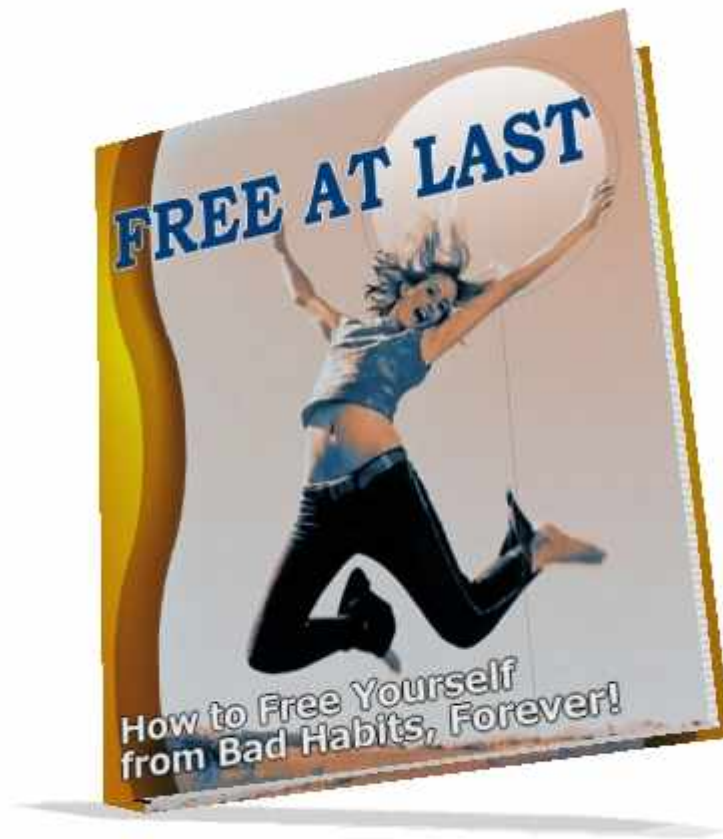


FREE AT LAST

How to Free Yourself from Bad Habits, Forever!



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INTRODUCTION

Alice: Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?
The Cheshire Cat: That depends a good deal on where you want to go.

CAN PEOPLE REALLY CHANGE?

David Lucero knows where he wants to go: He wants to go to El Paso, Texas.

David is about sixty years old, I think. For the last three months, he has been living on a sidewalk across the street from a Greyhound bus station.

I don't know how long David has been homeless. He is one of America's walking wounded—mentally ill, unable to take care of himself, unable to cope with the business of life. He is always happy to talk, although you have to repeat yourself a few times before he can understand you: David is losing his hearing.

One day I tried to take him to a shelter for the homeless. All he had to do was get in the pickup truck. He had to make a decision: Get in or stay on the street. The right decision could have started the cycle of healing and change, but it was more than David was capable of doing that morning. He decided to stay on the street, waiting for his imaginary ride to El Paso.

When I meet people like David, I tell myself that Lewis Carroll didn't make anything up when he wrote *Alice in Wonderland*. I have met many people who are flesh and blood Cheshire Cats, Mad Hatters, and Queens of Hearts.

I come into contact every day with people whose lives and families have been torn apart by bad habits: people addicted to cigarettes, alcohol, and illegal drugs; over-spenders, overeaters, and chronic worriers; negative thinkers, procrastinators, and people who won't forgive themselves for something that happened long ago.

I have seen firsthand how bad habits keep ordinary people from living happier and healthier lives. Everywhere you look, people want to know why they are unhappy. And they want to know what they can do about it.

Plenty of talk shows offer a constant menu of miracle cures for every type of bad habit imaginable—everything from quick weight-loss programs to 20-minute lessons in positive thinking that promise to cure depression. We are constantly bombarded by programs that promise effortless and immediate results: *Lose weight fast, while eating as much as you want! Guaranteed to work! Sure.*

We are overwhelmed with solutions today. And the more solutions there are, the harder it is to find one that works. Many people have failed so many times that they've almost given up the battle. Others gave up a long time ago.

Establishing new priorities

Is it possible to free yourself from bad habits? Can people really change in any meaningful and long-lasting way? Can I change myself? The answer to each of these questions is “yes.” But you can't change in 24 hours, as some programs and self-help books promise.

My research, as well as my experience and common sense, tell me that *anyone can change*, but at the same time, I know that people need a compelling reason to change.

