

we *CAME*,
we *SAW*,
we *CONQUERED*



Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

SOMETIMES THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED IS LESS TRAVELED FOR A REASON.” –Jerry Seinfeld

Why is that? Do we choose our own road, or does the road choose us? It’s a question common to all the great stories about who we are and what we do. Sometimes the answer isn’t clear until we’re caught right in the middle of the intersection. That’s when we’d better know for sure where we’re going.

Take the tobacco road, for example. Time was that most U.S. public health advocates avoided the tobacco road altogether because it was treacherous, unmapped and notorious for fatal wrecks. After all, it’s no accident of history that one of tobacco’s earliest logos was a crown with the words “veni, vidi, vici.” I came, I saw, I conquered.

Who wants to run up against that attitude around some darkened bend? Understandably, then, our own initial steps down that road were exploratory and cautious. In the early 1990s we funded mostly low-level tactics with like-minded partners to get kids to “just say no,” pregnant smokers to quit and the sons of good ol’ boys to stop chewing.

We asked ourselves, how could this not work? The American people for 30 years had been hammered with a drumbeat of evidence telling them that smoking kills. The facts speak for themselves. Certainly they knew enough to quit smoking. But they didn’t stop. Instead, they blew their smoke right back in the face of the best medical evidence and epidemiological research that money could buy.

At the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), leaders like Bob Hughes and Nancy Kaufman recognized that maybe a different kind of research was required. Rather than investing so much in detailing the problems, how about new research to identify the solutions? Let’s find out, they decided, funding \$16

million (\$24.5 million in 2008 dollars) between 1992 and 1996 to grow the field of tobacco-policy research with the *Tobacco Policy Research and Evaluation Program*.

What we found were formulas for change: Higher cigarette prices meant fewer kids willing to buy them. Our grantees even came up with the technical information the FDA needed to consider regulating nicotine as a drug.

Gaining some confidence, we pulled together a jumble of local lone-ranger tobacco-control groups under RWJF's *SmokeLess States* umbrella, the field's first real coalition.

Beware, though, he warned. Tobacco sees us coming and is playing hardball, threatening RWJF with an IRS investigation to challenge the Foundation's tax status. The Trustees were concerned.

Without serious premeditation, we quickly were engaged on four fronts: addressing the habitual and unhealthy behaviors of high-risk groups; elevating tobacco-policy research with resources and an identity of its own; creating coalitions, literally out of a void, to implement emerging evidence-based strategies; and strengthening advocacy in the states.

The result? Just like that, we had our first-ever tobacco portfolio. Indeed, we thought we were doing pretty well. That's when Nancy Kaufman, Bob Hughes and Mike Beachler went to Paris for the World Conference on Tobacco OR Health. Nancy, Bob and Mike were surrounded by other anti-smoking advocates, academics and government officials from around the globe. The talk was all about the need for social and political intervention to counter smoking's threat to world health.

Other Western countries were way ahead of the United States in reducing tobacco use among both youths and adults. We were stunned. In comparison, our light didn't seem to burn as brightly as we thought it did.

The conference delegates approved an international strategy for tobacco control. This was a blueprint for curtailing supply and demand for tobacco products through "smoke-free" public policies; curbs on tobacco ads aimed at

kids; regulation of the nicotine content of cigarettes; higher cigarette taxes to slow the consumption and uptake of smoking by youths; and efforts to increase the reach and affordability of proven quit-smoking treatments.

To the Americans, this was a radical, even revolutionary agenda. Before leaving Paris, we helped pull together other U.S. tobacco-control advocates. They all agreed: America needed to get its act together.

Back in Princeton, N.J., Nancy, Bob and Mike pitched Schroeder. They made a strong case. It went something like this:

Steve, we've already elevated the field of tobacco-policy research. We know the tobacco industry is vulnerable on the health consequences of smoking. STAT and SmokeLess States tell us that communities and whole regions are ripe for organizing. The Clinton administration is getting ready to take aim at tobacco. We'll organize and sustain a national movement and keep going with our clinical and policy research. The Foundation's assets are growing and the money's there. The country needs a leader on this. We're good to go.

