

Quitting Made Real by NICORETTE®: Podcast Episode 1 Ad Transcript (ENGLISH): Ray Zahab

Runtime: 15:44

SPEAKERS

Ray Zahab (right), Cynthia Loyst (left)

[We open on Cynthia Loyst, podcast host, who is wearing a light blue shirt speaking to the camera while sitting in a green chair. Behind her is a white sign in the shape of a spinnaker that says “Quitting Made Real” in dark green text, with a white NICORETTE® logo within a dark green rectangle in the top right corner of the sign. Tall leafy plants can be seen in the background, and a small display of NICORETTE® products sits to the right of the screen, on Cynthia’s left. There is a microphone on a stand in front of Cynthia.]

[00:00 – 00:11]

Cynthia: Welcome to *Quitting Made Real* by NICORETTE® the podcast bringing you real stories about breaking the smoking addiction. My name is Cynthia Loyst, and quitting smoking is honestly one of the best things I ever did for myself.

[00:11– 00:19]

[Camera angle shifts to a view from Cynthia’s left]

Cynthia: We have an incredible lineup of guests, and they're all sharing their unique stories of how everyone affected by nicotine addiction can help make quitting real.

[00:19 – 00:29]

[Placeholder TBC – b-roll integration here]

Cynthia: Ray Zahab has tackled some of the world's toughest terrains, and he joins us now to share one of his most challenging journeys, his quitting journey. Welcome to *Quitting Made Real*, Ray.

[00:29 – 00:31]

[Camera angle shifts to show Ray Zahab, adventurer and podcast guest, in frame. He is wearing a black t-shirt, sitting on a green chair to Cynthia’s right with the NICORETTE sign behind them.]

Cynthia: Ray, thank you so much for being here.

Ray: Thank you.

[00:31- 00:45]

Cynthia: Okay, Ray. You are known for being an ultra runner. You're an explorer. Your social media is incredible, but you were once a smoker, and I'm always curious to know, like, when did you start and how?

[00:46 - 01:05]

Ray: For me, it truly was a new beginning, because I was at a point in my life *[camera pans to show both Ray and Cynthia in frame]* this is 25 years ago, where I was no longer satisfied with where things were not

going in my life, I had no passion in my life, [Cynthia nods] I didn't have anything that I was like waking up every day excited about.

[01:05]

Cynthia: Yeah

[01:05 – 01:13]

Ray: [Continuing] And I was living a very unhealthy life. I mean, I was drinking way too much, smoking upwards of a pack a day, cigarettes.

[01:13]

Cynthia: Yeah.

[01:13 – 01:57]

Ray: Can you imagine doing that nowadays? I mean, it costs an insane amount of money. Anyhow [waves hand] I was smoking a pack of cigarettes a day, feeling like crap and knowing that I needed to do something about it, but not knowing what to do.

And I'm very fortunate that I have a younger brother who's an incredible adventurer in his own right, who had gone through a life transformation, and he said, "Hey, do you want to try and get outside with me?" And that literally was the first steps I took.

Now it was the most difficult thing I've ever done. Out of all of the adventures crossing the Arctic, 7,500 kilometers of running across the Sahara, the most difficult challenge I ever faced was quitting smoking, and it took me more than three years to really commit and become quit.

[01:57 – 01:58]

Cynthia: Okay - we're gonna break this down.

[01:58]

Ray: Yeah.

[01:59 – 02:03]

Cynthia: But I would still want to go back in time, because, like, I personally remember I grew up, my dad was a smoker.

[02:03]

Ray: Mhm.

[02:04 – 02:27]

Cynthia: So I grew up seeing somebody who I cared about smoke. And I remember being a kid and first learning about the impact that smoking could have, and it was in my, like, elementary school classes and

going home and being like, “Dad, you've got to quit. You absolutely have to quit.” But then as I got older, I became fascinated by it. And I was curious. And there's even pictures that we have in my photo album of myself, holding on to my dad's cigarette packs.

[02:28]

Ray: Yeah, yeah [nodding].

[02:28 – 02:29]

Cynthia: [laughing] You would never let kids do that today.

[02:30]

Ray: Yeah, yeah for sure [laughs].

[02:30 – 02:43]

Cynthia: And then as soon as I hit around, like 14,15, I remember being at a party, and I had that first drag. And what happened is what's supposed to happen, was that I immediately felt disgusting. And then I felt sick to my stomach.

[02:44]

Ray: Right.

[02:44 – 02:51]

Cynthia: But then, you know, I don't know, maybe six months later, I tried it again, and I got that kind of head rush of euphoria, and before long, I was hooked.

[02:51]

Ray: Mmhm [nodding].

[02:52 – 02:57]

Cynthia: And I didn't understand how quickly that journey would happen until it happened to me.