What does it mean to change? To change means to establish new priorities—to choose a behavior that's different from the one we're using now. David Lucero is stuck on the street, waiting for a solution that doesn't exist. When a real solution is right in front of his nose, he can't see it.

I don't know when his hearing started to deteriorate. And even though he can see, I have a feeling that he has been blind for many years. I don't know the story of his life, but I suspect it is a story of bad habits and bad decisions.

I'm sure it's a story filled with bad people and bad situations, too. But at some point we have to discard the factors, the people, and the situations that shaped us. Focusing on the past won't help us solve today. At some point we have to take responsibility for our own lives.

I suspect that bad habits and bad choices are what brought David to this point—day after day and year after year—until he hit rock bottom. That's always the way it is.

Learning how to free yourself from bad habits starts with the realization that we cause our own feelings. I am the major cause of my own problems. The moment I grasp that simple fact, I'm ready to step into the process of self-change that will lead to freedom from the habits that keep me from living a more satisfying life. And when I'm free from my bad habits, the people around me will be free from the person I used to be.

All people can bring about superficial changes in themselves. But freeing yourself from a self-destructive habit like smoking or overeating requires a deep, long-lasting change. A bad habit is like an iceberg. You can't beat the habit if you approach it as if it were only as large as what you can see on the surface.

Franz Kafka said, "a book must be the axe for the frozen sea within us." Any book or program that aims to help people break bad habits must reveal the whole iceberg that lies below the surface."

You can't eliminate the whole thing in one day, but if you take a step-by-step approach, you can eliminate the bad habit sooner than you thought possible. It is going to take effort on your part.

You can't eat whatever you want and lose weight, no matter how many times you hear it on the talk shows. But you can lose weight and you can learn to enjoy healthy foods more than the unhealthy foods you're eating now.

David has constructed a verbal cage for himself. His definition of the problem seems to give him no choice; he avoids having to take responsibility for himself. To receive the benefits that come with daily meals, hot showers, clean clothes, a bed, medical attention, companionship, and as much help as a social worker can give him— bus fare to El Paso, if that is indeed where he should go—he must break out of the cage.

But David is convinced that he cannot go to the shelter, for doing so would mean that he might miss his ride to El Paso. That is how people get trapped in verbal cages of their own making.

I talk about some extreme cases in this report because I see them every day. But I also think that these extreme cases make it easier to see the real issues and challenges faced by people who are not in such obviously life-threatening situations.

David isn't conscious of the elaborate mechanisms he has constructed to hide the truth from himself, but he is hiding it all the same. To stop bad habits, we must stop hiding the truth from ourselves.

Overeaters, smokers, and chronic procrastinators have more in common with people like David than meets the eye. We all go to great lengths to hide the truth from ourselves about the destructive nature of our bad habits; too often, lives and families are destroyed before we become aware of the verbal cages that keep us trapped in self-destructive behavior.

Does professional therapy work? Can it help people break bad habits before the habit destroys their lives? The dropout rate is astonishing: *45% of clients who seek a professional therapist drop out of therapy after two or three sessions.*

Do programs help? Millions of smokers have quit forever *without following a treatment program.* On the other hand, many people who try a smoking-cessation program are not able to quit, no matter how many different programs they try.

Some research suggests that for *every person who quits smoking by following a treatment program, there are almost twenty persons who quit on their own.*

What conclusion should we draw from all of this? It's pretty clear, I think. You have a better chance of freeing yourself from a bad habit by becoming your own coach, by taking responsibility for your own program.

The goal of this report is to give you the information and strategy that will empower you to free yourself from bad habits. Millions of people have succeeded in breaking a bad habit and so can you.

The six stages in the process of self-change, breaking a habit

Change is not an event, but a process. Change happens through a series of stages and most successful self-changers fail at least once before they succeed. Willpower alone won't do it.

You need to understand the cycle of change or you risk substituting one bad habit for another, as so often happens when ex-smokers satisfy their craving for "something" by overeating. Success depends on having the right information and knowing how to use it.

Researchers have identified six clear stages in the process of successful self-change:

1. *Denial*
2. *Awareness*
3. *Preparation*
4. *Action*
5. *Maintenance*
6. *Termination*

For most people, the process of breaking a bad habit is not a straight path that takes them from one stage to the next. Successful self-changers usually follow a path that's more like a spiral: They move forward, go back to a