

Hypnosis helps some build New Year's resolve

By Chad Lawhorn

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Stephen Griffeth knows the crowds soon will come.

He'll see the smokers who swear 2007 will be the year they will quit. He'll see the sweet toothers who promise this will be the year they'll stick to their diet. He'll see the couch potatoes who just know this will be the year they will sculpt their bodies into shape.

In other words, he'll see the numerous people who in the past have found New Year's resolutions to be as painful as a Jan. 1 hangover.

Not to fear. Griffeth tells all the frustrated souls the same thing: Relax. Really, just relax, listen to his soothing voice and let the mind do the work.

Griffeth is a Lawrence-based hypnotherapist, and he knows he'll see plenty of people in the coming weeks who turn to hypnosis in their quest to fulfill a New Year's resolution.

"Usually, the busiest time of the year starts about mid-January and lasts into March or April," said Griffeth, who said he'll see about six people a week at his part-time business that only operates on Saturdays and Mondays.

Snuffing the smoke

People wanting help to stop smoking make up the largest portion of his clientele. Some of his patients swear by what his hypnosis methods can accomplish.

"After the second visit, I pretty much considered myself a nonsmoker," said Lawrence resident Michael Stuart, who had smoked for 16 years. "And it happened just right then. It wasn't gradual at all.

"After I left that second visit, I had no desire to smoke again. I drove there with cigarettes in my car, and when I left, I had no desire to smoke them."

That was seven years ago, and Stuart hasn't had a cigarette since. He said the hypnosis actually helped him to view cigarettes as repulsive.

Griffeth, who also operates an engineering company in Lawrence, said he's hypnotized more than 1,000 people since he became interested in the human mind in the early 1970s as a chemistry student at Kansas State University. He estimates that about 90 percent of the time he's able to help smokers kick the habit.

Reliable industrywide statistics, however, aren't easily available to verify those claims. The state doesn't have a licensing process for hypnotherapists, and as such doesn't have statistics about the industry.

Hypnotherapy



Nine years ago Dr. Michael Stewart got serious about quitting and put his skepticism aside and scheduled an appointment with a local hypno-therapist.

Plenty of skeptics

Stuart admits he was a bit leery of going to a hypnotist but thought he should give it a try because several other methods had failed him in his efforts to stop smoking.

“I was skeptical for sure,” Stuart said. “You see those things on TV where they make you cluck like a chicken.”

But Stuart said his sessions with Griffeth were “very professional.”

Griffeth said hypnotists do have to fight the stereotypes that have been created by comedy routines and B-movie plotlines.

“People are afraid that something is going to be said or done that will be a violation of them personally,” Griffeth said. “It all comes from the movies or TV. Basically whatever you have seen on TV about hypnosis, forget it.

“I can't make a person do what is against their morals or their ethics.”

Griffeth, who charges \$325 for his multisession smoking cessation program, said the process isn't as exotic as it's made out to be by the media.

Some hypnotists do use the swinging pocketwatch or other similar item to fixate a person, he said. But he said many hypnotists do what he does, which is simply use his voice to “progressively relax” an individual.

A key to successfully hypnotizing an individual is to get them to relax physically and mentally, Griffeth said. It's common for a patient's heart rate or blood pressure to decrease during a session, he said.

Griffeth said part of the process also involves a “convincing” stage. For that he said he frequently tells clients to clasp their hands together. He tells them their hands are clasped so tightly that they can’t be pulled apart. He then asks the clients to try to pull their hands apart, and inevitably they are unable to do so until Griffeth assures them that they have the physical ability to do so.

The final step of the process is when Griffeth gives the clients suggestions that convince them that they no longer crave cigarettes or certain types of food, for example.

“It works because the changes are coming from within a person,” Griffeth said. “It comes from where the desires are coming from.”

Some licensing

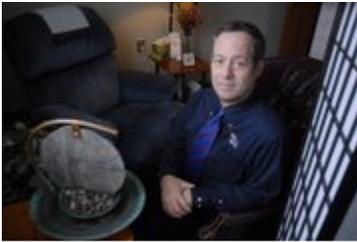


Photo by Richard Gwin

Stephen Griffeth expects demand for hypnosis to pick up in the coming weeks as people work on their New Year’s resolutions. Griffeth, a Lawrence-based hypnotherapist, says hypnosis can help people gain control over their emotions and behaviors, including smoking.

Hypnosis is becoming more accepted in the medical mainstream, he said, and some states and medical organizations are beginning to push for legislation that would allow only licensed medical professionals to perform hypnotherapy.

The movement hasn’t started in Kansas, however, according to Mark Stafford, general counsel with the Kansas Board of Healing Arts. He said his organization hadn’t seen a need to license hypnotherapists.

He said his organization does watch to ensure that hypnotists aren’t making claims that they are treating diseases or encouraging people to abandon traditional forms of medical treatment.

“If they are claiming they are going to cure cancer, that’s a problem,” Stafford said. “You can’t even claim you are going to treat cancer in this state without being licensed by our board.”

But Griffeth said reputable hypnotists are always upfront that they are not treating, diagnosing or prescribing cures for medical conditions.

“We’re really just more facilitators and educators who help people find success in whatever they want to do,” Griffeth said.

What is hypnosis?

Hypnosis, also referred to as hypnotherapy or hypnotic suggestion, is an altered state of consciousness. This state of consciousness is usually achieved with the help of a hypnotherapist and is different from everyday awareness. When patients are under hypnosis:

- Their attention is more focused
- They’re more responsive to suggestions
- They’re more open and less critical or disbelieving

The purpose of hypnosis as a therapeutic technique is to help patients gain more control over their behavior, emotions or physical well-being.

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