

## MY WEIRD PROMPTS

Podcast Transcript

### EPISODE #115

# The Right to Breathe: Tobacco Policy and the Enforcement Gap

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## EPISODE SYNOPSIS

In this episode, Herman and Corn dive into the suffocating reality of second-hand smoke and the widening gap between global tobacco legislation and real-world enforcement. Inspired by a listener's struggle with asthma in Jerusalem, the discussion moves from the chemical dangers of sidestream smoke to the pioneering bans in Ireland and France. We explore the radical "end-game" strategies of 2025, including the Maldives' generational tobacco ban and the rising awareness of third-hand smoke. Why do some countries successfully clear the air while others remain stuck in a toxic fog? Join us as we examine the fundamental shift from the "right to smoke" to the "right to breathe" and what it means for the future of public health.

## DANIEL'S PROMPT

### Daniel

I would like to discuss second-hand smoke exposure and the state of related policies around the world in 2025. As an asthmatic, I've noticed significant differences in how countries like Ireland and Israel enforce these laws. Which countries currently have the most advanced regimes, and what are the nuances in policies between different countries?

# TRANSCRIPT

## Corn

Hey everyone, welcome back to My Weird Prompts! I am Corn, and I am joined as always by my brother.

## Herman

Herman Poppleberry, at your service. Today we are diving into a topic that hits pretty close to home, literally. Our housemate Daniel sent us a voice note about something that has been bothering him quite a bit lately, especially as someone who lives with asthma.

## Corn

Yeah, Daniel was telling us about how he has been struggling with second-hand smoke exposure here in Jerusalem. It is one of those things you do not really think about until you cannot breathe, you know? It is especially interesting because Daniel grew up in Ireland, which apparently has a totally different vibe when it comes to smoking laws compared to what we see here in Israel.

## Herman

It is a fascinating study in how policy and culture collide. And honestly, it is a perfect time to talk about this because here at the end of twenty-five, the global landscape for tobacco control has shifted in some pretty radical ways. As a donkey who spends way too much time reading public health journals, I can tell you that the gap between the leaders and the laggards is wider than ever.

## Corn

I mean, I am just a simple sloth who likes fresh air, but even I have noticed that some places feel... I do not know, cleaner than others? But before we get into the heavy policy stuff, can we just talk about what second-hand smoke actually is? I mean, we all know it is the smoke from the end of the cigarette, but why is it so much worse for people like Daniel?

### Herman

That is a great starting point, Corn. So, there are actually two types of tobacco smoke that non-smokers get exposed to. There is sidestream smoke, which comes directly from the burning end of the cigarette, and mainstream smoke, which is what the smoker exhales. The crazy thing is that sidestream smoke actually has higher concentrations of cancer-causing agents and toxins than the smoke the smoker inhales.

### Corn

Wait, really? How does that work?

### Herman

Well, when a smoker inhales, the tobacco burns at a higher temperature, which actually destroys some of the toxins. But when the cigarette is just sitting there in an ashtray, it burns at a lower temperature, which results in a dirtier, more toxic chemical cocktail. For someone with asthma, those particles are like tiny jagged rocks hitting their airways. It causes immediate inflammation, which is why Daniel mentioned that tightness in his chest starting up even an hour after he leaves a smoky environment.

### Corn

That sounds miserable. And Daniel mentioned that globally, this is a massive issue. I saw a report recently saying that children lose over eight million days of healthy life every single year just because of second-hand smoke. Eight million!

### Herman

Exactly. The actual figure from research presented earlier this year in twenty-five is eight point forty-five million days of healthy life lost annually for children. It is a staggering number. And that is why we are seeing this massive push for stricter laws. But as Daniel pointed out, having a law on the books and actually making people follow it are two very different things.

### Corn

Right, the enforcement gap. He mentioned Ireland versus Israel. I remember hearing that Ireland was actually one of the first places to do a full indoor smoking ban, like, a long time ago.

### Herman

You are spot on. Ireland was a global pioneer. They implemented the first national workplace smoking ban in two thousand four. It was revolutionary at the time. People thought the pubs would go out of business, that there would be riots in the streets. But instead, it became a massive success. Public support actually grew after it was implemented because people realized how much nicer it was to go home without their clothes smelling like an old campfire.

### Corn

And here in Israel, it feels... different. I mean, I go to some bars in Jerusalem and it is like walking into a fog bank. There are signs that say no smoking, but everyone has a cigarette in their hand and the bartenders just shrug.

### Herman

That is the core of Daniel's frustration. In Israel, the legislation is actually quite robust on paper. We have laws banning smoking in public places, including bars, restaurants, and even within ten meters of hospital entrances. But the enforcement is, well, it is spotty at best. In many places, it is socially acceptable to just ignore the law, and the local authorities do not always make it a priority to issue fines.

### Corn

It is weird because Israel is so advanced in so many other ways, but with smoking, it feels like we are stuck in the nineteen eighties. Daniel even mentioned seeing doctors smoking right outside the hospital doors when his son was born! That feels like some kind of dark irony.

