

# It's A Funny Old World

'Willpower is not something that can be summoned up. It's always there - we just don't realise it'

**W**illpower is a myth. A controversial statement perhaps, but I'll say it again: willpower is a myth, and you can stop worrying right now about whether or not you have it. There. I bet I've made your day now.

In truth, we all have free will - although some of us may find that hard to believe. I mean, who is that gremlin that seems to take over and drive us to do things that masquerade as being against our will? Did I really polish off that tub of ice cream the very night before my Weight Watchers weigh-in? As Oscar Wilde so famously said, 'I can resist anything except temptation.'

Many people find it baffling that they can be extremely determined in some areas of life and very wobbly in others. And they interpret this passivity as a failure to summon up willpower. But willpower is not something that can be summoned up; it is always there - we just don't realise it. So what is the difference between thinking, 'I know I ought to but it's just so hard,' and, 'I'm going to do this and nothing will stop me'? The secret is that determination comes from a settled decision.

We all are able to make settled decisions with no problems. These are the easy ones, like, 'Do I deserve a treat for my hard work?' If we don't have mixed feelings about something, then the correct course of action is obvious.

Ambivalence, then, is what we need to tackle. 'I know I ought to' screams of ambivalence. It immediately highlights the dilemma of knowing that we should do something, while feeling reluctant to do so. What's more, we will probably revisit the dilemma frequently, each time telling ourselves, 'I know I ought to (or ought NOT to),' but still getting nowhere. We could fuel a rocket with all the energy we waste.

Talk to reformed smokers and a lot of them, including me, will say they tried to give up many times



This week's columnist:  
**Author and agony aunt  
Caroline Buchanan**

before they succeeded. Some even accepted the myth that they just couldn't summon up the willpower to sustain it all those previous times but then, one day, bingo, they had success.

I gave up smoking even though I didn't really want to. But I wanted to want to so I enrolled in a workshop and haven't smoked since. I made a decision and then I was happy to do it. I discovered that if we put the action in first, the feeling then catches up.

Now let's apply this stuff to our excess baggage. For example, we might feel we need to lose weight. We know we're going to be healthier, slimmer and fitter as a result and our confidence and self-esteem will benefit, too. But then our self-sabotage creeps in. 'I've done this a thousand times - it doesn't work,' or, 'I'll start next Monday...'

Some dieters join a slimming club and find that groups are helpful. When we enrol, we've actually made a settled decision. And we are halfway to our goal when we walk through that door.

So far so good. But let's say we have a wobble. How can we sustain our settled decision? Well, we remind ourselves of all the benefits of positive change. We can reward ourselves with a timely treat. And we CAN become aware of our self-sabotaging side...

❖ **The 15 Minute Rule: How to Stop Procrastinating and Take Control of Your Life** by Caroline Buchanan (£7.59, Right Way) is available at [amazon.co.uk](http://amazon.co.uk)



Hive Beach  
Café in  
Dorset

## My Funny Old Week

**Where I've been...** The wonderful **Hive Beach Café** in Burton Bradstock, Dorset.

**What I've seen...** Gok Wan's fab one-man show **Naked & Baring All**.

**Who I've met...** Gok's agent **Carol Hayes**.

**What I've bought...** **Jamie Lawson** tickets.

**NEXT WEEK**  
**Sophie Radice**

PHOTOS: NEIL COOPER, ALAMY