

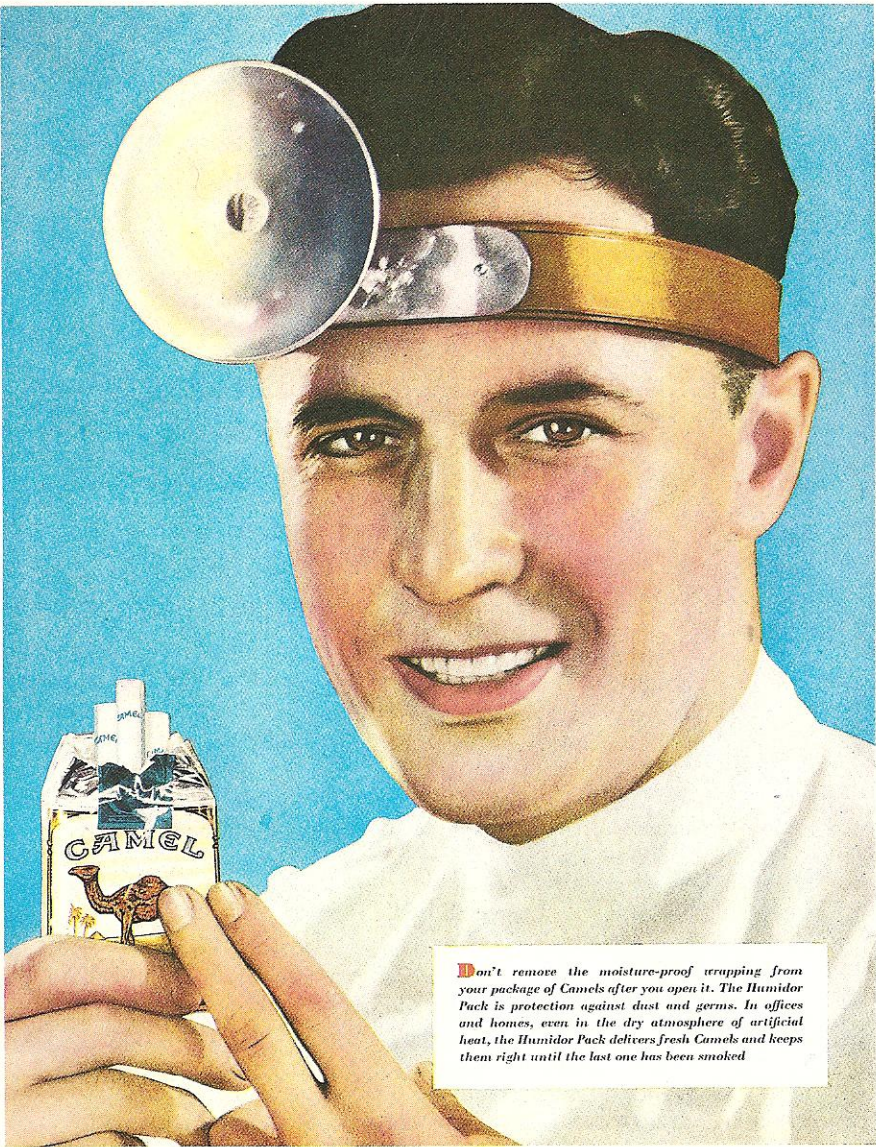


# NEW YORK STATE JOURNAL OF MEDICINE

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Table of Contents, page 279

## THE WORLD CIGARETTE PANDEMIC Part II



Don't remove the moisture-proof wrapping from your package of Camels after you open it. The Humidor Pack is protection against dust and germs. In offices and homes, even in the dry atmosphere of artificial heat, the Humidor Pack delivers fresh Camels and keeps them right until the last one has been smoked.

*PRIMUM NON NOCERE?*

# Helping Youth Decide: "When the fox preaches, beware the geese"

W. R. COULSON, PH.D, EdD

*Helping Youth Decide* is a 20-page booklet with color illustrations, made available free to parents with funds provided by the Tobacco Institute. It purports to teach good parent-teenager communication. Released in the fall of 1984, its mode of distribution was unusual for a booklet published by a non-profit educational group (the National Association of State Boards of Education). On its behalf advertisements were placed in such national magazines as *Better Homes & Gardens*, *Ladies Home Journal*, *People*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Time*, and *TV Guide* and in such major newspapers as *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times*. At a press conference in Washington, DC, Tobacco Institute Vice-President Walker Merryman told of his organization's enthusiasm for the project: "To date we have avoided encouraging youngsters to smoke. This effort should actively discourage youth smoking."<sup>1</sup> He spoke of his industry's "open-ended commitment" to

*Helping Youth Decide*, a commitment confirmed when additional materials were scheduled for 1985 release, including discussion leader guides and translation into Spanish. By May, 350,000 copies of the booklet were in print.

If Merryman's judgment is correct—that the campaign should discourage youth smoking—major changes in industry demographics and profits will ensue. Studies of age of initiation of smoking indicate that most adults who smoke began in their teens. For example, a 1975 survey by the National Clearinghouse for Smoking and Health found that 76.22% of Americans who smoke or formerly smoked took up smoking by age 20. Only 11.28% began smoking after age 24.<sup>2</sup> (These percentages are conservative, since they do not include the four million Americans under 21 who smoked at the time [personal communication, Shopland DR, Technical Information Officer, Office on Smoking and Health, US Public Health Service, Feb 19, 1985].)