### Herman

It is incredibly perverse. And it is not just a feeling, Corn. The data from late twenty-four and twenty-five shows that while smoking rates are dropping in many Western countries, they have been stubbornly high or even rising among certain groups in Israel, particularly young people. When the culture does not stigmatize public smoking, the laws do not carry much weight.

### Corn

So if Ireland is the gold standard for enforcement and Israel is struggling, what does the rest of the world look like right now? Are there countries that are going even further than Ireland did?

### Herman

Oh, absolutely. Twenty-five has been a massive year for what people are calling the end-game strategies. We are moving past just banning smoking in bars. We are now seeing bans in outdoor spaces. France has really taken the lead on this recently.

### Corn

France? I always think of France as the place where everyone is sitting at a cafe with a cigarette and a baguette.

### Herman

That was the old stereotype! But as of July first, twenty-five, France implemented some of the strictest outdoor smoking bans in the world. They have banned smoking in all outdoor areas frequented by children. We are talking parks, public gardens, beaches, and even bus stops. If there is a chance a kid is there, you cannot light up.

### Corn

That is a huge shift. I bet the beaches are a lot nicer without cigarette butts in the sand.

### Herman

It makes a massive difference for the environment too, but the primary goal is de-normalizing the behavior. If kids never see people smoking in public, they are much less likely to start. It is all about changing the social fabric.

### Corn

You mentioned end-game strategies. That sounds like something out of a superhero movie. What does that actually mean in the world of tobacco policy?

### Herman

It refers to policies designed to eventually eliminate tobacco use entirely. The most famous example right now is the Maldives. This year, they introduced a generational tobacco ban.

### Corn

A generational ban? How does that work? Do they just ban it for everyone born after a certain year?

### Herman

Exactly. It is often called a smoke-free generation law. Basically, they set a date, and anyone born after that date can never legally be sold tobacco products for their entire lives. So, the legal smoking age effectively goes up by one year every single year. In theory, it means that tobacco eventually just ages out of the population.

### Corn

That is wild. It is like a slow-motion prohibition. Does it actually work?

### Herman

Well, we are in the early stages of seeing the results. New Zealand tried something similar before a change in government rolled it back, but the Maldives is pushing forward. Other countries are watching very closely. The idea is to stop the supply chain for new smokers while still allowing current adult smokers to make their own choices, though with more and more restrictions on where they can actually do it.

### Corn

It is interesting that the focus is shifting to the next generation. It makes sense, though. If you can stop the habit before it starts, you solve the second-hand smoke problem for everyone eventually. But what about right now for people like Daniel? Is there any hope for better enforcement in places that already have the laws?

### Herman

That is the big question. Some countries are using technology to help. There are apps now in parts of the European Union where citizens can report smoking violations in real-time, and it triggers an automatic notification to the business owner or even a local inspector. It is a bit controversial because it feels a little like snitching, but for someone with a health condition, it is a matter of safety.

### Corn

I can see that. If I could not breathe because someone was breaking the law next to me, I would probably want a way to report it too.

### Herman

It is all about who the law is protecting. For a long time, the conversation was about the smoker's right to smoke. Now, the conversation has shifted entirely to the non-smoker's right to breathe clean air. It is a fundamental shift in how we view public space.

### Corn

Let's take a quick break for our sponsors. Larry: Are you tired of the air around you being just... plain? Do you wish you could carry a piece of the industrial revolution wherever you go? Introducing The Smog-O-Matic Five Thousand! This revolutionary wearable device takes perfectly clean air and enriches it with a proprietary blend of charcoal dust, aged newsprint scent, and a hint of mysterious chemical runoff. Why breathe like a forest-dwelling hermit when you can breathe like you are standing behind a bus in nineteen seventy-two? The Smog-O-Matic Five Thousand is sleek, heavy, and requires sixteen double-A batteries an hour. It is the perfect gift for the person who has everything but wants a persistent cough. Larry: BUY NOW!

### Herman

...Alright, thanks Larry. I think I will stick to the fresh air, personally. Anyway, Corn, where were we?

### Corn

We were talking about the shift in rights—the right to breathe versus the right to smoke. It seems like the world is really moving toward the breathers. But I am curious about the nuances. Daniel mentioned that even in Ireland, things have evolved. It is not just about bars anymore, right?

### Herman

Right. In twenty-five, we are seeing a lot of focus on what is called third-hand smoke. This is the residue that sticks to walls, carpets, and clothes long after the cigarette is put out. Even if no one is smoking in a room right now, if they smoked there an hour ago, there are still toxins being off-gassed into the air.

### **Corn**

Wait, so even if the room smells fine, there could still be stuff in the air?

### **Herman**

Exactly. And for asthmatics or young children crawling on carpets, that is a real health risk. That is why we are seeing more policies around smoke-free housing. In some parts of the United States and Canada, entire apartment buildings are now required to be smoke-free, including inside the private units.

### **Corn**

That feels like it would be hard to enforce. How do they know if you are smoking in your own living room?

### **Herman**

Usually it is through lease agreements and neighbor complaints. But the goal is to protect the people in the next apartment over. Because as we know, smoke travels through vents, electrical outlets, and floorboards. If you live in a multi-unit building, your neighbor's second-hand smoke is often your second-hand smoke.

