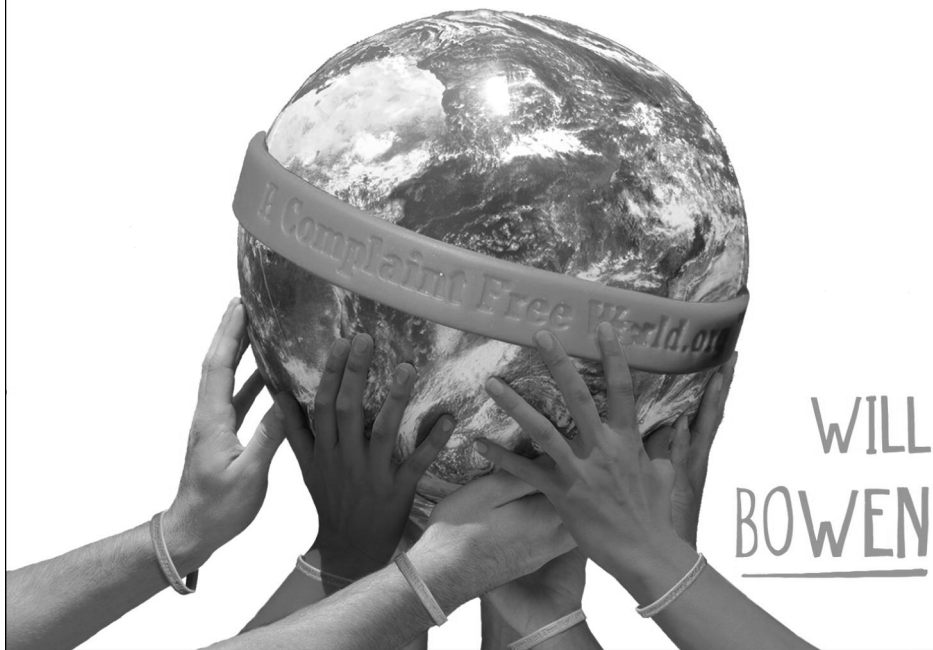


JOIN MORE THAN 10 MILLION PEOPLE
IN THIS LIFE-CHANGING PROGRAM!

A COMPLAINT FREE WORLD

How to Stop Complaining and Start
Enjoying the Life You Always Wanted



AN INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLER • REVISED AND UPDATED

Chapter 1

I Complain Therefore I Am

VOICES

“Like most of the other folks who took up the Complaint Free Challenge, I quickly discovered exactly how many of the words I spoke in daily interactions were complaints. For the first time, I really heard myself when I vented about work, whined about my aches and pains, bemoaned political and world issues, and complained about the weather. What a shock to realize how many of my words held negative energy – and I considered myself such a positive person!”

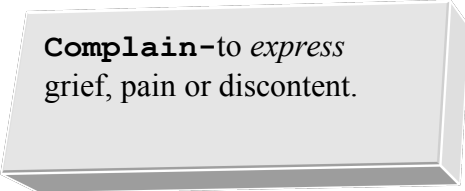
—Marty Pointer
Kansas City, MO

“Man invented language to satisfy his deep need to complain.”

—Lily Tomlin

Like most people, you spend much of your time swimming in a sea of negativity and complaints.

Just as a fish may not even be aware of the water that surrounds it, you may not be aware of all of the complaints you hear and speak. Complaining is so much a part of who we are, it's difficult to recognize what is and is not a complaint.



Complain-to *express* grief, pain or discontent.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines “complain” as “to express grief, pain, or discontent.”

By its very definition, a complaint is spoken. Some overzealous souls taking the 21-day challenge have tried to switch their purple bracelet with every negative thought. The problem is that we think hundreds of thousands of thoughts every day. Trying to monitor each thought is futile. Consider a simpler, proven approach: stop complaining and your thoughts will become more positive.

Think of your mind as a manufacturer and your mouth as a customer. The manufacturer produces negative thoughts that are purchased by the customer when they are expressed as complaints. It goes like this: the manufacturer (your brain) produces a negative thought, which the customer (your mouth) purchases by complaining.

If the customer will stop buying what the manufacturer produces, the manufacturer will retool. When you stop complaining about what you perceive to be wrong and begin to speak about what you are grateful for and what you desire, you force

your manufacturer brain to develop a new product line. When you commit that what comes out of your mouth will be positive, your mind will become more aware of positive experiences to be used as raw materials to supply positive thoughts. As a result, the fundamental focus of your mind will shift. Your attention will be upon what you want and, this is important: you will begin to draw more of what you want into your experience. Further, as you shift your focus away from the challenging aspects of life, you lessen their occurrence.

Complaints are attacks for perceived injustices.

A statement of fact is a neutral comment intended to inform (not berate) the listener.

What you call reality will transform. This sounds simplistic, but it works. There is no reality, only perception. And you can change your perception.

