?

No that was it, yep.

No cravings or anything like that?

Yeah there was no cravings. I remember the smell of when I did get sick and that's what I hated and that's why I still hate it right now.

Do you think it's as socially acceptable to smoke now as it used to be?

I don't think it is socially acceptable to smoke now. I think when you look at pubs and cinemas and especially sporting events they do make an emphasis on keeping certain areas smokefree, which is great. I think it is good for the spectacle and it's great for society.

Why do you think so many other people still take up smoking today?

I think some young people today still take up smoking simply because their friends are doing it, their mates are doing it, their cousins do it, their uncles do it, maybe they have a lot of time on their hands and they think it's just a thing to do to burn up time and you know it's a habit, it becomes a habit, they like doing it.

I think it is because it is the way our culture is, it's the way we've been brought up, it's in our neighbourhood, it's the thing to do and I think we do watch a lot of TV and we get a lot of what they do on TV as well.

What would you say to young kids today doing it for those reasons?

Look I would say, 'If you would like a healthy future then stop'. I would say, 'Think about what you want to do in the future'. I think a lot of people that I know would like to do

something sporty or something around those areas and smoking doesn't help when you are wanting to achieve that.

Did you think it's ever uncool to refuse a cigarette or choose not to smoke?

I think me personally it isn't uncool, it's a right of yours and I think you are doing quite well if you do stand up and refuse one. But within our youngsters there is a lot of peer pressure out there.

What do you think smoking says about a person?

I think when you smoke it says that you don't really care about your body, you don't really care about your future and I think you know you wouldn't stab yourself and you wouldn't poison yourself. I think that's exactly what you are doing.

In your opinion what's the worst thing about smoking?

Look in my opinion the worst thing about smoking is not only does it affect your body but you teach others the same habit and you know there is a ripple effect there, it goes down throughout the people that you influence, the people that respect you, the people that look up to you and it continues and you are responsible for that.

As an athlete what are your thoughts on smoking and how it affects your performance and reputation within the Warriors?

As an athlete smoking does affect those two things, reputation and performance quite a lot. I think more importantly in terms of performance you know you want to be at your peak, you want to be the best, you want to excel and smoking only hinders that. I think as a reputation we athletes do endorse a lot of healthy eating, healthy living and we try to endorse our sport as a way of life and trying to teach youngsters that there is an option rather than hanging out in gangs and hoods and stuff like that to play sport and to enjoy it and I think smoking hinders all that. Smoking does stop the fun in the game and what we're trying to promote.

As athletes we try to promote sport as fun, as something to do in your spare time, as a place where you can gain friendship and have a social life, and also a career. And as athletes we try to hit our peak, you try and be in the best physical condition and smoking hinders that, smoking stops that. Smoking doesn't do well for your body and you know the public do know that

Would you go out with a smoker?

Would I go out with a smoker? No I wouldn't.

Why is that?

I wouldn't go out with a smoker simply because I am against it, I don't like it, I have seen the effects of it and I am married.

What ways can someone support a friend or a whanau member to quit?

One way I think you can support a family or friend who was smoking is accountability, is to encourage them and gain trust over them and just explain the effects of smoking and try to encourage them and keep them accountable to try and stop that. You know people are different, it takes some people a year, some people it takes 10 years but I think if you are persistent in wanting that person to stop smoking, if you love them enough you will keep them honest and accountable.

Looking back would you consider quitting smoking as a real achievement of yours?

Yes I would. Looking back I would consider that an achievement, quitting smoking simply because if I can remember I didn't really enjoy life or sport back then and smoking did cause me to head in the wrong direction. I was hanging out with the wrong friends.

Do think using help, like Quitline or patches means that you are too weak to quit by yourself?

No I don't think so. I think if you seek help it shows a sign of maturity and shows that you are concerned about your future and yeah.

What advice would you give to a younger brother or sister who has started smoking socially?

That's a good one. The advice I would give to a young person who was smoking would be you know to stop really and show them examples. I would give them an example of someone who is smoking and who hasn't gone very far and the example would usually be a close friend or close family member that they know.

Do you have any advice for young people that are trying to quit?

I would say keep going. I would say stick at it, persevere. It's pretty hard but you know you will benefit from it in the future. You will be able to do a lot more things, you know.

Do you have any advice for friends or family that are trying to quit?

The advice I would give to family and friends and people who are trying to quit is just realise the effect that you have on your family and friends and those who look up to you cause you may be influencing them in something which you wouldn't want to be responsible for.

Do you have a view on the tobacco industry?

My thoughts on the tobacco industry is that look it will always be there but if we can, one smoker at a time help each other to quit then things could be different.

Do you know anyone who has used Quitline, patches or nicotine gum or anything like that to quit?

No I don't. Yeah I don't know anyone who has used them but I have seen people just quit without using any of them and it's taken them a long time. I think if they used Quitline or if they used patches or whatever you know then maybe they would have quit a lot faster.

What are your thoughts on Mt Smart stadium being smokefree for the Warriors games?

Yeah it's really good. You know when you are not playing and you are roaming around the stadium and you see a lot of kids and families, a lot of families do flock to the games and that's good and it just disrupts the game when you see someone smoking within the area and I think Mt Smart's done a great job in having certain areas where you can smoke, just keeping away from the family environment because they are really enjoying the football and the environment and the last thing they want is a puff of smoke in their face. It's really good for families and friends to come and watch the game in a smoke free environment.

Do your parents smoke?

My dad currently smokes and he has tried numerous times to quit but it just hasn't happened. He finds it very hard.

What are some of the ways he's tried to quit? Has he contacted Quitline?

No, my dad is a different sort of character. He doesn't think he needs that kind of stuff. If he is determined to do something, he thinks on his own and as much as I have wanted him to, wanted to tell him how to, or give him advice on how to quit I think it's impossible in his situation.