

Can You Go 24 Hours without Complaining?

Written by Claire Knowles

Have you yet adopted the “no complaining rule?” Eight years ago, Jon Gordon’s book, *The No Complaining Rule* took the business world by storm, topping the best-seller’s list. The key to this book’s enduring success is that it offers positive ways to deal with negativity both at work and in other organizations. It requires that you shine a light on your own complaining.

All of us intuitively know that negativity in workplaces, and in organizations (even within our New York State Women, Inc.), can collectively cost billions of dollars and ultimately impact the morale, productivity, and health of individuals, organizations, teams, and workplaces. In an organizational sense, too many chronic complainers can quickly erode the ability to effectively achieve the overarching mission and goal.

If you were to step back and observe yourself objectively as a fly on the wall, would you consider yourself to be a chronic complainer? Pay attention to your own patterns. Have you noticed your own personal grumblings? To whom do you tend to air most of your complaints? (Are those recipients becoming weary of your complaining? Why not take some time for some personal introspection?)

Is *your* organization able to deal with chronic complainers? Is there a means in place to respectfully engage with chronic complainers, as well as to openly deal with genuine, justified, complaints? If not, perhaps it is time to create that respectful listening process, and to create that additional avenue, where the negative elephants in the room can be openly and fairly discussed and addressed.

As a woman in business, I understand the common frustration of working through a difficult situation, needing to vent, needing to have someone listen, and then to be asked to think about the “no complaining rule.” For this reason, our emotions must be considered in this mix too. There’s a marked difference between being a chronic complainer and needing to emotionally vent. Sometimes the moment requires us to find a way to vent—to have someone listen to us—to breathe—to take a walk to handle a stressful time. When we are in a situation that evokes high levels of frustration or anger, we all know that we need to stop and carve out time to examine what is causing the anger, or the frustration, and then to develop a constructive plan of action to address the situation (for the better). Complaining about it might assuage the emotion for a bit, but moving into constructive solutions is the better way.

Our Vision for New York State Women Inc. is to make a difference in the lives of working women, and our Mission remains to build powerful women personally, professionally,

and politically. Imagine for one moment what could happen in our own personal lives, our work-lives, and within our chapters, if each member went forward, starting today, to become cognizant of our complaining—and to then decide to stop that negative behavior (if it is our own), and to respectfully address that chronic-complaining behavior from others—realizing the negative, contagious effect it carries.

Some complaints are justified, while others are not. Personally, I have found that chronic complaining (even silently to myself) accomplishes nothing positive. However, for many people, it seems to be an essential part of their personality, almost a way of life for them, and can be contagious among others, helping to create a toxic climate. It's best to avoid such people whenever possible but sometimes that is impossible. Sometimes you have to confront the chronic complainer. Sometimes you have to say, "I'm exhausted by your continual complaining...I'll gladly listen to you again when you come back with a viable solution to the very thing you're complaining about." Or "I find continual complaining is an inroad to negativity...and negativity is the last thing I need...it is contagious, like gossip, and I just don't want to catch it." (Then walk away). What you'll find is that chronic complainers may not even realize that they carry that label. (They can change that behavior).

As a Consultant, I've worked in many organizations where unprofessionalism has taken hold. Some organizations and teams have made it okay to be unprofessional in their dealings with each other, and even with clients or customers or academic colleagues. Usually there is a long litany of hurts and a trail of events—unresolved complaints, name-calling, back-stabbings, undermining, unhealthy alliances. Unprofessionalism, including *unchecked chronic complaining*, can be exposed for precisely what it is. Once a light has been put on the specific behaviors and the connection made to the impact on the business, organization, etc., this negative elephant disappears quickly. I like to suggest to organizations, that they include *chronic complaining* as a behavior that is listed as not professionally or socially acceptable within their Codes of Conduct.

One of my early professional trainings in the corporate world was to understand the important and expected differences in a professional versus a non-professional environment. This requires minimizing deadly behavioral habits while augmenting the caring habits of a professional environment. Can you see where *complaining* fits in to this learning?

Minimize these:

Complaining
Blaming
Nagging
Undermining
Harassing/Tearing others down
Negativity

Augment these:

Accepting Responsibility
Negotiating Differences
Listening
Supporting, Developing Trusting Relationships
Lifting others up
Finding the Positive

Let's move forward fulfilling our Vision--starting with *No Chronic Complaining*—to make a difference in our own lives, and in the lives of working women.

Quotes:

“Go 24 hours without complaining. (Not even once.) Then watch how your life starts changing! ~ Positivelifetips.com

“If you have time to whine and complain about something then you have the time to do something about it.” ~ Anthony J. D’Angelo

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