A complaint is distinguished from a statement of fact by the energy expressed. “It’s hot today,” is a statement of fact. A heavy sigh followed by the lament, “It’s hot today,” is a complaint. In *A New Earth*, Eckhart Tolle summed it up this way,

“Complaining is not to be confused with informing someone of a mistake or deficiency so that it can be put right. And to refrain from complaining doesn’t necessarily mean putting up with bad quality or behavior. There is no ego in telling the waiter your soup is cold and needs to be heated up—if you stick to the facts, which are always neutral. ‘How dare you serve me cold soup...?’ That’s complaining.”

There is negative energy being expressed with a complaint. Most complaints have a, “This is unfair!” Or, “How dare this happen to me,” quality. It’s as if the complainer feels attacked by the actions of someone or something and counter-attacks with complaints. Complaints are counterattacks for perceived injustices. A statement of fact is a neutral comment intended to inform (not berate) the listener.

A man from Bosnia emailed to say that, sadly, his country is famous worldwide for one thing: war. His intention is to make his country famous for being Complaint Free. “I have not yet made it 21 consecutive days without complaining.” He said, “I seem to hit a wall around day four and have to start over again but I have found that I’m already a much happier person... IS IT SUPPOSED TO DO THAT?”

I laughed out loud.

It’s as if becoming a happier person while becoming Complaint Free is a side effect that we should have disclosed. Perhaps, our web site and my book jackets should carry a warning, “ATTENTION: ATTEMPTING TO BECOME COMPLAINT FREE MAY SPONTANIOUSLY INDUCE HAPPINESS!”

One of the most frequent comments we receive from people taking the Complaint Free challenge is that, long before they reach 21-consecutive days, they find that they do feel happier.

This happiness compounds upon itself because happy people tend to attract other positive people, joyful experiences and opportunities than do unhappy people. As a result, they feel even happier which draws more good things and this wonderful cycle continues and expands.

Researchers believe that there are four stages to becoming competent at anything. In becoming a Complaint Free person, you will go through each of these stages and, sorry, you can’t skip steps. You can’t race through or jump steps and affect lasting change. Depending upon your experience, some of the stages may last longer than others.

You might soar through one stage and then become stuck in another stage for a long time, but if you stay with it you will master the skill of being Complaint Free.

The four stages to competency are:

1. Unconscious Incompetence
2. Conscious Incompetence
3. Conscious Competence
4. Unconscious Competence

Right now, you are in the Unconscious Incompetence stage. You don't realize (are unconscious) how much you complain (are incompetent). The average person may complain 15-30 times a day but you probably aren't aware if you are at the low end of the spectrum, the high end, or are totally off the chart.

A woman getting out of bed in the middle of the night stubs her toe on a table leg. As the pain shoots up her body, she reflexively shouts, "Ouch!" It is normal to say, "ouch" when we are hurt. Many people, however, are an 'OUCH!' in search of a hurt." They walk around ouching about the difficulties and problems in their life and then are surprised when more of them show up. If you cry "ouch," the hurt will show up. If you complain, you'll receive more to complain about. It's the Law of Attraction in action. As you complete these stages, as you leave complaining behind, as you will no longer be an "ouch" looking for a hurt. You will attract pleasure rather than pain.

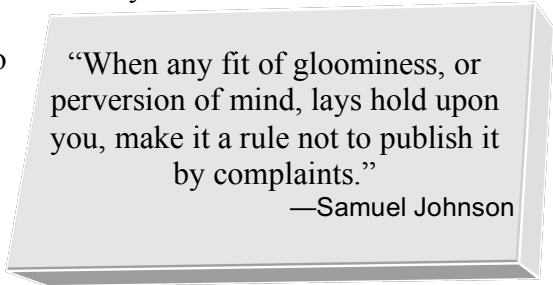
In "On a Distant Prospect of Eton College," Thomas Gray gave us the oft-quoted phrase "ignorance is bliss." As you become a Complaint Free person, you begin in the

bliss of ignorance because you are unaware of how often you complain, you then move through the turmoil of awareness and transformation and finally arrive at true bliss.

Unconscious Incompetence is as much a state of being as a stage of competency.

This is where everyone begins his or her attempt to master any new skill. In

Unconscious Incompetence you are pure potential, ready to create great things for yourself. There are exciting new vistas about to be explored. All you have to do is be willing to go through the remaining steps, which will make you a master at living a Complaint Free life and allow you to reap the many attendant rewards.



“When any fit of gloominess, or perversion of mind, lays hold upon you, make it a rule not to publish it by complaints.”
—Samuel Johnson

People ask, “Are you saying I can’t complain *ever*?”

