

Foreword

When I first started TV work with the ABC affiliate in Boston in 1972, broadcast television was king, with a realm dominated by only ABC, CBS, and NBC. Even though I got into the business by accident and had no formal training in media, I quickly understood the power of the airwaves to influence the minds and hearts of viewers. I also became very conscious of the attendant responsibility to be accurate and understandable, remembering Mark Twain's admonition (loosely phrased) to beware of reading health books because mistakes can kill you.

Perusing the information in this enormously informative volume, I was once again reminded of those elemental emotions: exhilaration about the opportunities offered by media and anxiety about the potential for misuse. Any phrase or sound bite can affect millions of people. In dealing with tobacco, I think the power of this potential must never be forgotten. Tobacco captivates people when they cannot rationally resist its siren call and can unleash a slow, deadly disease that can kill them even as they try to escape the tenacious trap of addiction. So those of us given the privilege of access to media should be aware of our own responsibilities in the fight against tobacco use—including the need to choose words and images to counter misinformation and temptation aimed at the young entrusted to our care.

I have come to believe that unless we think and feel that we are fighting a lethal battle against tobacco use, we will not succeed in stemming the forces that would promote it. This volume contains a wealth of information about how tobacco companies use media to their benefit. I predict that, like me, even though you have seen them in action, you will be amazed by the tactics used to promote tobacco. Tobacco use is a social phenomenon largely propelled by mass media over the past century, led by tobacco industry professionals who constantly change strategies to reach their goals. They combine the resourcefulness of a profit-making industry with a changing media and regulatory landscape to sell a product that remains our greatest public health challenge. We will not remove tobacco from our society unless we are willing to understand the industry's constantly changing tactics.

But this volume provides encouragement—information about successful efforts to fight back. Again I was surprised by what can work and stimulated to think about new ways to take a stand and make a difference.

I invite you to consider this volume a valuable reference for understanding how media can be used in the war against tobacco. Keep it handy for wise counsel, strategic encouragement, and a partner in a noble cause.

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