

The No Complaining Rule – phase 1

Negativity affects the morale, performance and productivity of our teams. Complaining and negativity are a kind of cancer in an organisation. It grows hidden beneath the surface, if not caught it eventually spreads.

According to author Jon Gordon there are two main reasons why people complain: (1) because they were fearful and helpless and (2) because it has become a habit.

A man is about as happy as he chooses to be.

Abraham Lincoln

An effective strategy for addressing negativity and overcoming this habit is to introduce **the no complaining rule**. The aim of this strategy is not to eliminate all complaining, just mindless, chronic complaining. An even greater goal is to turn justified complaints into positive solutions. Every complaint represents an opportunity to turn something negative into a positive.

What about venting? Yes, sometimes you need to let it out. Sometimes a person just needs to complain. It can be helpful to vent but it becomes harmful when it is a habit and negativity permeates. It could be argued that we were born to complain. As babies, we cried to get what we wanted. When we were hungry, we cried and our mother fed us. When we were tired, we cried and we were rocked to sleep. We cried to get our way all the time and it worked like a charm. Unfortunately, far too many are still using an adult form of crying – called complaining - to get what they want or to express their feeling of helplessness. Just as we learn to outgrow crying we must outgrow the habit of complaining. There are better and more productive ways to deal with our negative feelings. Gordon quotes a great football coach, *“Don't complain. 80% of the people you complain to don't care and 20% are glad you have problems.”*

The No Complaining Rule - *Staff are not allowed to mindlessly complain to their colleagues. If they have a problem or complaint about their job, their school, their students, their parents or anything else, they are encouraged to bring the issue to someone who is in a position to address the complaint. However, the staff member must share one or two possible solutions to their complaint as well.*

You should never complain to someone who is not able to help with the solution. Mindless complaining serves no purpose and only sabotages morale and performance. It cultivates negativity and adversely affects both the complainer and the person being complained to.

Phase 1 is to start personally with a *No Complaining Day* – it's like a complaining fast. Start by monitoring your thoughts and words and realising how negative you really are. Self-awareness is an important first step. You might be surprised!

The intent is to eliminate the kind of habitual mindless complaining that doesn't serve a purpose and allow complaining that is justified and worthwhile. The difference is justified complaining is about things you CAN control and identifying potential solutions. It is pointless complaining about things beyond our control or to people who can't help. By thinking of possible solutions to our complaints we become problem solvers rather than problem sharers.

Based on Jon Gordon's book *“The No Complaining Rule – Positive Ways to Deal with Negativity at Work”*

Key points

Complaining and negativity are like a cancer

Two main reasons people complain
- Fearful and helpless
- It has become a habit

Try to eliminate mindless, habitual complaining

Venting can be helpful but not when it is habitual

Only complain about things that you can control, to people who can help solve the issue and always come with one or two possible solutions

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