To which I respond, “Of course you can complain.” And I say this for two reasons:

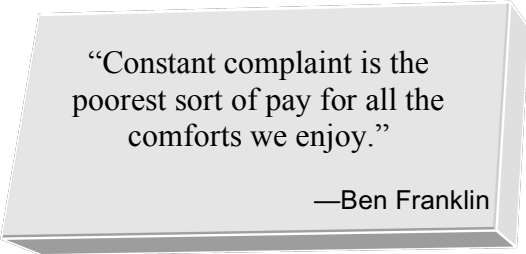
1. I’m not out to tell you or anyone else what to do. If I were, I’d be trying to change you and that means I’m focusing on something about you I don’t like. I’d be expressing discontent about you and, by inference, complaining. So, you can do whatever you want. It’s your choice.
2. Sometimes it makes sense to complain.

Now, before you feel you’ve found your loophole in number 2 (above) consider that word “sometimes” and remember that I and thousands of people around the world have gone three 21 consecutive days, that’s three solid weeks in a row, or, 504 back-to-

back hours without complaining at all. No Complaints, zero, zip! When it comes to complaining, “sometimes” means “not very often at all.”

If we are honest with ourselves, life events that lead us to express grief, pain, or discontent are *exceptionally* rare. Certainly there are individuals around the world who are facing very difficult lives and everyone goes through hard times here and there.

However, many people today are living in the safest, healthiest and most prosperous time in all of human history. And yet, what do they do? They complain.



“Constant complaint is the poorest sort of pay for all the comforts we enjoy.”

—Ben Franklin

This is not new. Hundreds of years ago, Benjamin Franklin said, “Constant complaint is the poorest sort of pay for all the comforts we enjoy.” When Franklin wrote this there was no electricity, aspirin, penicillin, air conditioning, indoor plumbing, air travel or many of the thousands of modern niceties and so-called necessities we now take for granted. Nonetheless, he felt his contemporaries were far too cavalier about how good they had it. Franklin’s generation had much less than we do and yet we, like them, still find ample reasons to complain.

Little if any of the complaining we do is calculated to improve our situation. It’s just a lot of “ear pollution” detrimental to our happiness and well-being.

Check yourself. When you complain (express grief, pain or discontent), is the cause severe? Are you complaining frequently? Or, are you an “ouch” looking for a hurt.

To be a happy person living life by design, you need a very, very high threshold of what leads you to your expressing grief, pain, and discontent. The next time you’re about to complain about something, ask yourself how your situation stacks up to something that happened to me.

I was sitting in my home office, writing. The home my family lived in at the time was located at a sharp bend in the road. Drivers had to slow down to take the curve but just two hundreds yards past our house the city road became a county highway and the speed limit jumped from 25 mph to 55 mph. Because of the curve and the lower speed limit, cars would slow down to a crawl in front of our house and then accelerate rapidly heading out of town. Or, they’d race into town and brake quickly just in front of our house to make the curve. If it weren’t for that curve, the road in front of our home would have been in a very dangerous place.

It was a warm spring afternoon and the lace curtains flapped rhythmically in the breeze. Suddenly I heard a sound that snapped me from work: a loud “thud” followed by a scream. The scream was not that of a person but rather an animal. Every animal, just like every person, has a unique voice and I knew this voice well. It was our longhaired golden retriever Ginger.

Normally we don't think of dogs screaming. Barking, howling, whimpering—yes; but not screaming. Nonetheless, that's exactly what Ginger was doing. She had been crossing the road in front of our house and a vehicle had hit her. She lay in the road shrieking with pain not twenty feet outside my window. I shouted and ran through the living room and out the front door followed by my daughter Lia. Lia was six years old at the time.

As we approached Ginger we could tell she was badly injured. She was using her front legs to try and stand but her hind legs did not seem capable of helping. Over and over she yowled in pain. Neighbors poured from their homes to see what was causing the commotion. Lia stood frozen and just kept saying her name, "Ginger... Ginger..." as the tears flowed down her cheeks and wet her shirt.

I looked around for the driver who had hit Ginger but saw no one. Then, I saw a truck towing a trailer headed out of town cresting the hill and accelerating well past 55 mph. Even though our dog lay there in agony and my daughter cried piteously, I was consumed with confronting the person who had hit Ginger. "How could anyone do this and just drive off?" I said angrily. "He had to slow down to come around the curve...surely he saw her, surely he knew what happened!"

I jumped into my car and fishtailed out of the driveway leaving a plume of dust and gravel. 60, 75, then 83 miles per hour along the uneven road in pursuit of the person who had hit Lia's dog and left without so much as facing us. I was going so fast on the

uncertain surface that my car began to feel as if it were floating tenuously above the ground. In that moment, I calmed myself enough to realize that if I were killed while driving; it would be even harder on everyone than Ginger's having been hurt. I slowed just enough to control my car as the distance between me and other driver narrowed.

Turning into his driveway and not realizing I was chasing him, the driver stepped out of his truck in a torn shirt and dirty jeans. His greasy baseball cap that sported a profane witticism was pushed back on his sunburned forehead. I skidded in behind him and jumped from my car screaming, "You hit my dog!" The man turned and looked at me quizzically as if I had spoken to him in a foreign language.

With the blood raging in my ears, I wasn't sure I heard him correctly when he said, "I know I hit your dog...what are you going to do about it?"