[02:58]

Ray: Mmhm [continues to nod].

[02:59 – 03:05]

Cynthia: And so I'm curious, do you remember what was going on when you actually just started and got hooked? Was it a surprising journey for you?

[03:05 – 03:24]

Ray: You know what, it's like you dug into my head and took the words, I mean, it's exactly like my experience, it was very similar to yours. I remember the first couple of puffs and like just feeling ill smoking,

but then before long, and not even really being able to put my finger on the exact time of when it happened, you're hooked.

[03:24]

Cynthia: Mmm [nodding].

[03:34 – 03:39]

Ray: And then I'm not one of these people who's like, wow, you know, I take a cigarette out, I'd smoke it, and I'd feel like crap. And then, you know – no, I loved smoking. I got to a point where I love it. It was part of me. Wake up in the morning, have a coffee, smoke a cigarette. You know, go outside, anything you were doing requires a cigarette.

[03:40]

Cynthia: Yep.

[03:40 – 03:49]

Ray: And it becomes not only a physical addiction, but it becomes an addiction of sorts, where it's the most insidious.

[03:49]

Cynthia: Oh yeah, insidious, yes.

[03:50 – 04:00]

Ray: It's an insidious addiction, because everything you do that, where pleasure is involved, or doing something fun is involved, cigarettes are there. It's part of the story. It's part of your daily vocabulary.

[04:01]

Cynthia: Yeah

[04:01 – 04:05]

Ray: And I was definitely one of those people. I mean, that's why it was so hard to quit. You know?

[04:05 – 04:09]

Cynthia: So give me a sense – so you've painted a picture of how you, kind of were in a low point in your life.

[04:09]

Ray: Mhm.

[04:10 – 04:34]

Cynthia: You were particularly not very healthy. Was there – I remember, for me, very similar, I was not doing a lot, I had wrapped cigarettes and smoking around my identity as, like, a TV producer, and as, like,

you know, somebody who was, part of the, you know, hopping around bars and whatever. And then what I started to notice was the times when it started to be gross.

[04:34]

Ray: Mmhm.

[04:34 – 04:36]

Cynthia: Like, let's say somebody would be like, oh, like, I just came in from the outside and smell the cigarettes on me.

[04:37]

Ray: Yes, yes, mmhm [nodding].

[04:37 – 04:54]

Cynthia: Or I would wake up in the morning and have this horrible cough. And then I started journaling and recognizing that every single morning I woke up, the first thought out of my head, the most honest thought out of my head was, “Oh, my God, I gotta quit smoking.” But quickly, throughout the day, I would forget about that.

[04:54]

Ray: Mhmm.

[04:55 – 05:15]

Cynthia: But slowly this started to mount. And then it came to a moment where I was like on a film shoot. And I was more wrapped up in when was my smoke break and if it happened, than being present to what I was doing on my job. And that was a real wake up call for me. And I decided I had to do something. Talk to me about the moment that you realized, okay, I gotta do something about this.

[05:15 – 05:33]

Ray: I would wake up. I remember those days very well – “I have to quit smoking,” or trying to go up a flight of stairs, “I gotta quit smoking.” Anything that involves physical activity or effort. I need to quit smoking. And then, as you said, you'd forget about it, because you'd take a haul off that cigarette and everything was –

[05:33]

Cynthia: It's your best friend again.

[05:34 – 06:40]

Ray: Right? You just felt like a million bucks. And you know, I think it was probably, my gosh, being so chained to the habit of smoking and being so sick of the thought in my mind that some tobacco executive is making millions of bucks off of my, you know, lack of ability to control my life in this aspect, that for me, more than even breaking it because of the physical aspects, it was owning this thing that is so bad for me

that I do in my life, owning it, controlling it, and saying I'm not going to do this anymore, and that being the first step in the change of who I was.

I didn't realize how powerful that decision would be in that moment, but it would follow everything else that I would do for the rest of my life, for these last 25, 30 years, everything would be changed – my outlook on life, my ability to make decisions and stick to commitments, right, was altered by my ability to finally stop smoking.

[06:41 – 07:13]

Cynthia: I love that. It's kind of like the metaphor that's coming to my mind is like this, kind of like this butterfly. You know, like the caterpillar turning into a butterfly. It becomes transformational when you can get through the other side. But it's like you said, it's not easy, and there is a process that you have to get used to if you're going through the quitting journey, that there will be discomfort, that there will be challenges, and so, talk about, maybe you can go back in time, and what that felt like for you, and maybe how running started to fit into that journey.

[07:14 – 07:49]

Ray: The thing with smoking, because of the physical, mental, and emotional and addiction that comes along with, those first steps that you take in finding a different avenue to channel yourself into are not only preparatory, like a preparatory phase for the rest of your life, but will initiate also, whether you're able to stick to this thing or not.

