

Tempo

Hypnosis casts a spell of respectability

In a few moments, you will find yourself in a place of comfort, a place of peace, of serenity, a secure place that you and you alone like to go. Maybe it will be a mountaintop where a gentle snow is falling and where there's the scent of evergreens in the clean, crisp air. Or maybe you are on a beach on a wonderful, warm day, lying on a chaise lounge, feeling the sun, which is shining in a cloudless sky, and listening to the restful rhythm of the waves.

By Paul Galloway

Monica pulls a pack of Kools from her purse and in all innocence asks, "Can't I smoke until I get hypnotized?"

She most certainly cannot. Eleanor Laser, who soon will be soothing Monica's imagination with tranquil visions of mountaintops and beaches, is very firm about this.

She says there will be time for Monica and the others to light up during the 15-minute break, which is about an hour from now.

If everything goes the way it's supposed to, it will be the last cigarette they will have for the rest of their lives.

Monica is among five women and five men who are seated around a

long, polished table in an 11th-floor conference room in a Loop skyscraper. It's past 5 p.m. on a Monday, and most of their coworkers at Laventhol & Horwath, the big accounting firm, are already heading home.

These 10 people have stayed late at the office to take part in this one-shot, two-hour, cold-turkey clinic that will use hypnosis to free them from their tobacco habit.

Hypnosis? In the workplace? Could it be that something unusual, maybe even noteworthy is going on here?

It looks that way.

Here is a conservative, nationwide accounting firm that is making it possible for its very straight, upwardly mobile employees to be hypnotized—for a good reason, of course—and here are 10 of these very straight, upwardly mobile employees sitting around after work ready and willing to give it a try—for a good reason, of course.

Laser, who has a doctorate in psychology and training in hypnosis, is conducting the clinic. She has held similar stop-smoking clinics for other companies and has used hypnosis for this purpose in her private practice as a psychotherapist.

This evening, the ages of the Laventhol & Horwath people range from the 20s through the 50s, although most are in their 30s. Their presence indicates that while hypnosis may not be a tidal wave that is hurtling toward the shore of American culture, it has become a mainstream current of some strength.

For years, professionals in medicine, psychology and mental health have found hypnosis useful in treating and understanding a variety of physical and emotional problems. Surgeons and dentists have used it as a substitute for anesthesia; athletes have used it to improve their performance; law enforcement authorities have used it in criminal investigations.

Now, hypnosis seems to be reaching a larger, less specialized audience and enjoying wider acceptance than it has ever had. If this is, indeed, the case, its adoption as a weapon against smoking by more and more members of the general public has certainly contributed to its popularization.

These days, in fact, hypnosis is hip. Or, if you prefer, *hyp*. It is being embraced by substantial numbers of the congenitally fashionable, who are taking it into that deliciously treacherous territory between fad and trend.

It's likely you know someone who has quit smoking—or has tried to quit—this way. Or it's likely you know someone who has been hypnotized for other concerns—overeating, drug addiction, migraine headaches or menstrual pain, to name a few.

But even with its apparently increasing respectability, hypnosis still carries some heavy baggage. There are people who are, at best, ambivalent about it, who see it as something vaguely disreputable, easily exploited by charlatans and quacks, better suited for a stage than a doctor's office, a mix of mumbo jumbo and hocus-pocus that ranks in credibility just ahead of forecasting the future with sheep entrails.

This attitude is understandable, for hypnosis has a dual personality and a history tainted by ignorance and abuse.

In her introductory remarks, Laser addresses the doubts that may exist. "Hypnosis is harmless," she says. "There are no side effects. It's a myth that you're 'going under.' You will not be asleep. You'll be aware and in control the entire time. You are nowhere else. It's something you're going to enjoy. Some people



Tribune photo by Charles Osgood

Eleanor Laser uses hypnosis to help smokers quit. "Hypnosis helps with anxiety," she says. "It helps you feel secure and comfortable."

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feel very light, like they're floating. Some feel numb, like there's a tingling sensation in their body. Others feel as though they're detached from their body, as though they're all mind and no body. Some feel heavy, unable to move—*too comfortable to move.*"

What hypnosis does for those who want to stop smoking, she says, is put some strong new images in the storehouse of their unconscious mind, some of which will make the habit—addiction, if you wish—unappealing in the extreme. "The meaning smoking had for

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Hypnosis joins 'in' crowd of behavior aids

you will no longer be there," she says.

The payoff is enormous. By giving up smoking, they'll have more energy, younger skin, more self-esteem; most important, they'll be healthier.

There's more. "After hypnosis," Laser says, "you'll be calm, relaxed and refreshed. Hypnosis helps you with anxiety. It helps you feel secure and comfortable."

For \$50, how can you go wrong?