It took a moment for the shock of his comment to wear off. After regaining my connection with reality I stammered, "Wh...WHAT? What did you say?" He smiled as if correcting an errant child and then said again, in slow deliberate words, "I know I hit your dog...what exactly are you going to do about it?"

I went blind with rage. In my mind I saw the image of Lia's slumped shoulders in my rear view mirror as she stood sobbing over Ginger's body writhing in pain.

I yelled. "Put up your hands."

"What?" he asked grinning sarcastically.

“Put up your hands,” I said again, “Defend yourself...I’m going to kill you!”

A few moments ago, reason had kept me from killing myself while driving in a white-hot rage to find this guy. Now, his dismissive and cavalier comment about having hurt, possibly mortally wounded our beloved Ginger had vanquished all reason.

I had never been in a fight in my adult life. I don’t believe in fighting. I wasn’t sure I knew how to fight. But I wanted to beat this man to death. I was insane with anger. I didn’t care if I ended up in prison.

“I ain’t gonna fight you.” He said. “And if you hit me it’s assault, mister.”

I stood there dumbfounded, my arms raised, my fists clinched tight as diamonds.

“Fight me!!!” I demanded.

“No, sir.” He said through his remaining teeth, “I ain’t gonna do no such thing. And if you hit me, it’s assault.”

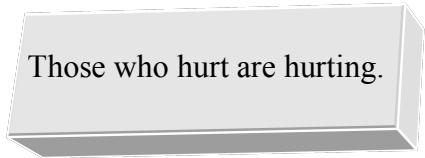
He turned his back and lumbered slowly away. I stood shaking, anger poisoning my blood.

I don’t remember driving home. I don’t remember lifting Ginger up and taking her to the veterinarian’s office. I do remember the way she smelled the last time I held

her and the way she whimpered softly as the vet's needle ended her suffering. "How could a person do such a thing?" I asked choking back bitter tears.

Days later the man's jagged smile still haunted me as I tried to sleep. His, "I know I hit your dog, what are you going to do about it?" rang in my ears. I visualized exactly what I would have done to him had we fought. In my visions I was a super hero destroying an evil villain. Sometimes, I imagined I had a baseball bat or other weapon and was hurting him; hurting him as badly, hurting him as he had hurt me, Lia and Ginger.

On the third night of unsuccessful attempts to sleep, I got up and began to write in my journal. After spilling out my grief, pain, and discontent for nearly an hour, I wrote something surprising: "Those who hurt are hurting" Taking in my words as if they were from someone else I said, aloud "What?"



Those who hurt are hurting.

Again my pen wrote, "Those who hurt are hurting." I sat back brooding in my chair and listened to the crickets celebrating the spring night. "Those who hurt are hurting? What does that have to do with this guy?"

As I thought more about it, I began to understand. A person who could so easily hurt a treasured family pet must not know the love of companion animals as we do. A person who can drive away while a young child folds into tears could not fully know the

love of children. A man who refuses to apologize for spearing a family's heart must have had his heart speared many, many times. This man was the real victim in this story. Truly he had acted as a villain but it came as a result of the depth of pain within him.

I sat a long time letting this all sink in. Every time I began to feel angry with him and the pain he caused, I thought of the pain this man must live with on a daily basis. After a while, I noticed my breathing slowing down, my tension relaxing. I switched off the light, went to bed, and slept soundly.

Complain - to express grief, pain or discontent.

During this experience I felt **grief**. Ginger had shown up five years prior at our home in rural South Carolina. Several dogs had come to our home wanting but Gibson; our other dog, always ran them off. For some reason, Ginger he let stay. There was something special about Ginger. We presumed from her demeanor that she had been abused prior to coming to live with us. And, because she especially shied away from me, it was probably a man who had mistreated her. Tentatively, after a year or so she had begun to trust me. And in the remaining years she had become a true friend. I deeply grieved her passing.

I certainly felt **pain**, real emotional pain that tore at my soul. For those of us with children we know that we would rather endure any pain than have our children do so. And the pain my Lia was going through redoubled my own.

I felt **discontent**. I felt torn for not having thrashed the guy as well as for having considered acting violently in the first place. I felt ashamed for walking away from him and equally ashamed for having chased after him in the first place.

Pain. Grief. Discontent.

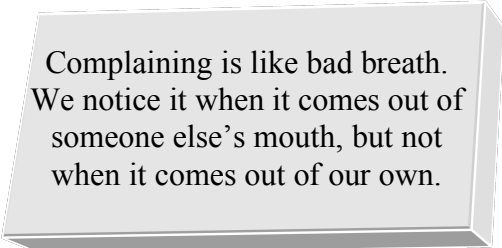
When this man hit Ginger, it was appropriate for me to have felt and to have expressed each of these. You may have experienced something equally difficult at some time in your life. Fortunately, such traumatic events are rare. Similarly, complaining (expressing grief, pain or discontent) should be rare.

