

UP IN SMOKE

Smoking at the office is ritual bonding at its best (and most deadly). It's about to become even more significant.

BY CHRIS ALLSOP

We know many scientific facts about smoking, smokers more than most. Smoking causes emphysema, lung cancer, other cancers, dodgy babies and more. Unfortunately, smoking is also like driving fast on a runway while being strafed by a helicopter gunship: it's pretty cool.

The 'cool' aspect of smoking could be traced back to the darker days of scientific know-how, when oblivious Hollywood stars sucked in enough tar to pit three dinosaurs apiece. Iconic photographs of film legends puffing on silk tipped fags helped breed the cool-to-smoke mindset, people such as James Dean, Humphrey Bogart and Marilyn Monroe, to name but a very select few.

This, in turn, led to the 'live fast, die young' motif that a lit cigarette with smoke curling away from its fiery pip came to represent. (Perhaps, if James Dean had been found

dead of an asthma attack, clutching an empty inhaler, then maybe many deadly addictions would never have been.)

Many deadly addictions – that more often than not started at school. A major facet of the teen psychological make-up is emulation, and good looking, dead people make excellent heroes to emulate, immune as they are from the levelling impact of being actively present in the same tedious and uncomprehending world as the teenager in question.

Emulation or simply an 'up yours' to school law, teen smokers would gather in shabby alleys and form tight and unassailable social groupings with dirty fingernails that other, non-smoking youths would struggle to join from a standing start.

And this mentality bleeds into the modern day office. While now grown-up and not purposefully alienating

colleagues, the workplace smoking area offers an echo of school day bonding and 'up yours' appeal. Office managers have to give way to a smokers' addictions, if they don't employees tend to get all grouchy and annoying and take out their withdrawal on everyone else. Imagine other addicts getting the same treatment: an alcoholic having his twice daily five minute vodka soak or a porn addict curtaining off his cubicle for a stint of erotic surf time?

With the new laws to be passed on banning smoking in pubs, clubs, bars and everywhere that it is fun,

sociable and comfy to smoke, the focus for the tobacco cabal is about to intensify on the office. Where else will you be able to scab cigarettes while you're 'giving up', and hack up big, black phlegms to a chorus of sympathy and praise, rather than uniform revulsion?

Smoking culture in the office is a real, live, if quite unfit, strand in the workplace weave. You all know you should give up, but if you can't quite bring yourself to do it, then enjoy it, before our nanny state does something else to make the world a little less cool. ■

WHO ARE YOU SMOKING WITH? A PERSONALITY SNAPSHOT

MARLBORO REDS

Man's man. Or a woman who wants to be a man.

MARLBORO MEDIUMS

Confused.

MARLBORO LIGHTS

Standard, social smoker.

MAYFAIR

Too poor to be seen with.

GITANES

Former child star.

ROLLIES

Saves all their money for drugs.

PIPE

Sociopath.

CIGAR

Dictator.

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