HOW THE HISTORY OF SMOKING CAN TEACH US TO BECOME BETTER SMARTPHONE USERS IN TEN LESSONS

Growing up in The Netherlands in the seventies I was surrounded by smokers. At my baby shower my room was filled with smoke. At birthday parties it was my job to make sure that the glasses with cigarettes were always filled. When in our car, me and my brother sat on the back seat while our mom and dad were smoking with the windows up. Our doctor smoked during consultation hours. Even our famous orange soccer players lighted a cigarette during the halftime break.

Remember, in the seventies, we already knew tobacco was bad for us. We just didn't care. Everyone smoked. Always, everywhere. Thoughtlessly. If you did not smoke you had some explaining to do. Just like using a smartphone today. Everyone uses a smartphone. Always. Everywhere. Thoughtlessly. And if you do not, you have some explaining to do.

But we smoke less. The percentage of people smoking in the Netherlands declined from 86% in the seventies to 22% now. And we take much more account of each other. Smoking at a baby shower is passé. That is good news and it poses and interesting question: Can we learn from the history of smoking to become better smartphone users? Sure, we can. We can learn a lot. Let's take a look at the ten most important lessons.

One: Smartphone users are victims not perpetrators
In the seventies there were a lot of reasons for smoking. Smoking was cool. David Bowie smoked. John Travolta did. So did everyone else. Advertisements for smoking where everywhere. Cigarettes were cheap. But the main reason for smoking was no doubt nicotine. Smoking is highly addictive and we now understand that people do not smoke out of free will. They smoke because someone else wants them to. **Smokers are victims not perpetrators.** The same goes for smartphones. Ninety percent of the time we are on our smartphones we are using an app. Most of the time this is an app that is designed for addiction, or as Nir Eyal puts it: to be 'habit-forming'. App-designers are very successful at this. They figured us out and they know which buttons the push. We use our smartphones heavily because someone else wants us to do so. **This means that (heavy) smartphone users are victims too. Not perpetrators.** This is a very important paradigm shift. Perpetrators should be punished. Victims should be helped.

Think about this when you are telling your children to get of their phone!

Two: you have the right not to be a second-hand smartphone user
The moment people started to talk about the health risks of second-hand smoke the tobacco industry knew this was a serious threat to their business interests. If people have the right to smoke they also have the right *not to be* exposed to smoke. The concept of second-hand smoke was the driving force behind stricter regulation of cigarettes and a totally different attitude towards smoking and smokers.

There is also something called second-hand smartphone usage. **Involuntary exposure to smartphone users.** The most prominent example is of course when you are hit by a texting truck driver but there are more subtle ways of second-hand smartphone usage. Suppose you prepared a presentation for a meeting only to find out everyone is checking their phone. Or maybe you are having a conversation that is deteriorating because you are being phubbed (a contraction of phone and snubbed). Or you are a teacher talking to Apple and Samsung logos. Or you visit Auschwitz only to see people making selfies of the 'Arbeit Macht Frei – sign'. Or maybe you go to a concert and find yourself surrounded by people taking pictures, filming and posting and then frequently checking for likes. Hard to get in the right vibe then! It is not a problem if people are staring at their smartphone in the waiting room of the hospital. Waiting rooms are boring. It is a problem when the world you live in, when parties, barbecues and dinners start to look like waiting rooms.

I believe people should sometimes have the right not to be exposed to smartphone users. It is time we take second-hand smartphone usage seriously.

Three: Smartphone usage. We won't figure it out together!
In The Netherlands we used to have a famous advertising slogan: Smoking? We will figure it out together! Guess what, we didn't. No wonder, the slogan was made up by the tobacco industry. It was a distraction maneuver. They knew we won't figure it out together. We needed some rules and some law. Same goes for smartphone usage.

For example: I always tell my students to put away their phone during classes. Some colleagues don't. They do not believe in prohibition. They believe in seduction and motivation and inspiration. I think that is naive. You are competing with a device that students use even in heavy traffic on a bike. The device is so tempting they even want to risk their live. You are never going to win from a smartphone, not even if you are the best math teacher ever. And you are not.

Of course we need to talk. We need to motivate. We need to inspire. But most of all we need some rules and some law. Below are some examples we can learn from the history of smoking.

Four: We need more no smartphone zones
We used to smoke everywhere. Later more and more no smoking zones appeared and now sometimes you find yourself smoking in an aquarium at the airport. This works. There should also be more and more no smartphone zones. Occasionally there is a restaurant or a bar with a no smartphone policy. Or an expensive resort without internet connection. Offline is the new luxury. This has to become more commonplace. Concert halls, train carriages, offices, classrooms, bars, restaurants, cinemas, sections in soccer stadiums and so on. Not to irritate or frustrate people but to help them. Remember heavy users are victims that need to be helped. No smartphone zones help you concentrate on the thing you came for in the first place. And at the same time you are also providing options for people who do not want to be exposed to second-hand smoke. Maybe we will organize ourselves, more likely we will need no smartphone zone rules or a law. Like we see at schools in France.

The idea of no smartphone zones is also very effective at home. It is better and easier to set rules about places than time. Not in the bedroom. Not at the dinner table. Not in front of the TV. At my home we call using your smartphone in front of the TV *double dipping* because of the two screens. And it is not allowed.

