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Pill-Popping Society Easily Promoted

A BUSINESSMAN jokingly said to his companions at a Chamber of Commerce luncheon recently: "I need several doses of those new pills they have to make you smarter!"

He doesn't, but that is exactly the kind of reaction drug peddlers want to generate — acceptance, even if facetious.

Since researchers in Nebraska announced they had found "smart pills," an organic chemical compound which apparently improves memory and intellectual performance that normally deteriorate with age, Californians have been pushing another newly-found drug.

That one is called "zoom," is said to be legal and is described as a pill that gives a powerful lift before breakfast. One promoter says he is selling 3,000 cases a week to solve "the nation's human energy crisis" and also to make him a millionaire.

The latter goal probably is uppermost in his mind, because money is the larger motive that keeps drug addiction growing.

The idea of establishing a society

addicted to drugs, alcohol and other compulsive habits has been gaining ground, thanks largely to skillfully planned campaigns. These are designed to break down family or religious training, prejudice or common sense that might deter an individual from forming habits with the products offered.

Periodically, articles appear in magazines advising us that drugs are available, or soon will be, to allow a person to select the kind of mood he or she wants for the day and to create the mood by popping certain habit-forming pills.

An example of how this works is described in a national trade publication by a Michigan advertising agency. It employs what is called "belief dynamics" to modify customer notions about drinking beer or using various other advertised products.

This concept concludes that it is "advertising's job to encounter a person's beliefs in such a way that he or she will behave, or purchase, what the advertiser wants him or

her to buy."

Similar techniques are applied when certain groups want to persuade the public it should accept legalized gambling by promising benefits from taxes, or to legalize liquor-by-the-drink on the flimsy theory that people would drink less if liquor were more readily available.

The theory is to get people's interest by offering something they want or think they need, such as better memory recall, more energy, lower taxes or a happier mood. Promoters will promise anything to get people to form habits that will be profitable to the sellers.

It would be nice to say that smart people don't fall for such schemes, but the record shows many do.

Just about every kind of scheme, con game, bad politics, phony religion, vice, immoral practice and health-destroying habit can be and is being "sold" this way.

The old business motto, caveat emptor (let the buyer beware), applies to quality of ideas as well as to quality of products.