



Known as the “Pitbull of Personal Development,” he’s one of the most sought after and highest-paid lecturers in North America—but don’t dare call him a **motivational** speaker! This guy proudly refers to himself as the world’s first **irritational** speaker. His name is Larry Winget and his approach to self-improvement is... **different**. A realist who claims that old-fashioned hard work is the **only path to success**, he’s well aware that his notions contradict those of most self-help “experts.” Forget “work smart, not hard”; according to Winget, anyone in this world who has ever **achieved greatness** has worked extremely hard.

Shut Up, Stop Whining, and Have a Cigar

by Tommy Zarzecki

“I’ll never just light up a cigar for the hell of it,” claims the Oklahoma native in a booming Southwestern voice that commands you to stand up and take notice. “I need that time with my cigar, sitting alone as the sun sets, just winding down from the day’s events. It really slows me down, and, with the pace I move about the country, there’s almost nothing I appreciate more in life.”

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Clad in western garb and gleaming with an artillery of heavy silver bracelets and rings that must add a couple of pounds to each arm, this man walks his talk like no other. “My biggest rush is to say something so obnoxious that the crowd physically leans back in a state of disbelief,” says the distinctive cowboy that stands out in Manhattan’s Little Italy, where we met for a Sunday lunch. “Within 20 seconds, they lean right back up and oftentimes turn to the person next to them and say, *you know, I have to admit, he’s right.*”

Clearly, this abrasive, in-your-face approach is working quite well for both Larry and his audiences. An author for whom three of four books have earned bestseller status, Winget’s ideas are finding their way into the lives of those who’ve realized that, perhaps, the more passive approaches to success are by no means the most effective. With titles like *Shut Up, Stop Whining, & Get a Life* and *It’s Called Work for a Reason!*, not to mention his latest, *You’re Broke Because You Want to Be*, Winget’s words fly smack into the face of conventional wisdom, hitting below the belt just hard enough so y’all can wake up and smell the maduros. You might recognize the bald speaker from TV. He’s hosted A&E’s *Big Spender* and did a popular stint on CNBC’s *The Millionaire Inside*. Even Hyundai hired him as a spokesman in their national television ads.

Unless you become uncomfortable, Larry preaches, you won’t change—and, of course, he means for the better. He delivers his message with tough love, knowing that patting you on the back while spouting clichéd platitudes is *not* going to make you see the light. It’s only when you’ve truly had enough that the much-needed changes will occur. And, as an ardent lover of the leaf, Winget applies that logic when it comes to dealing with draconian smoking laws.

“Many complain about the smoke Nazis, but most people don’t take any *real* action. They sit on their fat asses and don’t actually *do* a damned thing! If you want laws to change, you have to be heard! Write, e-mail, and phone the living hell out of our representatives—they’re called representatives for a reason,” he says, clearly getting fired up and gesturing with his *Romeo y Julieta Edición*

Limitada. “Show up for council meetings or start your own meetings. Hell, get a group of cigar folks together and call a press conference! Make a video of it and put it on YouTube, or do a podcast and flat-out educate people to the differences between cigars and cigarettes, and how unfair the taxes are to the cigar industry! You don’t need to be a pro to accomplish your mission. You just need to be committed and others will follow.”

Taking a deep breath, he continues. “Face it, this is all an uphill battle; smoking is *not* popular and antismoking legislation *is*. My whole platform has always been about *doing*—working hard and being proactive in order to get what you want in life. This is going to be a continual fight, but when it comes down to our individual freedoms, those are *always* worth fighting for.”

After growing up dirt-poor, Winget attended a little-bitty college in northeastern Oklahoma. On top of his studies, he worked as a telephone operator, learning the ins and outs of the telecom world. Determined to be his own boss, he put that knowledge to use after graduation. He spent several years working incredibly hard to build and perfect his own thriving telecom company.

He became everything he ever wanted to be—successful and rich, with all the trappings. Then, out of the blue, due to some catastrophic mistakes within the company, he lost absolutely everything overnight. Some people would collapse with a weight like this on their shoulders, but not this guy. “To this day, the best thing that ever happened to me was going bankrupt,” he says. “At the moment, I was thinking, *holy shit, this is horrible!* But, looking back, I would not be the success I am today if that hadn’t happened.”

His real goal had always been professional speaking. In the late ’80s, he set out on this path as a business humorist, teaching audiences valuable business lessons

mixed with sarcastic comedy. But about 10 years in, he started to hate every word coming out of his mouth. “I felt like the biggest compromising whore that would say whatever a company wanted me to say. It was all just so inauthentic,” he recalls. “I was 45 years old and going through the classic midlife crisis.”



Before Oklahoma bars began catering to their cigar-smoking clientele in the 1990s, there was Larry Winget and the Cigars-A-Go-Go mobile tobacconist. Knowing a smokin’ idea when he saw it, he created a service based on the Cigar Boom—and was also savvy enough to call it quits before the trend screeched to a halt.



A cathartic, soul-searching trip to Sedona, Arizona, in 1999, followed by a permanent move to Scottsdale a year later, allowed Larry to reinvent himself. He decided to speak about what he considered the truth. One day, some knucklehead heckled him. Winget’s response? “Why don’t you shut up, stop whining, and get a life!”

