

Chapter 1

THE ACCIDENT CHAIN AND PROGRAMS OF BEHAVIOUR

You alone must do it, but you can't do it alone.

O Hobart Mowrer

Throughout my flying career I have been educated in many areas of human understanding in an effort to be able to make better decisions when in charge of many lives. The concept of the accident chain is something that has really had an impact on my life and I wish to share it with you now.

Imagine a chain, simple links that go together one by one to form a length. Chains can be made of different materials of variable thicknesses that affect the way they perform. This chain can be of any length. Disaster comes when the chain breaks. In an aircraft accident this can be



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catastrophic not just for the person, people or situation creating the links but also for the people around them.

The accident chain for an aircraft can begin forming with the decision to take off when the weather is not ideal. The links can accumulate if the pilot is tired or distracted by external factors. Perhaps a decision to not put enough fuel on board to get to safety if the destination runway is flooded or damaged will place another link in the chain. The pilot may become stressed by the thought of what may happen and may lose focus. This could be enough to misjudge the distance to a hillside, and then an accident happens. The chain breaks. Apply this accident chain theory to smoking and it begins at the first cigarette. Without knowing it you have just created a link. Then the second cigarette and the third have created new links. Chain-smoking establishes a weak link in your chain. You might then ignore concerns from your doctor or a family member and continue smoking when they have noticed irregularities in your behaviour or health.

For your chain to break and an accident to occur, the number and quality of links in your chain need to reach a point where the chain can no longer maintain its integrity.

Using this concept, can you see your accident chain being formed and where it may be strained? Write down some of your links below.

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Can you identify any weak links?

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The great thing about recognising the accident chain is that the formation of the chain can be stopped at any time, before it breaks. Recognition in itself can be curative.

Programs of behaviour

There are different arguments as to whether smoking is to be called an addiction or a habit, so from now on I am going to refer to it as a program of behaviour.

Our brains are incredible things we often unfortunately under uses and do not completely understand. They have evolved over tens of thousands of years to be learning and storage powerhouses. Like a robot that has been set to follow a continuous program, our brains run regular patterns so we can operate during our day and remain safely within our comfort zones.

In karate training we repeatedly practise the same physical actions and patterns of movement. As time passes, the physical actions become faster, more controlled and precise until they can be performed as a matter of programmed reflex. The brain has created a strong link to that movement and can trigger the body to perform it quickly and automatically.

Without going into a litany of scientific detail our brains work like a three-dimensional city with streets that

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interconnect in all directions. In our regular day there are paths that we travel often and there are others that we travel infrequently. Most of the brain remains untravelled but when we do take a new path we create a connection and a fresh neural pathway is born. If we travel that path only once, the link will be weak and may eventually fade until only a trace remains.

The strongest links are the ones we travel regularly and automatically without thinking. To be able to consciously perform every single daily action would overload our conscious minds so this automation has become a natural part of our makeup. The brain with all of these links cannot operate consciously all of the time as there are just far too many processes for us to be in control of every step of the way. This automation can show up in our everyday behaviour with unconscious patterns and actions such as nail biting, chewing the lower or upper lip, nose picking or constant 'sniffing', fidgeting or facial tics.

Have you ever driven your car down a regularly travelled road and suddenly become aware that you were lost in your thoughts and were operating in automatic mode? When you first drove a car you would have leap-frogged and ground the gears. Now you can drive, eat food and hold a conversation without giving much thought to your actions. Can you remember when you first smoked a cigarette? Do you remember what may have been your particular motivational factor for doing so? Was it to be like your favourite movie star? Was it to be rebellious? Were you simply curious? Was it to be like your friends and be accepted as a part of the group? Was it to be like

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your father? Did you want to feel like an adult, a feeling of ‘growing up’ and ‘arriving’?

A lot of the smokers I have interviewed can recall when they began. A common link was the power of friends or role models and the peer pressure to feel as though they are a part of the group.

While sports is by far the best avenue to attract, sample and influence our core target smokers, it's not the only way. International movies and videos also have tremendous appeal to our young adult consumers in Asia.

Philip Morris internal document (1990) — sourced from WHO report on smoking 2008

The first cigarette you smoked created a new connection—a new neural pathway—and each cigarette that followed reinforced that link to create one that is now strong enough that you travel it automatically on a daily basis.

These regular highways can be diluted or weakened over time (which is the aim of patches, gum and other alternative methods), but some situations can arise to create immediate changes which can cause links to be instantly weakened and even severed.

Today is one of those opportunities to sever the link you have with smoking.

The links in our brain serve to satisfy our basic human need for comfort and continuity. As humans we love to be

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comfortable, and to put ourselves out of our zone can set the alarm bells ringing. It's time to silence the alarm bells (fear and doubt) and start to experience a few new things. I'm not going to ask you to lie on a bed of sharp nails, swim with sharks or wrestle live crocodiles but what I will do is ask you to look at some different ways of thinking and shift you out of your comfort zone. My objective is to get you to step off the regularly travelled highway and change your association with smoking.

It won't be too hard, will it?

By the end of this book you will be having fun with the techniques and will be hungry for opportunities to expand further.

When was the last time you were in a classroom or a gathering that went over a period of a few days? Did you notice that everyone prefers to sit in the same seat? Upon entering the room the scenery would have been unfamiliar. Therefore the first place you sat would have become a 'safety point' for you and the situation would have been the same for the other attendees. You would have become familiar with your particular view and this position is where you would have created your baseline, your reference to the new surroundings to which you would return every day thereafter.