But for most people, our complaints are not sourced by such deeply painful experiences. Rather we're like the character in the Joe Walsh song, "Life's been good"—we can't complain but sometimes, in fact many times, we still do. Things are not really bad enough to warrant expressing grief, pain or discontent but complaining is our default setting. It's simply habitual; it's what we do.

Prior to beginning your trek down the path to becoming a Complaint Free person, you were probably blissfully unaware as to how much you complain and the damaging effect of your complaints on your life. For many, griping about the weather, their spouse, their work, their bodies, their friends, their jobs, the economy, other drivers, their

country, or whatever they are thinking about is something done dozens of times each and every day.

Few realize how often they complain. The words come out of our mouths so their ears must hear them. But, for some reason, they don't register as complaints. It seems that complaining is like bad breath—we notice it when it comes out of someone else's mouth but not when it comes from our own.

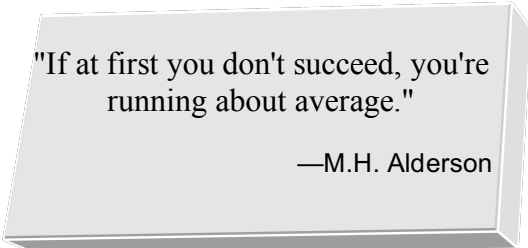


Complaining is like bad breath. We notice it when it comes out of someone else's mouth, but not when it comes out of our own.

Chances are you complain a lot more than you think. And now that you've accepted the 21-day challenge to become Complaint Free, you have begun to notice it. As you start moving the bracelet from wrist to wrist, you realize how much you kvetch (Yiddish for "complain"—I'm not Jewish, but I like the term).

Up until this point, you would probably have said, honestly, that you don't complain—much, anyway. Certainly you think that you only complain when something is legitimately bothering you. The next time you're tempted to rationalize your complaining, remember Ginger's story and ask yourself if what you're going through is that bad. Then, resolve to keep your commitment to become Complaint Free.

Everyone who has become a 21-Day Complaint Free Champion has said to me, "It wasn't easy, but it was worth it." Nothing valuable is ever easy. Simple? Yes. But "easy" is not part of becoming a successful person. I say this not to discourage you but to inspire you. If you find becoming a Complaint Free person (monitoring and



"If at first you don't succeed, you're running about average."

—M.H. Alderson

changing your words) difficult, it doesn't mean that you can't do it. And it doesn't mean there is something wrong with you. M.H. Alderson said, "If at first you don't succeed, you're running about average." If you're complaining, you're right where you're supposed to be. Now you're becoming aware of it and you can begin to erase it from your life.

Just switch your bracelet with each complaint and start again.

Recently, Lia, now age 15, and I drove to Alexandria, Indiana to meet Mike Carmichael and his wife Glenda . Mike works as a painting contractor and four decades ago he had a unique idea. He drilled a hole through a regulation baseball, threaded a coat hanger through the ball and then dipped it in a bucket of paint. Returning home the next day, he dipped the ball again. Whenever Mike would come home from work he would dip the ball in the paint leftover from his day's work and hang it up to dry. Each time he immersed the ball, he kept record of how many coats covered it.

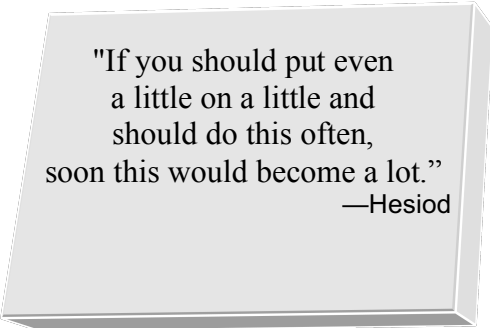
When he reached one thousand coats of paint, his little experiment had taken on the size and oblong shape of a bottle of bleach. Mike was fascinated by how a single coat of paint, which measures only five one-hundredths of an inch in thickness, applied every single day would ultimate grow so large.

In 1977, Mike decided to take his idea to another level. He took a fresh, baseball, drilled a much larger hole and inserted a 2-inch thick metal hook. He hung the ball in his workshop and invited family, friends and passersby to apply a coat of paint to the ball.

Now, 34 years later, a sign hangs in front of his workshop boasting, the “World’s Largest Ball of Paint.”

Lia and I pulled into Mike’s driveway. As we entered the room where the ball resided we saw that it now hangs from steel girders, Mike stood proudly next to his creation. I gasped at the enormity of the thing.

I asked Mike how much it weighs. He said that several months ago he had used a crane to hoist it onto the back of a truck so it could be weighed on scales used to weigh tractor-trailers. Major League Baseball says that an official baseball should weigh 5.25 ounces. This baseball, now covered in tens of thousands of coats of paint, each not much thicker than a human hair, tipped the scales at an astounding 3,500 pounds!



"If you should put even
a little on a little and
should do this often,
soon this would become a lot."
—Hesiod

I was dumbfounded. After a moment I asked, “How big is it?”