Like without sounding too convoluted, so to connect it to the running – so I said, okay, and my brother says, “Hey, you gotta come out. Let's go. Let's go mountain biking.” I can't, I can't ride my mountain bike. I can't even ride it up a hill.

[07:49]

Cynthia: You're like ugh [pretends to gasp for air].

[07:50 – 08:23]

Ray: Because I'm so winded, right? So I'm like, I gotta do this. And I'm thinking like you, like you were saying before, all I'm thinking about is, when am I gonna get a smoke break, when you're on production. So for me, I'm pushing my mountain bike up the hill, and I'm like, you know what, I'm gonna sneak a cigarette when I go back to the car. And I was that guy, right? But the one day, the first day that we went out on a long hike, he was going to take me climbing, and I said to myself, no, this is the day. Look, I'm never going to smoke again. If I can do this whole day, get through this whole day, I'm never going to do this again. That day, something clicked, something changed.

[08:23]

Cynthia: Mmm [nodding].

[8:24 – 08:39]

Ray: And in that moment when I was fully committed, it didn't take very long. I'm not doing any of that, right? Anymore. It was in a very short order that I was actually able to not push my mountain bike up the hill, but ride it up the hill. The change happened fast.

[08:40 – 08:50]

Cynthia: Okay, so you were motivated, because you noticed so quickly how your sort of lungs were recovering, how your – your fitness level was recovering.

[08:50]

Ray: Yes.

[08:51 – 08:56]

Cynthia: Is that what helped you stay smoke-free? Like, or were there other like – so you got the physical thing. What was the mental piece?

[08:56 – 09:05]

Ray: That was at the end of three years, right? So the story I just told you, climbing up the hike, or hiking up to the climb. That's where a three-year period, I'm at the end of those three years, I'm so sick of starting and stopping.

[09:05 – 09:06]

Cynthia: Oh okay, so this whole time –

[09:06 – 09:07]

Ray: Oh, yeah, I'm trying.

[09:07 – 09:09]

Cynthia: You're kind of like, I'm still smoking, but I'm trying. Okay.

[09:09 – 09:10]

Ray: Yeah. I'm trying. I'm trying, but I keep slipping.

[09:11]

Cynthia: Wow. Yeah.

[09:11]

Ray: Or maybe I make a month.

[09:11]

Cynthia: Yeah.

[09:12 – 09:16]

Ray: And then I have to have a cigarette. Some stressful situation arises and I have to have a cigarette.

[09:16]

Cynthia: Got it.

[09:17 – 09:40]

Ray: So, when I eventually made that full commitment. I'm never looking back. Immediately, everything else in my life started to change 180 degrees. My physicality, my emotional well-being. Why emotional and mental people wonder with quitting smoking? You know, like I say, the greatest challenges in life are 90 per cent mental, the other 10 is all in our heads.

[09:40]

Cynthia: [Laughing]

[09:40 – 09:50]

Ray: When we're addicted to this physical thing, like we're physically addicted to this horrible thing called smoking, when you're able to kick it, like I said before, you own it.

[09:50]

Cynthia: Mmhm.

[09:51 – 10:10]

Ray: That is a very difficult decision and commitment that one makes, and if you can stick to that commitment, everything else in your life that you couldn't commit to before – like you had one foot in the pool, but you couldn't get all the way in – you're just cannonballing now. You're jumping in the pool right away, because, you know you can do it. You licked this thing that was so difficult, that you'll never look back.

[10:11 – 10:56]

Cynthia: I love that. It's so interesting. Also for me, I had to, when I finally decided, okay, I have to quit. One of the most helpful things was using Nicorette, and I did use the patch as well, because I needed to distance myself from the habit. The actual, like, holding on to this cigarette and taking an inhale in and feeling that exact sensation that I associated with cigarettes. But having the nicotine as a kind of like, I don't know, almost like a bridge, was a really important first step for me that helped me. Because once I made that decision, I was like, I've made a commitment to myself that I'm never going back to actual cigarettes. So, your relapses – did you have any relapses along the way?

[10:56]

Ray: Oh, tons.

[10:57 – 10:58]

Cynthia: Once you had that wakeup call?

[10:58 – 11:16]

Ray: Had I known what was available to me, right, at the time, I totally would have took advantage of it without sounding too you know, “statistic-y” – is that a word? I don't know, but you know, 96 per cent of people, I learned this recently, 95 or 96 per cent of people who try to quit on willpower alone are gonna fail.

[11:16]

Cynthia: Yeah [nodding].