Five: It is about time we start paying for our apps
We levy excise duty on tobacco products to discourage smoking and to use the money for anti-smoking campaigns or healthcare. Why don't we levy excise duty on our apps? Most of our apps are free. Okay, we pay with our data, but most people do not seem to care. Or understand. Do not get me wrong. The most important reason to tax our apps is not to discourage users **but to make them think**. We compare costs and benefits to make a decision but if there are no costs, we stop doing this. The result is that we do not demand better apps. We just use our 'free' stuff thoughtlessly. If we want people to think, if we want them to become critical consumers, we have to end 'free' apps. We can excise levy duty or draw up a law that forces the technology companies to sell their apps for money. After all, it is also no longer allowed to distribute cigarettes for free.

Six: We need to demand better apps for our smartphone
Cigarettes are a very consistent product. Even in movies about the future. Writers imagine flying cars, robots with feelings, artificial meat, going to Mars and people still smoking ordinary cigarettes. Still the average nicotine and tar content of cigarettes has steadily fallen resulting in smokers inhaling larger volumes per puff. But now there is the e-cigarette. The health risks of e-cigarettes are uncertain but vaping is likely safer than smoking.

It is way easier to make better apps than to make better cigarettes. We only have to ask for it. We decide with our money. Just like we asked for salads at McDonalds. We have to ask for apps that know that we are driving our car or biking and stop harassing us. If my 13 year old daughter bikes through heavy traffic she has a device in her pocket that is working hard to get her attention. That is almost immoral. We need to ask for apps that know that we are eating and don't disturb us. Apps that are way better in selecting which notifications are important and which are not. We need apps that register that our children have seen three consecutive

episodes of Sponge Bob and tell them to go play outside instead of forcing infinite episodes. Or apps that come with automatic user time limits.

Maybe we also need technology that helps us to leave our smartphones at home. Bracelets that show us the way by pinching our wrists, small devices that we can use to listen to Spotify, running shoes that track our running, bankcards under our skins and so on. There is already a lot of stuff out there. Technological problems are solved by better technology. We need artificial intelligence and blockchain and conversational agents. But only if these new technologies that put our values first!

Seven: Our smartphones should have warning messages

If I were a smoker I would always choose cigarette packages with the warning message: 'Smoking Causes Impotence'. As a father of two children impotence sounds a lot better than Deadly Lung Cancer. There is a lot of debate on the effectiveness of these warning messages but there is clear evidence that the warnings increase consumer' knowledge about the health consequences of tobacco use. Smartphones should come with the same warning messages. Android P and iOS12 are already moving in the right direction informing the user about the amount of time spent on the phone. Maybe they should also inform us about the negative consequences of using too much social media or using your phone right before you go to sleep. Or when you are biking. Or in a car. Or if you use your phone first thing in the morning. Maybe they should warn us that if we play Candy Crush Saga, the game actually is playing with us.

Eight: Every workplace should have a smartphone etiquette

A decade ago, or so, it was still allowed to smoke in my office building but there were some rules. You could not smoke during meetings and smokers were grouped in the same office spaces. Later smokers had to smoke outside and now they can only smoke in a confined space behind my building. We also have Email Etiquette. Do not email all employees asking if someone has found your keys, for example. Do not reply to all. Do not use blind carbon copy. And so on. But we do not have a smartphone etiquette. Most companies don't. About time we change that.

Maybe your company decides to use lockers. You can leave your personal smartphone in the locker and only use it during breaks. A coffee. A smoke. A smartphone. Maybe you will draft an etiquette that does not allow workers to bring their personal smartphone. Or maybe employees are not allowed to bring it to meetings. Or use it during one on one conversations. Or conferences. Or whatever. The important is that you think about it, discuss it, and start working on a etiquette.

Nine: Smartphone therapy should be covered by health insurance

If you want to quit smoking in the Netherlands your boss will support you and your basic health insurance will pay for the therapy. If you want to control your addiction to your smartphone you will have to figure it out and pay for it yourself. Using your smartphone too much is not an diagnosed addiction and as a result not covered by health insurance. Because of that therapies are also still very experimental and immature. We need an Allen Carr for smartphones!

Ten: People want to be helped!

If the government bans smoking in restaurants or bars or soccer stadiums or increases the excise duty on cigarettes there is no real protest. The reason, I think, is that most smokers deep down want to quit. They are not proud of being a smoker. The same goes for smartphone users. I have talked to a lot of people and I have given a lot of talks on the absurdity of smartphone usage, on the fact that users do not think, that they are manipulated by companies and people never get angry. Never. Most of the time they agree and then they return to their old habits.

The reason, I think, is they want to be helped. Deep down they will welcome no smartphone zones, better technology, smartphone etiquette, warning messages and even excise duty on their apps. The technology companies will suffer under these policies, not the users.

Finally, the ten lessons above are only part of the smoking metaphor. There is much more. Age restrictions, Big Tobacco/Big Tech, cigarettes/smartphones after sex, keeping your nerves in check, the fact that cigarettes/smartphones are often the last thing in the evening and the first in the morning and so on.

The most important lesson however is that if we look back at the seventies it seems like absurd time period. People were smoking all the time and everywhere. In the Netherlands money collectors for the cancer fund went door to door with while smoking. Times are better now. In 2030 I would like to look back at 2018 and have the same feeling. But I am afraid that if we do not act, if we do not learn from the history of smoking, in 2030 we will wish we were back in 2018.

And that's a dreadful thought.

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