MLB rules standards are that a regulation baseball must be between two and seven-eighths and three inches in diameter. Without paint, this is the size of Mike’s baseball. Mike handed one end of a carpenter’s measuring tape to Glenda and they stretched it out for us to see. “Just over 52 inches in diameter.” He said with a smile that seemed wide as the wide as ball of paint itself.

“22,799” was written in large, red numbers across the front of the ball.

“What does 22,799 represent?” Lia asked.

“That’s the coat of paint you and your dad are going to apply today,” Mike said.

“Really?” Lia asked excitedly.

“Absolutely,” Said Mike. “What color do you want to use?”

Lia and I smiled at each other. “Purple!” We said simultaneously.

Minutes later, Mike handed each of us a paint roller soaked in purple paint.

Working diligently, it took the two of us about fifteen minutes to evenly coat the mammoth ball. While we were painting, Mike asked, “What brings you, two, here?”

See the
World’s Largest Ball of Paint and
read Mike’s story:

www.BallofPaint.freehosting.net

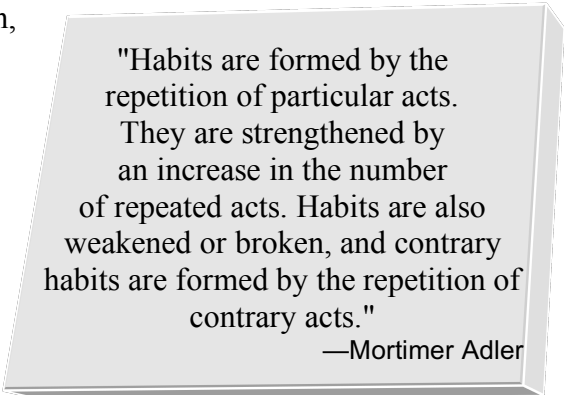
I pointed to the purple Complaint Free bracelet on my right wrist and told Mike about the more than ten million people around the world who have taken the challenge. We then talked about habits.

“Habits direct our lives.” I said. “We do so many things simply because they are things we have done over and over. What starts out as a single event, just like a single coat of paint on a three-inch baseball will, over time, become something massive just like this one and three-quarter ton ball of paint.”

Mike thought a moment and said he’d never thought of the correlation before but that it made a lot of sense. As we were leaving, Mike handed me a small curio to take

with me. To keep the massive ball round, he must occasionally shear off drips that form on the bottom of the ball. The piece he handed me was about as wide as a silver dollar and about as thick as a pencil. As I looked at this sliver shaved from the World's Largest Ball of Paint, I could see the hundreds of paper-thin individual coats that had created its hulking girth.

American philosopher, author and educator Mortimer Adler wrote, "Habits are formed by the repetition of particular acts. They are strengthened by an increase in the number of repeated acts. Habits are also weakened or broken, and contrary habits are formed by the repetition of contrary acts." For most people, complaining is a habit that has been reinforced time and again through repetition. However, by consciously striving not to complain, in time you will no longer default to this mode of expression.



"Habits are formed by the repetition of particular acts. They are strengthened by an increase in the number of repeated acts. Habits are also weakened or broken, and contrary habits are formed by the repetition of contrary acts."
—Mortimer Adler

Not expressing a single complaint seems like it may not have much of an impact on your life but it begins to stem the tide of the complaining habit that has defined who you are. As you bite your tongue and swallow back a complaint, you are adding a coat of paint to a new habit that will take on momentum and grow to define the new you.

You may doubt that you can go 21 Consecutive days without complaining, but you *can*. I complained dozens of times every single day and I made it. The key is not to give up. I know a wonderful, elderly woman who is still wearing one of the original

purple bracelets we gave out. It's now tattered and gray but she says dogmatically,
“They might bury me in this thing but I'm not giving up.”

That's the level of commitment it takes. Commit to never giving up. Remember the good news that even before you make 21 consecutive days of not complaining, you will find your internal focus shifting and yourself becoming happier. Here's an email I received:

Hi,

Like thousands, I have already begun changing my focus. While waiting for my bracelet, I have started to wear a rubber band around my wrist. This has made me aware of what I'm doing. I've been doing this for about a week, and I am now rarely complaining. The remarkable thing about this is how much happier I feel! Not to mention how much happier those around me must be (like my husband!). I have wanted to work on my complaining for a long time and the bracelet campaign has been the impetus for my changing behavior.

The subject of the bracelets and the mission behind them has come up in MANY conversations, so the mission has a HUGE ripple effect where MANY people are at least thinking about how often they complain and perhaps deciding to behave differently. This movement may have a very far-reaching effect as more and more people hear of the idea. The reach of this mission is far greater than those who actually get the bracelets! Awesome to think about!

-Jeanne Reilly
Rockville, Md.

