

Quitting turns ash into cash

ROB STOCK
MONEY MATTERS
rob.stock@fairfaxmedia.co.nz



OPINION: Last year I met the global spin-doctor of Imperial Tobacco.

It was rather thrilling. He might just be the most polished talker I ever met.

If there was a world championship for spin, he'd be a contender for the gold medal.

I told him I didn't hear the world Imperial used much any more, but that it was quite appropriate for his company considering the impact its cigarettes have on Maori.

He was unruffled by the comment. I got the feeling it would take a lot to ruffle him.

I suspect my feelings about banning cigarettes entirely might.

As a country we are within touching distance of being able to outlaw the old death sticks.

We have a target of being smokefree by 2025, and with a bit of political bravery, we could be.

The Maori Party were the inspiration for the target, and not surprisingly, given the disproportionate number of Maori who smoke.

I'm not usually a banning sort of man. I'm pretty tolerant of other people's choices, but cigarettes aren't really a choice

GOLDEN RULES

- Give up cigarettes
- Invest the money saved
- Get richer, and get fitter

thing. They're an addiction thing, and as an ex-smoker I know about addiction.

Addiction makes you a liar, and to yourself, to others. Anyone who says they wouldn't like to give up cigarette smoking is lying.

But now we have e-cigarettes which deliver nicotine without the harmful smoke. Once they are legalised next year (oh, so slow!), I reckon a health minister really committed to saving lives would give cigarettes until January 1, 2025, and after that they'd be illegal.

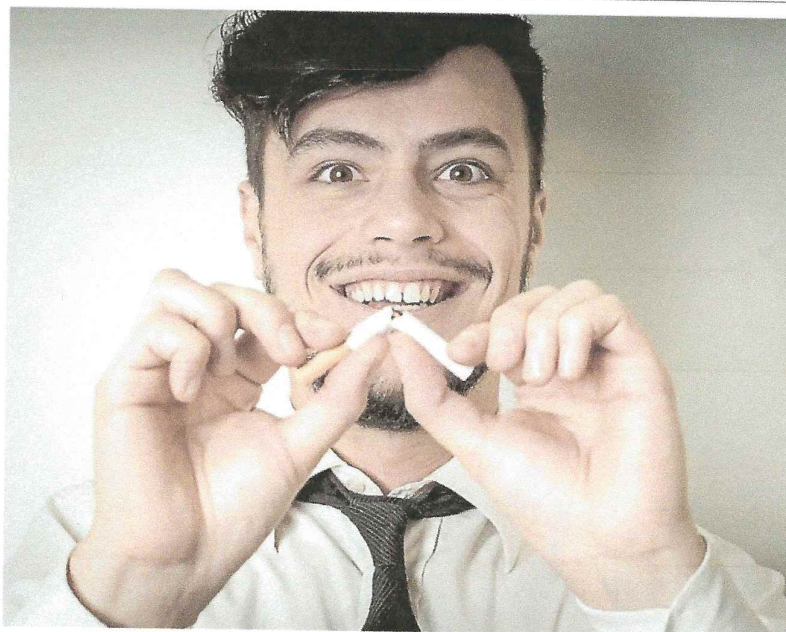
History would remember that minister as a global legend, like Irish health minister Michael Martin, whose pub smoking ban was a world-first.

Sure, there'd be a legal battle. Tobacco companies would sue under our trade and investment treaties. But those treaties allow us to take measures to protect public health.

Uruguay (population 3.5 million) proved that by fighting off Philip Morris' attempts to stop it bringing in plain packaging.

I gave up ciggies when I came back to New Zealand around 15 years ago after leaving London.

I got off the plane and never touched another cigarette.



Quitting - up there as a financial red-letter day alongside buying your first place, and clearing the mortgage. PHOTO: I23RF

"I never touched another cigarette. Instead, I got fit and I got richer."

Instead, I got fit, and I got richer.

A month ago the Government unveiled ambitious targets for improving Maori incomes.

It could double down by banning cigarettes.

I know. Some of you are

thinking I'm a meddling do-gooder who'll be after your soft drinks, fatty pies and booze next.

You have an arguable point. I am arguing for a limited beneficial meddling in people's "choices", so guilty as charged, though I'd die in a ditch in defence of my right to a reasonably-priced beer, and your right to eat sweets and fatty life-ruining takeaways.

But just imagine if all the smokers saved an annual fortune

by switching to vaping.

In many cases that'd be a couple of thousand apiece to stick into KiwiSaver every year, but you can calculate your own savings on the Quitline website.

And the Government sticks in up to \$521.43 a year when you save into KiwiSaver.

That's a hell of an additional return on quitting.

Come retirement, former smokers would all be laughing, as opposed to coughing.

Punishing a business whistleblower

ALAN KNOWSLEY
LEGAL MATTERS



Ignoring a manager's health and safety concerns has been held not to be the actions of a fair and reasonable employer.

The Employment Relations Authority has upheld an employee's claim for an unjustified disadvantage and awarded lost wages of \$5400 and compensation for hurt and humiliation of \$7000.

The employee was engaged as a manager of a licensed premises.

She raised concerns over fire exits being obstructed by boxes stacked over the exits, an exit door not unlocking during a fire alarm and the emergency plan not giving proper instructions.

The emergency plan required patrons to assemble in the car park but the premises did not have a car park.

The manager also raised concerns about the serving of alcohol to intoxicated patrons.

She found as a result that her hours were reduced on rosters to the point where she was given no shifts at all and the alarm code was altered without her knowledge.

Although she was never actually dismissed, the authority held that she was effectively out of work due to the lack of rostered shifts and therefore awarded her lost wages until she found a new position.



Obviously, the employer here reacted badly to the employee's concerns and did not approach the situation in a way that would have dealt with the concerns appropriately.

That is actually quite a common response as people let their hurt feelings get in the way of a dispassionate consideration of the issues.

However, even worse was that in addition to the employment issues over the way the employee

was treated, this case raised serious issues about the health and safety procedure of this workplace. Among them, fire exits were blocked, fire exit doors did not unlock during a fire alarm as they were supposed to do, and the emergency plan had little relevance to the actual premises.

The emergency plan may have been a cut-and-paste job that ticked the box for having a plan, but it appears no one had given much thought to its application to

the building.

To be appropriate an emergency plan must be effective.

Check out your business plan to ensure it fits your circumstances.

You should consult with your staff on the plan and once it is in place ensure that all staff are aware of the plan and what they need to do.

Training and practices, such as a fire drill, are important parts of ensuring staff know what to do

Training and practices, such as a fire drill, are important parts of ensuring staff know what to do.

and, as a lesson from the case referred to above, if you are checking your plan or premises, make sure that fire exits are not blocked and that the doors do open when people need to use them in an emergency.

Another thing that is commonly overlooked, especially in offices, is chemicals in the kitchen.

Do you have dishwashing or cleaning products under the sink? Consider the risk they may pose to young children visiting the workplace who may be left unsupervised while their parent does some urgent work.

Child-proof caps and a lock on the cupboard are simple and effective - and cost-effective - ways to minimise the risk, but are often not remembered in among the more obviously dangerous things in the workplace.

■ Column courtesy of RAINEY COLLINS LAWYERS phone 0800 733 484 www.raineycollins.co.nz. If you have a legal inquiry you would like discussed in this column please email Alan on aknowsley@raineycollins.co.nz