You see yourself lying in a hospital bed. You see members of your family and your dearest friends standing around the bed. You see a doctor enter the room and walk to your bed. He looks down at you. "I'm sorry," he says, "but there's no hope for you. You should have listened to me years ago when I told you to stop smoking."

The final smoke break is over. The lights have been lowered so that it's almost dark. The Cold Turkey Ten have closed their eyes. They look peaceful, as though they're sleeping.

Laser, seated at the head of the table, is speaking through a microphone, which makes her voice sound somewhat disembodied, as though it's being piped in from somewhere else. She speaks slowly, softly, reading from a prepared text.

It's impossible to tell how well everything is going just by looking. Everyone appears to be hypnotized, but who knows what's going on in each head? In hypnosis, success depends on the frame of mind of

the subject to a degree that is unnecessary in, for example, appendectomies or root canal procedures.

During the preliminaries of the first hour, Laser had warned that there's nothing magic about hypnosis, nothing automatic. It's sim-

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ply an aid, a tool. Skeptics who resist won't be helped, and neither will those who try too hard.

But people who cooperate fully, who concentrate on the mountain peaks and the seashores and any other scenes she asks them to visualize and who really and truly desire to stop smoking—for most of them, hypnosis can be beneficial.

It all comes down to this: You have to want it to work.

Its subjective nature accounts for some of the controversy and confusion surrounding hypnosis, but there are several other drawbacks as well.

One is an inability to agree on a single definition. In 1958, the

American Medical Association decided hypnosis is "a temporary condition of altered attention in the subject which may be induced by another person and in which a variety of phenomena may appear spontaneously or in response to verbal or other stimuli . . ." The definition lumbers on from there for another 57 words that do little for clarity or precision.

An encyclopedia says a hypnotic trance is "a change in a person's conscious awareness," then throws up its hands: "Scientists consider all aspects of hypnosis controversial, and hypnotism by unqualified persons as dangerous."

Whatever hypnosis is, a lot of people can do it, and all of them are free to hang out a shingle calling themselves hypnotists. Most state governments don't want to get involved. Illinois is typical; it sets no standards for hypnotists, issues no licenses, exerts no special controls.

This gives hypnosis a wide-open field, which has, in turn, led to efforts at self-policing and tension between professionals and lay hypnotists.

In 1957, the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis [ASCH], which has its headquarters in Des Plaines, was formed by professionals who use hypnosis in private practice but who do not describe themselves as hypnotists or hypnotherapists.

The ASCH restricts its membership to those who have doctoral degrees in medicine, psychology or dentistry, and in general, the or-

ganization takes a dim view of hypnotists who don't have these credentials.

"This is because we hear from time to time of lay hypnotists who are actually practicing psychology without a license," says William F. Hoffman, the ASCH's executive vice president. ASCH membership, now 4,000, has almost doubled the last 10 years, and Hoffman says he's seen an accompanying increase in laypeople at the group's hypnosis workshops.

Among the lay organizations is the Association for the Advancement of Ethical Hypnotists [AAEH], whose Chicago chapter is headed by hypnotist Stanley V. Mitchell. "The AAEH has 2,600 members, and many are doctors, ministers, lawyers," he says. "To be a certified member, you must have a minimum number of hours in psychology, pass a written exam and take an oral examination before a certification board."

When the AAEH put its phone number in the Yellow Pages in 1951, Mitchell says, there was only one other entry. Today under Hypnotists, there are more than 50. "And at the beginning," he continues, "we didn't have the attention in the first five years that we have now every five weeks. There's a tremendous change going on."

You see yourself in old age. You are engaged in a physical activity you enjoy very much. Look at yourself. You look very healthy and vital. You are filled with joy. Your loved ones are with you. Think of

the scene in the hospital room and this one. Which road do you want to travel?

Laser ends the session gently and gradually, and now all eyes are open and everyone is blinking and looking around.

Frank says he doesn't think he was hypnotized.

Laser asks him how much time he thinks passed while she was doing the hypnosis.

"Thirty minutes," he says.

"No, it was an hour," she says. "You may have been affected more than you think."

The lights go up, and everyone starts to leave.

Almost a month later, a polling reveals that seven say they have stopped, including Monica, who quit through hypnosis once before but resumed after a year. One person has cut down to one cigaret a day. Two others are smoking again.

Laser keeps track of her subjects and gives reinforcement sessions when needed, as they were for three of the Laventhol & Horwath people. Others also choose private sessions.

Laser asked that only a minimal portion of her words be recorded so the hypnosis will be more effective in the future. If people are expecting a specific image, she said, they won't be able to concentrate deeply enough to be hypnotized.

After the initial session, Laser was asked whether hypnosis was merely a placebo for people looking for a painless solution.

There are three types of people who smoke, she said. The first are those who like to live dangerously and who refuse to quit in spite of the evidence that smoking is life-threatening. The second are those with the willpower to quit by themselves. The third are those who need help. "Hypnosis can help the people in the third category," she says.