Venerated radio commentator Paul Harvey once said, “I hope one day to achieve enough of what the world calls success so that if someone asks me how I did it I will tell them, ‘I get up more times than I fall.’” As with all things worth accomplishing, you must fail your way to success. If you're like most, when you begin this process, you will probably move your bracelet from arm to arm until you get sore and tired of doing it. I

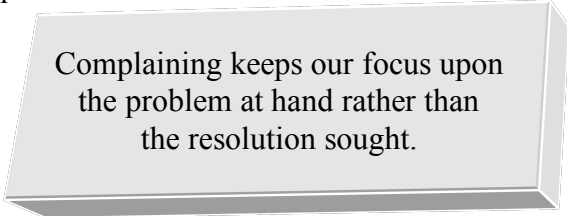
moved my bracelet so many times that I broke 3 of them before making it 21 consecutive days. If you break yours, go to www.AComplaintFreeWorld.org and order another.

If you'll stay with it, one day you'll be in lying in bed about to drift off to sleep and glance at your wrist. There, for the first time in days or possibly weeks, you'll see that your purple bracelet is on the same wrist as when you got out of bed that morning. You'll think, "I must have complained at some point today and just not caught myself." But as you do a mental inventory, you'll realize that you made it. You actually made it one whole day without complaining! One day at a time. You can do it.

As you begin this transformation, you are fortunate because even with my reminding you of the difficulty ahead, you have a psychological advantage working for you. It's called the Dunning-Kruger effect. The Dunning-Kruger effect is named for Justin Kruger and David Dunning of Cornell University who did studies on people attempting to learn new skills. Whenever a person tries something new be it snow skiing, juggling, playing the flute, riding a horse, meditating, writing a book, painting a picture or anything, it is part of human nature to think it will be simple to master. Their results, published in the December 1999 *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* stated, "Ignorance more frequently begets confidence than does knowledge." In other words, you're not aware that doing something is difficult so you give it a try. You think, "This is going to be easy" so you begin and getting started is always the most difficult part.

Without the Dunning-Kruger effect, if you knew the amount of effort it would actually take to become proficient at a new skill, you would probably give up before you begin.

Begin now to wear the purple bracelet (or rubber band, coin in your pocket or other self-monitoring tool) and move it with every complaint. Move it, even though it seems hard, embarrassing or frustrating. Move it, even after you've made it ten days, complained and had to start over again. Start over again and again. Stay with it even if others around you have given up.



Complaining keeps our focus upon the problem at hand rather than the resolution sought.

Stay with it even if others around you have succeeded and your personal best so far is only a couple of days.

At the beginning of this chapter, I shared the dictionary definition of “complain.” Over the last several years I have developed my own definition: *a complaint is an energetic statement that focuses on the problem at hand rather than the resolution sought.*

A complaint has energy, typically, “how dare this happen to me?” energy behind it. And the biggest problem with complaining is that it keeps our focus on what is wrong so that we don’t even consider ways a situation might be improved.

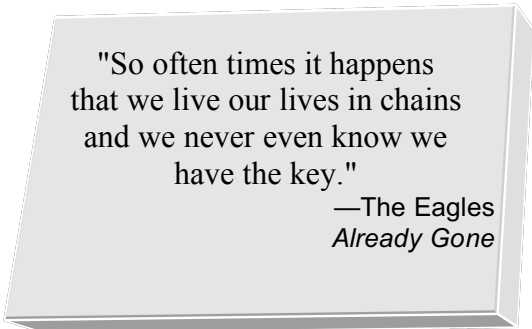
There is an old story of two construction workers sitting down to eat lunch together. The first worker opens his lunch box and complained, “Yech! A meatloaf sandwich...I hate meatloaf sandwiches.” His friend says nothing. The following day, the

two meet up again for lunch. Again the first opens his lunch box, looks inside and this time more agitated said, “Another meatloaf sandwich? I hate meatloaf sandwiches!” As before, his colleague remains silent. The third day, the two men gather for lunch and the first construction worker opens his lunch box and stomped about and shouted, “I’ve had it!! Day in and day out it’s the same thing! Meatloaf sandwiches every blessed day! I want something else!”

His friend asked, “Why don’t you just ask your wife to make you something else.”

With true bewilderment on his face the first worker replied, “I make my own lunch.”

You, me and everyone else make our own lunch. We create our lives with our thoughts and our words broadcast what we are thinking. Remember the line from the song *Already Gone* by The Eagles, “So oftentimes it happens that we live our lives in chains and we never even know we have the key.” You are chained to the meatloaf sandwich menu and you are the one holding the key.



"So often times it happens
that we live our lives in chains
and we never even know we
have the key."

—The Eagles
Already Gone

A friend related a real-life version of this meatloaf sandwich story. Over coffee he told me that two years ago his company had changed their voicemail system. Rather than punching in codes and directions via the telephone keypad to retrieve voicemails, all the employees now do is pick up the receiver and say, “Get messages,” then speak commands such as “replay message,” or, “delete message.”

