

KILROY CAFÉ

Philosophy for the Modern Age

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WORDS DON'T WORK

Sorry, Folks — Education won't change impulsive behavior.

By GLENN CAMPBELL

Get this into your thick skull: Words don't work.

No form of cognitive education will change an emotionally-driven behavior.

For example: Drug treatment programs don't work. Addicts who go through an addiction treatment program—of any kind—rarely have a better relapse record than those who don't go through it. Even the few programs that can prove, scientifically, that they work better than a placebo have such a low statistical success rate that they are hardly worth their huge cost. Quite simply, drug treatment is a fraud.

I'm not going to offer proof here, but just imagine if what I am saying were true. It would mean that advertizing campaigns, governments programs and court-mandated classes to treat addicts, drunk drivers and other impulsive offenders are a waste of money. It would mean Alcoholics Anonymous is a joke. It would mean Nicoderm, Weight Watchers, Bowflex and virtually every other product or service intended to modify habits and appetites are consumer rip-offs.

Think of the DARE program in public schools (Drug Awareness Resist-

ance Education). The idea is to teach kids the dangers of drug abuse so they won't try it themselves. Parents, teachers, police and politicians love DARE. Social scientists hate it. Statistically, the program is useless in discouraging future drug use (if you compare two schools with and without the program). It may even be worse than useless, giving kids a virtual consumer's guide to drugs for future reference.

Am I saying that when Britney Spears checks into a very expensive rehab program, the treatment itself is completely ineffective in changing her future addictive behavior? Yes, that's exactly what I am saying.

If my claim is correct, it would mean that if your spouse smokes, drinks, overeats or watches too much sports on TV, there is virtually nothing you can do to stop them short of walking out.

Ah, but THAT sometimes works.

Threatening to leave doesn't work, but *actually* leaving might, provided you really go, close the door and don't turn back. Six months later, after you are long gone, your ex-spouse might realize, "Hmmm, maybe I should change."

There are only two things that can change an emotionally-driven behavior from the outside: (1) You can fundamentally alter the environment in which it takes place, or (2) You can allow the person to experience the full consequences of their actions.

If you remove a kid from a drug-addicted family and place him in one without drugs, his own chances of addiction will be greatly reduced. That's the environmental solution. It could work, but only if it's a radical restructur-

ing that cuts to the core of the problem. Surface changes won't do.

If someone insists on drinking too much, and he suffers because of it, the best thing you can probably do is let him suffer. Those are the consequences. If he experiences them enough he might change or he might not (or he might be killed in the process), but his chances of changing are much greater than with any external program.

The technique you shouldn't bother with is talking the person out of his addiction. It doesn't work, and it's a waste of breath.

Taking away a smoker's cigarettes? Don't fall for it, even if the smoker begs you to. He'll kill you for those cigarettes later. You've also fallen into a trap, because you have substituted your own responsibility for what should be his.

The "will" to quit smoking, lose weight, quit porn or stop playing video games can only come from within. It comes from a combination of repeated consequential pain and the understanding that no one is going to save you but yourself.

Any treatment or education program says the opposite: "We're going to save you." As long as the addict is allowed to believe this—that his addiction is someone else's problem—then he is never going to change.

YOU can change whenever you want—You just have to believe you can.—but no one can impose this belief on you from the outside.

—G.C.

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