Merryman pointed out that it has been industry policy "for many years" to hold that "smoking is an adult custom." Indeed, the by-now-familiar slogan is featured in a brief preface to *Helping Youth Decide*. Otherwise smoking goes unmentioned except in this account of the "many new decisions" teenagers face: "Some decisions will be small, others important. Consider the following examples: whether to drive the car, to drink, to smoke, to borrow money, to quit school, to take or quit a job, to marry."<sup>3</sup> So, while the booklet may be sincere in its intention to discourage smoking, it is not about smoking. Rather, it is about what mothers and fathers can do to help their teenagers develop "decision making skills." To this end *Helping Youth Decide* teaches parents to set aside their instincts—"threatening . . . preaching . . . blaming . . . analyzing . . . pacifying . . . probing . . . avoiding"—in favor of the methods of non-directive psychotherapy.

It was psychologist Thomas Gordon who first tested the

## Helping Youth Decide



These program for parents developed by the National Association of State Boards of Education

Dr. Coulson is a professor of psychology and education at United States International University, San Diego. In 1978 he founded Project Mozart, a non-profit organization that attempts to restore authoritative parenting to families, particularly in matters of health.

Address correspondence to Dr. Coulson, Center for Enterprising Families, PO Box 10777, La Jolla, CA 92038.

## How to Get Your Teenager Talking - to You.

If you believe your young teenager is worth talking to, you have your first step made.

Developed by professional educators, "HELPING YOUTH DECIDE" can help you help your teenager make the important decisions he or she is being asked to make.

You drink, smoke, borrow money, quit school, get married.

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SPECIAL ADVERTISING SECTION

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## Requests for "Helping Youth Decide" Pour In From All Over The Country

### Strong Attraction

W... of the National Association of State Boards of Education, Inc., has received a large number of requests for copies of the booklet "Helping Youth Decide."

### Runaway Success

W... of the National Association of State Boards of Education, Inc., has received a large number of requests for copies of the booklet "Helping Youth Decide."

ANALYSIS

The Tobacco Institute's *Tobacco Observer* reported the enthusiastic support of a spokesman for New York Governor Mario Cuomo, as well as two other governors, for *Helping Youth Decide*. In January 1984 Governor Cuomo announced the appointment of George Weissman, chairman of the board and chief executive officer of cigarette maker Philip Morris Inc., as special advisor to the governor on New York's efforts to attract new business.

In June 1983, the head of the White House Office on Drug Abuse Policy, Carlton Turner, was quoted in the *Tobacco Observer* as praising the Tobacco Institute's efforts to curtail smoking among teenagers.

idea that the "acceptance, understanding, and permissiveness... of the clinic"<sup>4</sup>—techniques developed by Carl Rogers and his associates in the late 40's and early 50's at the University of Chicago<sup>5</sup>—could be extended profitably to extra-clinical settings. Gordon's numerous books and articles are the major influence on the burgeoning "parenting" movement, including *Helping Youth Decide*. (Gordon's work is uncredited—no sources are referenced—but staff of the National Association of State Boards of Education, the corporate author, privately acknowledge their debt to him.)

Gordon found, however, that an important class of

problem behaviors would not yield to his recommended methods, and it may cause embarrassment at the Tobacco Institute to learn that he offers smoking as the foremost example. Besides smoking, his list includes premarital sex, marijuana use, and neglecting homework. He writes, "It is understandable that many parents feel so strongly about certain behaviors that they do not want to give up trying to influence their children, but a more objective view usually convinces them that they have no other feasible alternative except to give up—to accept what they cannot change." He adds, "I often tell parents, 'Don't want your child to become something in particular; just want him to become.'" <sup>6</sup> One can see the appeal of this system to any marketer interested in young people's becoming customers, and it is unfortunate that the Tobacco Institute, concerned about discouraging youth smoking, has stumbled into lending support to an inapposite method.

On the other hand, it is possible that the English proverb applies: "When the fox preaches, beware the geese."

What would be an effective anti-smoking campaign involving the parents of teenagers? There are clues in recent studies headed by Judith Brook and by Douglas Wilson, MD. Brook's team studied the qualities and strategies of the relationship between fathers and sons, comparing youngsters who smoked to those who did not.<sup>7</sup> Whether the father smoked was not significant, either as a main effect or an interaction. What was significant was that fathers of boys who abstained were "intolerant of tobacco and marijuana use." They had "high expectations for their sons." Neither characteristic is consistent with passive parenting. In the study by Wilson et al, 211 patients were counseled to stop smoking; 106 received follow-up sessions, the balance did not. "From the patients' reports 6 to 12 months after entry into the trial we found that, overall, only 12% of the patients in the control group but 23% of those in the experimental group had quit smoking. . . . [T]he proportion of patients who quit smoking was about five times as great in the experimental group as in the control group among those who smoked regular-tar cigarettes . . ."<sup>8</sup>

Follow-up, which differentiated the successful from the unsuccessful cases, is nothing other than a form of repetition—preaching, if you will. Condemned for parents in *Helping Youth Decide*, it is nonetheless essential to successful tobacco advertising—and, it seems, health education. If they are to retain their self-respect, parents might look to advertising practices and patient education for parenting tips—rather than to psychotherapy.

## REFERENCES

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## Maybe they aren't ready for everything they learn.

It's no secret that kids learn about more things at school than just schoolwork. Often, their peers instruct them in the ways of the adult world. For example, smoking. Against your wishes. And ours. We believe smoking is an adult custom, and that the decision whether to smoke or not should be based on mature and informed judgement.

Of course, smoking is just one of many practices reserved for adults by tradition or religion or even legal restriction. The list ranges from driving and obtaining credit to military enlistment, voting, drinking, marriage and many more.

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