### **Corn**

That is a really good point. I never thought about it coming through the walls. It makes the Israel situation feel even more urgent, especially in older buildings in Jerusalem where everything is so close together.

### **Herman**

It really is. And Daniel's point about the post office or small kiosks is another great example of the enforcement gap. In many countries, those would be considered high-priority areas for enforcement because everyone has to go to the post office. You cannot just choose to avoid it like you can a bar. When public services are smoky, it is a form of exclusion for people with respiratory issues.

### Corn

So, if we look at the global map in late twenty-five, who are the leaders right now? If someone like Daniel wanted to move somewhere where he would never have to worry about a cigarette again, where would he go?

### Herman

Well, Ireland is still near the top because their compliance is so high. But Australia and Singapore are also incredible leaders. Singapore has used a combination of very high taxes, massive public education campaigns, and incredibly strict enforcement. They even use thermal cameras in some areas to detect the heat from a cigarette in a non-smoking zone.

### Corn

Thermal cameras? Man, they are not messing around.

### Herman

Not at all. And then you have countries like Bhutan, which famously banned the sale and production of tobacco entirely for a long time, though they have moved toward more of a high-tax, restricted-access model recently. But if you want the most advanced regime in twenty-five, you really have to look at France's new outdoor laws. They are setting the pace for the rest of Europe.

### Corn

It is funny how things change. France used to be the smoker's paradise, and now they are the ones telling people they cannot smoke at the bus stop. It gives me hope that maybe Israel could change too.

### Herman

It usually starts with a tipping point in public opinion. In Ireland, the tipping point was the health of the bar workers. People realized it was not fair to force someone to work in a toxic environment just to earn a paycheck. In Israel, we might need a similar shift in focus—maybe focusing on the health of children or the rights of people with chronic conditions like asthma.

### **Corn**

Daniel mentioned that he feels like he just has to avoid certain places. That feels like a loss for the community. If a whole group of people cannot go to the cool bars or the local shops because of smoke, the community is smaller than it should be.

### **Herman**

That is exactly the right way to look at it. It is an accessibility issue. We talk a lot about ramps for wheelchairs or braille for the blind, but clean air is an accessibility requirement for millions of people with asthma, COPD, or heart conditions. When we allow public smoking, we are effectively putting up a "No Entry" sign for those people.

### **Corn**

So, what are the practical takeaways for our listeners? If you are in a place with bad enforcement like Israel, or even if you are in a place with good laws, what can you actually do?

### **Herman**

First, it is about knowing your rights. Even in Israel, the law is on your side. You have the right to ask a business owner to enforce the no-smoking rule. Often, they do not do it because they do not want the confrontation, but if enough customers speak up, the math changes for them. They realize they are losing more business from the non-smokers than they are from the smokers.

### **Corn**

And what about on a bigger scale?

### **Herman**

Advocacy is huge. Supporting organizations that push for better enforcement and stricter outdoor laws. And for the smokers out there, it is about being mindful of where that smoke goes. It does not just disappear when you blow it into the wind. It lingers on your clothes, it drifts into windows, and for someone like Daniel, it can ruin their whole day or even send them to the hospital.

### Corn

It is about that mutual respect, right? We all live in this house together, we all live in this city together. We have to look out for each other.

### Herman

Exactly. And the good news is that the global trend is very clearly moving toward smoke-free environments. Even the countries that are lagging behind are feeling the pressure. The economic cost of tobacco-related illness is just too high for governments to ignore forever. Between the lost productivity and the healthcare costs, tobacco is a massive drain on the system.

### Corn

I hope Daniel's lungs get a break soon. It sounds like he has a good perspective on it, though—comparing his two homes and seeing what is possible. It is not like this is an unsolvable problem. Ireland proved that you can change a culture in a single generation.

### Herman

They really did. And with the new generational bans starting up in twenty-five, we might be looking at a future where our kids look back at the idea of smoking in a bar the same way we look back at people throwing trash out of their car windows. It will just seem... gross and outdated.

### Corn

I am looking forward to that day. I like my air like I like my naps—long, deep, and uninterrupted by coughing fits.

### Herman

Well said, brother. I think we have covered a lot of ground today. From the chemistry of sidestream smoke to the generational bans in the Maldives and the new outdoor restrictions in France. It is a complex issue, but the direction of travel is clear.

**Corn**

Definitely. Thanks to Daniel for sending in such a personal and important topic. It really made me think about the air I am breathing every day.

**Herman**

And thanks to everyone for listening. This has been a really deep dive into something that affects every single one of us, whether we realize it or not.

**Corn**

If you want to get in touch with us, you can find our contact form at [myweirdprompts.com](https://myweirdprompts.com). We love hearing your thoughts and your own weird prompts. You can also find us on Spotify and anywhere else you get your podcasts.

**Herman**

We have an RSS feed on the website too, if you want to make sure you never miss an episode.

**Corn**

This has been My Weird Prompts. I am Corn.

**Herman**

And I am Herman Poppleberry.

**Corn**

Stay curious, and keep breathing that fresh air. We will see you next time!

**Herman**

Goodbye everyone!