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Article: "If I can give up smoking, so can you" – Mairéad Whyte.

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*Thousands of people will try to give up cigarettes this week. MAIREAD WHYTE, a life coach and business consultant from Ballycotton, says it's all in the mind*



**A**T quarter past two on September 6, 2008, I said goodbye to my best friends. It was a landmark in my personal history, a time where new relationships would replace the old.

As long as I can recall, they were there for me, lifted me up when I felt down, made me calm when I was anxious, they were my loyal companions on my every excursion.

The truth was that I was then addicted to their presence. The plain truth was the fact that they were a bad influence, they were damaging to my health and they provided me with all the excuses not to make the behavioural changes that I desired.

I had previously chosen not to see it that way, but that September day I woke up to realising what I really wanted — freedom.

Even though I had not yet worked out how I would cope without them, I proceeded to throw my packet of cigs into the nearest rubbish bin. I had decided to become a non-smoker and I felt afraid. I needed to work out my replacement strategy.

If you want a different result in your life, then you need to do something different. I value freedom and in my opinion true freedom means the ability to choose your behaviour in any given circumstance. I allowed cigarettes to take that privilege away. I would stand in snow four-feet deep to spend five minutes with one of them. That behaviour had to change if I was to be the person I wanted to be.

Different things work for different people. The trick is finding out that thing that works for you. The key for me was not only wanting freedom from cigarettes, but knowing why I wanted it. The 'why' is very important; if you fully understand why you want something, the easier it is to get it.

The stronger that 'why' the stronger your desire, and you constantly remind yourself of the greater benefits as you continue to take action to doing something different.

I started by asking myself why I wanted freedom from toxins and once I fully understood the honest reflective answer I gave myself, I was able to move my thinking from the old behaviour to the new replacement behaviour that I wanted instead. Amazingly, not only did quitting smoking fit into that picture, I got slimmer and fitter as a result of dumping the cigarettes.

So how did I stop smoking and lose weight? The simple answer is that it all started in my mind. It was Henry Ford, founder of Ford motors who said, "If you think you can do it or think you can't do it, you are right."

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My mother constantly picks up burning coals that spit out from her open fire. She thinks she was born with oven gloves on her hands. When she picks the burning coals from the mat, she's instinctively thinking about saving her mat, she doesn't think about burning her hands and lo and behold, she doesn't burn her hands.

This means we all have amazing mental strategies that we don't even know we have, and the potential of what we can achieve is great once we start becoming more aware to ourselves and our internal strategies. So when I decided to stop smoking and remain slim I started by believing it was possible. With focus, mental training and self-belief, as I started to believe it I started to see it.

When you decide to stop smoking you typically focus on being smoke-free, or think about not

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wanting or needing cigarettes, or maybe you think about the impact they have on your health — or how costly they are.

These are all the reasons why you should not smoke, in reality what this means is that you are still logically thinking about cigarettes. Thinking about cigarettes makes it harder to forget them, so you are really making it more difficult for yourself.

Instead, it is sensible that you consciously decide to focus on something else, this requires action and work, and this was significant for me to retrain my thinking and maintain focus. I thought about a healthy glowing me. The healthy glowing me became my dominant thought and everything else fell into place.

As humans, we have the freedom to think whatever we choose and this freedom to think is a huge gift we potentially under-use. I don't suggest

you buy a book or attend classes to learn how to retrain your thinking, I ask that you have an honest reflection about the person you truly want to be, realise the changes to make it happen and take the actions to make that a reality.

My desire to be the best I could possibly be was the start of my new relationship with a glowing self. A landmark which denotes my realisation of my previously hidden strategies which I can now apply to any other changes I want to make. It worked for me; maybe it will work for you too.

The power of our minds is incredible. Could it be your New Year's resolution to open up to the curiosity of how your mind works and how you can command it to get the changes in your life that you desire and deserve? Because, once you know how to open yourself to all that wisdom and knowledge that is already contained within yourself, you will never look back.