“That’s what’s *supposed* to happen,” He told me. “The problem is that sometimes the system doesn’t work very well and if there is any background noise or if we aren’t crystal clear in what we say, the system either doesn’t respond or does the wrong thing.”

He went on to tell me about a woman in the next cubicle who often has trouble retrieving her messages. If she says, “Get messages” and the system doesn’t respond or does the wrong thing, she will shout, “GET MESSAGES, DAMNIT!” Of course, the expletive after the command further confounds the automated attendant assuring that instead of her messages she gets a meatloaf sandwich.

“She’s yelling at a machine,” My friend said with a bemused smile. “And her anger makes the problem worse.” After a sip of coffee he added, “Now here’s the really sad part. When they installed the new phone system 24 months ago, I realized that the voice recognition feature didn’t work well so I went into the settings and changed it back to manual input. I touch the keys just like before to get my messages.

“When I heard this woman yelling into her receiver I told that her voicemail could be changed back to manual input.” She was screeching into her phone, ‘GET MESSAGES YOU WORTHLESS PIECE OF CRAP!’ and without even looking my way sniped, ‘I’m too busy right now, I’ll do it later!’”

My friend shook his head. “That was two years ago,” He said. “I’ve offered a dozen times to help her change it back and every time she says she’s ‘too busy.’ I told her it takes less than thirty seconds to fix but she keeps refusing my help. She doesn’t have

time to fix the problem but she's wasted hours over the last couple of years yelling into the phone."

"Can you imagine?" He continued, "She comes into work *every single day* knowing that she is going to wrestle with the voicemail system. She knows she can fix it in less than a minute, and yet does nothing. 'Astounding!'"

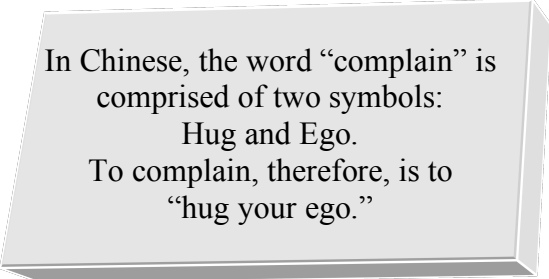
Are you tired of meatloaf sandwiches? You're making your own lunch each and every day. Your thoughts create your life and your words indicate what you are thinking. Change what you are saying, your thoughts will change and your life will improve.

When Jesus said, "seek and ye shall find" it was a statement of universal principle. What you seek, you will find. When you complain you are using the incredible power of your mind to seek out things that you profess not to want but that you, nonetheless, draw to you time and again. Then, when they show up, you complain about these new things and attract still more of what we don't want. You get caught in the "complaint loop"—a self-fulfilling prophecy of complaint > negative experience, complaint > negative experience, complaint > negative experience, and on and on it goes.

In "The Outsider," Albert Camus wrote, "Gazing up at the dark sky spangled with its signs and stars, for the first time, I laid my heart open to the benign indifference of the universe." The Universe is benign indifference. The Universe, or God, or Spirit or whatever you choose to call it is benign (good) but it is also indifferent (it does not care). The Universe doesn't care if you use the power of your thoughts as indicated by your words to attract love, health, happiness, abundance and peace, or if invite pain, suffering,

misery, loneliness and poverty. Our thoughts create our lives; our words indicate what we are thinking. When we control our words by eradicating complaining, we create our lives with intention and attract what we desire.

In Chinese, the word “complain” is comprised of two symbols, “Hug” and “Ego.” The Chinese believe that to complain is to “hug your ego.” There is profound wisdom in the pairing of these two signs to indicate the essence of complaining. When you complain you are hugging your ego.



In Chinese, the word “complain” is comprised of two symbols:
Hug and Ego.
To complain, therefore, is to
“hug your ego.”

The ego referred to is not the Freudian concept of the three-part psychological makeup of human beings. Rather, it is the concept of the limited human self that feels it is cut off from infinite supply.

When you complain you hug your ego. You provide aid, comfort, and validation to that strident voice in your head that insists you do not deserve what you desire. That limited self that feels cut off from the abundance of the world. You limit your ability to enjoy affluence.

The word “affluent” means “to be in the abundant flow.” There is a cascading river of goodness flowing at all times. When you complain, you divert the course of the flow around you. When you begin to speak only of what you desire, you allow it to wash over you drenching you with all manner of goodness.

When you begin to attempt to eradicate complaining from your life, you have years of this habit pushing you toward failure. It’s like being on a jet traveling north at

600 miles per hours. If the pilot turns the jet westward, you will feel your body straining to the right because you have been moving with great speed in that direction. If the jet stays true to its new course, you will soon settle in and no longer feel the pull of your previous direction.

Similarly, your previous habits will pull you when you attempt to change them. As you stay with your commitment to switch your Complaint Free bracelet, you will feel a strong pull to resort back to your negative ways. Keep going. Each passing moment and each switch of the bracelet are single coats of paint that will soon swell into a mighty force that will transform your life.