The audience went crazy! Winget knew right then and there that *this* was the foundation to build his platform on. It also became the title of his first nationally published book, which instantly shot to number one on the *Wall Street Journal* bestseller list.

Not surprising, considering that Larry Winget has always had a savvy head for business. In fact, during the Cigar Boom of the 1990s, he saw—and grabbed—a smokin’ opportunity. “I was walking through the Buckhead section of Atlanta when this guy pulled up in a van and rolled out this great stash of cigars for sale,” he explains, recalling a time before he became a motivational (oops—*irritational*) speaker. “I was incredibly impressed with the idea, but this guy was so damned bad at marketing!” The salesman may not have been doing everything exactly right, but Larry did notice one key factor: the guy was making *a lot* of money.

Upon returning to his native Oklahoma, Winget took the idea to the next level. Within a week, Cigars-A-Go-Go was born... and, of course, Larry did it right. “My partner and I bought a nice van, lined it with cedar, and installed a roll-out glass humidor,” he details enthusiastically. “We had graphics painted on the sides, and, for the finishing touch, a buddy made a giant cigar that he affixed to the roof—and it actually smoked!”

Knowing that this venture would be a hot ticket, Winget’s obvious next step was purchasing a ton of cigars. Bars, especially those with outdoor seating, were Go-Go’s main target; with the Boom still in its infancy, these places were not yet selling cigars. Before he knew it, bar patrons were

on the lookout for the bald guy in the stogie van. The business took off so fast that Larry and his partner hired help and purchased a second van. Cigars were all the rage, and the boys were making money hand over fist as one van hit pubs in Oklahoma City, while the other covered Tulsa. The demand was so incredible that they purchased a trailer and converted it into a mobile cigar store! This rolling, cedar-lined, walk-in humididor was stocked with all the popular brands and proved to be a welcome sight as the cigar craze raged on.

But all trends lose momentum at some point and, once again, Winget's business savvy enabled him to stay ahead of the curve. Sensing the end of the Boom on the horizon, the guys found someone to buy them out. By the late 1990s, Cigars-A-Go-Go, along with the Boom itself, was a beautiful and lucrative memory.

During his recent trip to Manhattan, Larry appeared on CNBC's *The Big Idea with Donnie Deutsch*, a show whose host encourages would-be entrepreneurs to chase their passions. The never-bashful Winget basically told Deutsch that *that* was a load of crap, and that passion, excitement, and love can be someone's absolute worst enemies. The point, as Winget explains it, is that when you get overly passionate, you tend to make decisions from the heart instead of the brain. To illustrate, Larry quotes from *The War of Art* by Steven Pressfield, who says that the difference between an amateur and a professional is that an amateur loves what he does while a professional loves what he does enough to do whatever it takes to be excellent at it. Winget believes there is a huge difference and echoes Pressfield's sentiment that, when someone becomes overly passionate, *excellence* is often sold down the drain.

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"I love four-letter words," Winget says of his unorthodox lecturing methods. "But my favorite of them all is 'next.' Okay, you had great success in one area? So what, who cares—what are you going to do *next*?" He notes that people's biggest problems arise *not* when they

screw up but instead when they're on a roll. That's the time, after all, that most of us get comfortable and no longer ask, *what's next*? To Winget, wallowing in success can become one's death knell.

This outspoken author claims to have read over 4,000 books on success, happiness, wealth, spirituality, relationships, business, and finance. His usual mission is to zero in on a popular book and take a contrarian's view. He culls what the masses find so intriguing then denounces it as pure BS. Yeah, he's not overly accepted by many of his peers on the talk circuit but, as you might guess, he doesn't give a rat's ass. "The world has this herd mentality where, if enough people believe it, then it must be true," he explains. "But that's not the case. If herd mentality worked, the herd would be rich, the herd would be famous, the herd would be superstars, and it's just not true."

He says what he believes. He ruffles feathers. He sometimes even provokes people into challenging him face to face—or just walking out of the room entirely! No matter what, this guy garners a reaction, maybe even before his speaking engagement begins. When a company hires him for a conference, the company often attempts to tell him what to say. His reply is always the same: "I'm gonna talk about what I wanna talk about." It's not a matter of being cocky; he simply believes that what he has to say is what everyone *needs* to hear.

It's an attitude that we'd be smart to adopt—even (*especially!*) when facing the ever-tightening noose of smoking restrictions in our country. "When it comes to the smoking laws in bars or restaurants, it really needs to be up to an owner whether his establishment permits smoking, not some legislator. *Everything* in this country is overlegislated," emphasizes Winget, a fan of darker, fuller-

bodied smokes. "It's the owner's decision who his patrons are going to be. If he's willing to sacrifice some of his customers by allowing smoking, that's *his* business. That's his own personal economy that the lawmakers are messing with and it's not right."