Schroeder understood the big picture. The vaunted Clinton campaign to reform the health system had flopped, turning the onetime “new nemesis” into no nemesis.

Tobacco, however, was something very different. At heart always the physician, Schroeder was keen to cure tobacco's ills. This was exciting. Beware, though, he warned. Tobacco sees us coming and is playing hardball, threatening RWJF with an IRS investigation to challenge the Foundation's tax status. The Trustees were concerned.

Regardless, Schroeder approved the plan, so long as we worked strategically with partners like the cancer, heart and lung associations to draw on their resources and to help deflect the political and corporate heat that was sure to come. Within a year we paired with the American Cancer Society to create the National Center for Tobacco-Free Kids, headed by Bill Novelli, a legend in American public relations and already a long-time stop-smoking champion.

The center eventually grew into the *Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids*. Its objectives: Change public attitudes and public policies on tobacco; prevent kids from smoking; help smokers quit; and protect everyone from secondhand smoke.

Now, for the first time, the tobacco-control movement had a high-profile, well-funded center of gravity strong enough to unify the fragmented field and, we hoped, destabilize Big Tobacco's lock on American culture and American politics. We even learned to use the power tools of public persuasion perfected by Big Tobacco itself.

Novelli, for years the campaign's chief executive, later said we created a how-to model for converting an advocacy Chevy into a jet. It helped that we pumped \$84 million into the campaign over a decade.

We entered the Tobacco Wars with great timing, significant resources and realistic objectives that evolved over time thanks to evidence-based certainty. Foundation veterans will tell you that taking on tobacco was epically intense and full of risk. But we never once doubted the imperative of our cause.

In other words, we did what we needed to do and what we were uniquely positioned to do. It's not an exaggeration that the consequences will last our lifetime and beyond. Where Hollywood once used movie stars to let us know that "L&M filters are just what the doctor ordered," smoking today is widely viewed as reckless, dangerous, out of the mainstream, even aberrant.

The experience altered us, permanently.
Along the way we wrote the book on how to practice our
philanthropy as a transforming force in society.

We now know for certain that there is no risk-free exposure to secondhand smoke. Nor do smoke-free policies hurt the bar and restaurant businesses. At work, where every desk used to have an ashtray, workplaces—in fact, most places—are now smoke-free. Some of the giants of the tobacco industry have changed their names, hoping we'll forget them more quickly. Is it all because of RWJF? Certainly not. But even critics like Professor of Medicine Stanton Glantz acknowledge that we "put tobacco control on the public agenda."

We knew for certain things were changing the day that R.J. Reynolds dismantled its huge in-your-face Joe Camel billboard across the street from the American Medical Association's headquarters in Chicago. By the time that sign came down, we'd helped form, mobilize and sustain a movement that so far has saved probably 2.5 million lives; and marginalized the tobacco industry as an economic and cultural mainstay of American life.

Yes, we really did help change our country and our world. For the better. The experience altered us, permanently. Along the way we wrote the book on how to practice our philanthropy as a transforming force in society. This is how our own book tells us we did it:

- *We took real risks and challenged the powerful.*
- *We withstood controversy and confrontation.*
- *We focused on the importance of precise research and evidence.*
- *We were strengthened by like-minded, courageous and diverse partners.*
- *We stayed the course to ensure solutions were clear and momentum secured.*
- *Not until progress was made and outcomes achieved did we scale down, honing our strategic focus.*

Today we bundle all this together as a “promise” we make to ourselves, to our grantees and to the society we seek to serve. Our promise is real and realized in all we are, all we do, all we hope to be. We live it through the aspirations we share, the puzzles we solve, the triumphs that lift us and the failures that teach us. We celebrate our promise in the stories we tell.

And, oh, yes, there’s one more story. On New Year’s Day 2008, signs went up in bars, cafes and restaurants all across Paris, “Ici C’est 100% Sans Tabac”—“Here It’s 100% Smoke Free.” The Parisian press reported that most people accepted the prohibition as inevitable. C’est la vie, promise-style.

Our promise is real and realized in all
we are, all we do, all we hope to be.



Robert Wood Johnson Foundation