I enjoy going into classrooms and training groups and moving around into different seats just to see what people's reactions are going to be. The most extreme reaction was that of a young man who threw me out of 'his' seat and hurled my bag across the room. Obviously

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it will take a bit more work for that particular individual to make any changes he requires in his life.

This illustrates what a habit, pattern of behaviour or a program can do to control our actions and kick in our defence mechanisms. Throughout our lives we perceive and interpret each experience to create certain conditions, rules and guidelines that we then follow until another experience comes along that causes us to change or amend our rules. In the case of the classroom the brain fixes a safety point and it is from this position that we refer to everything else.

The lessons are always presenting themselves to us but whether or not we are ready to see and accept them is the controlling factor as to whether we will change or not.

Dealing with the triggers

You may have been smoking for many years so it will be conditioned into your system as a regular program of behaviour. Light up, raise, puff, extinguish. Thirty times per day. Can you see how easily it can reinforce itself?

This program can and will have many factors that will set it off into automatic mode.

For example:

- when you wake up
- when you are bored



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- before/after sex
- before a car or plane journey
- before or after a meal
- stressful situations.

There are going to be many things in the day that will trigger you to light up a cigarette and take that big, first drag.

Reflect now upon your regular day. What are the triggers and regular things that cause you to reach for a cigarette?

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Resist the urge to reach for one now. I know that your subconscious trigger just kicked in.

Remember to breathe.

Why do you have a cigarette at those times?

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How does that cigarette make you feel?

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What are the physical sensations that you experience?

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Being able to identify the triggers that cause you to smoke is a great way to be able to interrupt your smoking program. Linking your conscious mind with the subconscious, automatic triggers will enable you to realise when you are about to run your program and interrupt or cancel it before it takes control.

Could your unconscious triggers be a weak link in your accident chain?

Take some time now to sit and think about what causes you to light up. Be sure to write them down and add to the list as they come to you. Referring to this page will help you in the future.

What causes me to light up a cigarette?

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If you are a *sometimes* or *social* smoker then you may realise that your pattern of behaviour is linked with social situations. You have a drink in one hand and a cigarette in the other but normally during the day you don't feel the *need* to light up.

Regular smokers will generally have set some subconscious rules for when they light up and may often light a cigarette without even realising it. I've witnessed smokers fumbling for their lighter and packet when they have already got a cigarette dangling from their lips. It's like fruitlessly searching all of the regular places you keep

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your sunglasses when they have been perched on your head the entire time.

Overly stressful situations will be a particular trigger for regular smokers. The word *stress* these days has become overused and associated with hard times and negative effects on the body and mind.

Stress can be defined as pressure, mental or physical strain, a system of forces producing or sustaining a strain, to exert pressure on, to emphasise.

It is here that I need to stress that 'stress' is perfectly normal and is necessary for us to grow both physically and mentally. In the building and repair of bones and muscle our bodies use stress in the form of torsion and strain. This strengthens and reinforces existing material as well as creates new structure and fibres. Mental stress helps us to exercise our brain and allows connections to be formed for the signals to pass through. Stress in normal amounts results in a calming effect and can even assist us in our sleep phase.

You can get too much of a good thing though. Too much mental and/or physical stress can have negative effects on the mind. Our bodies use stress to grow but when the stress becomes too much the effects can become destructive to our physical and mental wellbeing. One can experience symptoms such as:

- agitation
- depressive behaviour

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- difficulty sleeping
- anxiety and worry
- reduced concentration and focus
- speaking or acting harshly towards those around you
- blood pressure problems
- external physical symptoms such as hair loss or discoloration.

We will each develop different methods for dealing with the normal levels of stress as well as the abnormal levels. It is how we deal with our stresses that will determine how our minds and bodies respond. Some people may interpret and express excess levels of stress more physically while others may simply repress any feelings or visible emotions. When overly stressed, we may feel as though our heads are being crushed in a vice while other times we may actually rise to the occasion and take the challenge head-on.

When smokers are stressed and reach for a cigarette, even the motion of doing so can have a calming effect before they even take that first drag. The act of inhaling deeply when taking that first drag allows oxygen to enter the body and the partnered effect of a nicotine-induced feeling of euphoria can allow smokers to calm their nerves rapidly. The basic human need for safety is found in the regular program of smoking, something that may have been a constant for smokers for years and been accepted as their 'de-stress program'.



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Recognising how you deal with your daily stressors and the eventual excessively stressful moments can be instrumental in how you can change your pattern of behaviour to avoid reaching for a cigarette in the future.

Dealing with stress is important to being able to function properly in your daily life. There are tools and methods available for you to manage in your own way. You just need to discover what works for you.

Humans have a wonderful range of emotions and feelings and all of them have a purpose—to deny them can be damaging.

If you feel justifiably angry how do you express your anger?

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If you feel sad, how do you express your feelings?

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If you feel happy and elated, how do you express yourself?

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Clear communication with others and understanding how you manage your feelings, emotions and everyday experiences can help you to live a balanced and healthy life.





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Do you presently experience any of the symptoms such as anxiety, depressive behaviour, agitation, reduced concentration or difficulty sleeping?

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Do you feel overly stressed at home or at work?

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Do you feel tight in the chest or have difficulty breathing in stressful situations?

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Do you experience headaches on a regular basis?

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I will show you some coping methods but if you feel overly stressed at home or at work or are experiencing negative physical symptoms then it is important that you find a professional counsellor, psychologist or doctor. Openly communicating with someone you can trust and who can allow you to 'vent' in a controlled manner and help you find solutions is wonderfully curative. Instead of pills and potions I believe you should find someone who can guide you personally, teach you coping methods and show you how to solve the problems you face.