[11:17 – 11:55]

Ray: Right? But you're five times more likely to be able to stay quit and make it happen, right, if you're using something like Nicorette to help get you through, right? So that bridge, that gap is closed, and you get stronger then, in a sense, to pull yourself away. So it's very ironic, you're taking a nicotine product to help you quit smoking, but it's such a low dose that it enables you to be able to pull away slowly and, you know, remain steady, right? Because that's the hard part – it's a slip up, yeah? Like I was going cold turkey. It's literally the worst thing. It was – it was excruciating.

[11:55 – 12:02]

Cynthia: Can you talk about the way in which running or physical activity actually helped with the cravings, to some degree?

[12:02 – 12:16]

Ray: Yeah, I would say physical activity, because that became my identity. Yeah. You know, fast forward to what it is that I do now. If you said 30 years ago, you're going to be a professional explorer, doing all this stuff, deserts, Arctic and everything else, I'd say, no you're smoking something stronger than I was.

[12:17]

Cynthia: [Laughing]

[12:17 – 13:03]

Ray: Like, I mean, it just was not what I ever saw happening in my life, but running and physical activity was a new identity for me. It was – I was a different person, and that whole aspect of that healthy, active lifestyle was very empowering to me. And so I learned in that time, because of quitting smoking, because of trying my best to adhere to that new lifestyle, I was learning new things about myself. And running was the vehicle by which – I actually say running was my greatest teacher, because running has taken me around the world. It's taught me about everything, from culture, economics, agriculture, you name it, geography, topography, I've learned everything through my feet, being, doing what I do. It would have never happened if I was still smoking.

[13:03]

Cynthia: No.

[13:04 – 13:05]

Ray: A pack of cigarettes a day, right?

[13:05]

Cynthia: A pack [whispering, shocked].

[13:05 – 13:27]

Ray: It's just, where I am now to where I was then, are two completely different places. But, you know – sorry to interrupt – the decision to quit smoking was the single greatest decision that I've ever made in my life. I mean, there's no doubt about that, because nothing, nothing else that I've had in my life since, the good and the bad, nothing, the life experiences, would have never happened.

[13:28 – 13:33]

Cynthia: Yeah, I feel very similarly to that, like it was, it was like it was like a new birth, as you described it at the beginning.

[13:34]

Ray: You know what I mean?

[13:34 – 13:49]

Cynthia: But you're a testament, what you do now. These ultra marathons in the middle of deserts, in the middle of snowstorms, is a testament to how you do very difficult things. And so, it's an interesting thing. Part of this goes back to these – the stories we tell ourselves, right?

[13:49]

Ray: Mhm [agreeing].

[13:50 – 13:54]

Cynthia: You obviously have the mental strength to get through incredible things that most people would sit there and go, I could never do this.

[13:54]

Ray: Right.

[13:55 – 14:15]

Cynthia: I could never in a million years do this. And yet, you do it. So, I think it's interesting to kind of analyze, like, where we place these things. I'm curious, what advice might you offer to somebody who is listening to this and feels like quitting smoking would be too overwhelming, or that they just can't do it, or that they don't even want to do it?

[14:16 – 14:39]

Ray: You have to. You have to want it. You do have to, like you said, you think you don't want to. You want to. I mean, listen, you know, run for the bus, right? You eat, go see your doctor, right? Whatever like, it's simply not good for you. It is not – one-in-a-million people survive this thing, whatever, like, it's not a survivable situation, and it's not a viable way to live life. You have one life [lifts right pointer finger in emphasis].

[14:39]

Cynthia: Yeah.

[14:40 – 15:23]

Ray: You have one, and so why spend it polluting yourself every single day needlessly, to the profit of others? Right? So for me, the best advice I can give is, commit to it, but have a plan. And using, you know, something like Nicorette or something to help you get through, sure. That's the way to go? That's what you do. You make that decision. You have the plan. You work with your doctor, your healthcare professional, whatever. You work with your family, or you work with yourself, and you make it happen, right? But you have to commit to – it doesn't have to be “on September 30, I'm quitting smoking.” Doesn't have to be like that. On September 30, I'm going to start this journey to being quit. Right?

[15:23]

Cynthia: I like that.

[15:24]

Ray: You have to make the commitment.

[15:25 – 15:31]

Cynthia: Yeah, well, you've ended up in a wonderful spot. Thank you so much for sharing your journey with us and keep on doing these amazing things that you're doing.

[15:32 – 15:34]

Ray: Thank you so much. It's been an honour to be here with you.

[15:35 – 15:43]

Cynthia: And I want to thank you for listening to the quitting made real podcast by Nicorette. And of course, if you're thinking about quitting, remember, it is never too late to make quitting real.

[SUPER: PLACEHOLDER FOR LEGAL DISCLAIMER + CALL TO ACTION]