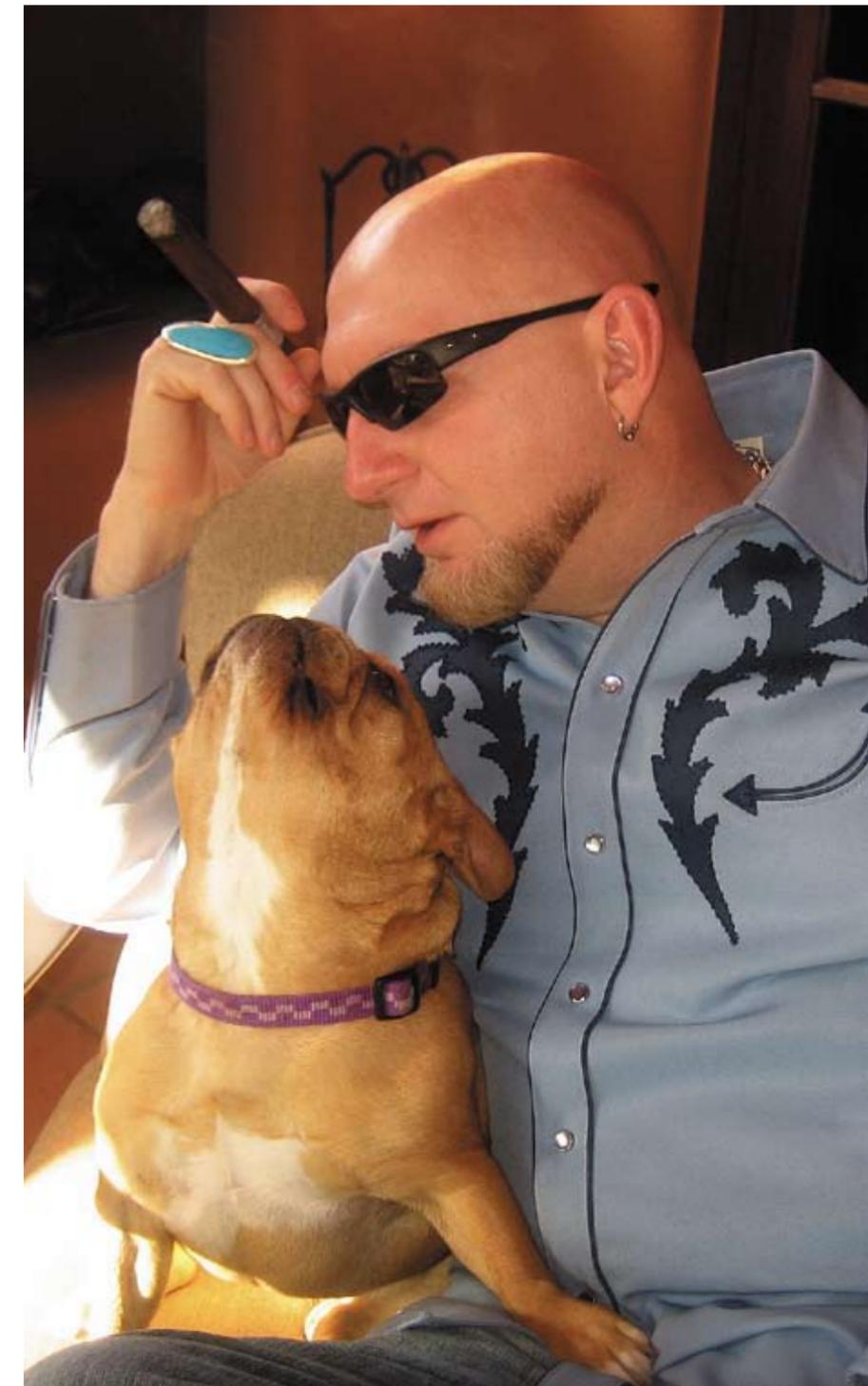
"Write, e-mail, and phone the living hell out of our representatives.

Hell, get a group of **cigar folks together** and call a press conference!"

After spending hours with this guy, I can't help but believe in him—as well as feel pretty damned relieved that he's on *our* side in the fight to enjoy a stogie in America! "A cigar actually forces me to sit down and be in the moment," he notes, revealing that he isn't *always* running at top speed. "I have one at night, my mind is soothed, and I'm ready to take on another day."

In his straight-up writings and bold lectures, Larry Winget comes across as one no-nonsense mutha. But, truly, he's a hell of a down-to-earth, sincere human being who's not only a trip to hang out with, but a cigar connoisseur to boot. His potent doses of tough love aren't meant to hurt you—in fact, quite the contrary. He's been in the trenches like so many of us, and that's what makes him authentic. His rags-to-riches-to-rags life gave him the experience and strength to reinvent himself into one of the most successful speakers and authors in the country today. Through his travels all over the US, and because of his hard work, this cigar-loving, ass-kicking personality is on his way to becoming a household name. Next time you light up a smoke at the end of a rough day, keep in mind the words of Winget: "Discover your uniqueness. Learn to exploit it in service of others and you will be guaranteed happiness, success, and prosperity."

Damn, Larry, I'll smoke to that. **CM**



Behind his abrasive, in-your-face attitude, Larry Winget's got a soft side, shown here with Butter (who seems to have developed her own taste for good smokes).