



Attaining and Maintaining:

TLC Coach Michelle Helps Veteran Stephen Jaworski Quit Tobacco for Good

When health concerns started to weigh on the mind of long-time smoker and Veteran Stephen Jaworski, he knew it was time to make a big lifestyle change. “I’d smoked since I was around 12 years old, and quit only for a brief time during Army basic training,” he explains. “But I started back up soon after that, when I was deployed.” At the peak of his cigarette habit, Stephen estimates that he was smoking a pack or more each day.

Didn’t Really Work

Stephen’s previous attempts to quit, using Chantix[®] (varenicline) and nicotine gum, had not gone well. “I had limited success—I smoked well into the time that you were supposed to stop smoking with Chantix[®],” he says. “So I stopped taking it because I didn’t want to waste my money on something that didn’t really work.” The gum didn’t help Stephen much either: he would chew it while at his smoke-free work place, but would often find himself lighting up after work.

Embracing It

A trip to the Erie (PA) VAMC in April of 2012 helped the 27-year-old Veteran get on the right track to kicking the tobacco habit once and for all. “I went to my annual appointment at the OEF/OIF/OND clinic, discussed my concerns with my provider, and told her I really wanted to quit,” he says. “She helped me get nicotine patches and enroll in the TLC Program.” Initially, Stephen was unsure about participating. But when he got his TLC materials in the mail and had his first call with his coach, he knew he was ready. “I started to embrace it then,” Stephen says. “I went from being ambivalent about TLC to being excited about actively working toward my goal of quitting.”





Care and Concern

Stephen feels that the combination of nicotine replacement therapy and a TLC coach has really helped him attain and maintain his abstinence. Although his family has been supportive, his coach's care, concern, and guidance have helped him get to where he is today. "My coach Michelle is very knowledgeable and she genuinely cares," Stephen says. "Having that support and structure, and someone to serve as a 'watchdog,' really helps keep me in check. To have a stranger care about me enough to call every week or every other week is really something else. It gives me the motivation to quit for myself *and* for somebody else." Homework assignments after every coaching call and the workbooks Stephen's received through the program have also contributed to his success—by keeping him focused on what he's doing and why he's doing it.

Breathing Easier

After initial referral in early April 2012, Stephen completed several weekly calls and just recently stepped down to bi-weekly coaching calls. "The call intervals always seem appropriate and the topics I discuss during each call correspond nicely with the things that I'm dealing with," he says. "I'm happy to report that I've been tobacco free since starting the program!" Now instead of smoking, he says that he chews mints, sips water, and uses nicotine patches as-needed to help suppress his tobacco cravings.

Quitting tobacco has made Stephen's life different in more ways than one. "There are foods that I thought I liked, but now that I can taste and smell them, I have a different opinion," he explains. "The biggest thing though, is that I can breathe. I just feel healthier and it's easier to take a breath." Stephen's also slowly making a new group of friends who are non-smokers. "I don't stink anymore from the cigarettes," he says half-jokingly, "or at least I don't *think* I do!"

With several months of smoke-free living under his belt, Stephen doesn't hesitate to endorse TLC for his fellow Veterans. "TLC has really helped me—it's like having a noncommissioned officer checking in on you regularly and making sure that you are not doing things that you shouldn't be doing," he says. "If you want to quit or you think you want to quit but aren't totally sure, just give it a try!"

