



Leadership is hard. This STUFF helps!

Issue Seven: THE **COMPLAINING** ISSUE

**Complaining:
The Habit That's Quietly Wrecking More Than You Think**

Yes... we're really doing this. An entire issue on complaining.

And if your first thought was, "I can't believe it! Why are they putting out an issue about this?" well... that's kind of the point.

Complaining is one of the most common, most accepted, and most damaging habits in organizations [and life], and somehow it still flies under the radar. It's one of the most important and most overlooked issues affecting teams, leadership, and culture today.

Almost every leader has felt it. And, it is one of my personal intolerables, so I get to rant a bit on complaining. At the same time, the whiners often don't see it that way. Some believe it's the only way to be heard. Others don't even realize they're doing it. Still others can justify it and make people believe it's right. That's what makes complaining so tricky. It hides in plain sight, blending into everyday conversations while quietly shaping how people think, feel, and act.

Negativity Has a Way of Finding Friends.

Watch what happens when someone new joins a team. They observe. They listen. They quietly try to figure out: "Who here is like me?" And before long, the whiners find each other. It's like they have a radar. Or a secret handshake. Either way, it doesn't take long. And once that little

group forms, the tone of the team starts to shift. But the impact of complaining goes far beyond team dynamics.

Complaining actually impacts us physically, emotionally, spiritually, and mentally. Chronic complaining triggers the release of cortisol, the body's primary stress hormone. Over time, elevated cortisol levels can weaken the immune system, increase blood pressure, and raise the risk of serious health issues like heart disease and diabetes. In other words, complaining doesn't just feel draining; it is draining. And it takes its toll.

And then there's the cultural impact.

Complaining spreads like burnt popcorn in a break room. One moment, everything is fine, and the next, the entire environment is affected. People who weren't even part of the conversation begin to feel it. Over time, that changes behavior. People start holding back. They become more cautious about what they say and who they say it to. Trust begins to erode, not because of one big moment, but because of a steady pattern.

When communication starts to break down, performance follows. Teams become less effective, less connected, and less willing to take risks. People decide to stay away from the complainers and they don't want to be that way. And yet... without realizing it, people fall into the pattern of complaining anyway. Why?

Because it's easy.

Because it's familiar.

Because no one ever told them not to.

It goes on and on. No one I know likes to be around whiners, even other whiners. Which is odd. That is why we wanted to draw attention to it and let people know it is a big deal.

Now, what can we do about it? Here are a few things to try:

Listen to them

The first step is simply to listen. Sometimes complaints are rooted in real concerns, and those concerns deserve to be heard. You are also giving them a little attention, which is often what they wanted in the first place. Then, once the concern is expressed, make sure they understand the boundaries. Listening doesn't mean allowing complaining to become the default way of communicating. There's an important distinction between acknowledging an issue and reinforcing a pattern.

Create boundaries

Many teams struggle with complaining because boundaries have never been clearly set. Whenever I am asked what to do about whiners, my first question is, "Did anyone tell them they were not supposed to complain?" Usually, the answer is no. Without clear boundaries, people are free to do what they think is best or what comes naturally. That's what is happening. The boundaries have not been set. Make positivity part of your values and norms, and make expressing concerns part of the practice. When leaders establish that communication should be direct, constructive, and solution-focused, it creates a different standard, one that people can align with.

Coach the upgrade

Welcome concerns. NOT complaints. The difference is this. When someone is concerned about something, they speak to the right person and bring a possible solution. When someone is whining about something, they speak to everyone, make sure they are heard, and have no solution. It's critical to help people understand the difference between complaining and raising a concern. This is all part of coaching people on how to handle concerns, and it gives them a better way to process what they're experiencing. Once that becomes part of the culture, things begin to change.

Practice gratitude

Gratitude is the antidote to complaining. It interrupts the cycle of negativity. When I hear a complainer going off about something, I will usually ask about one good thing that has happened in the last few weeks. Or I'll get ahead of the griping and ask about something great that has happened in the last month, personally or professionally. It makes no difference. The point is to shift from whining about what is wrong to gratitude for what is good. Also, make gratitude part of the culture by talking about positive things often, sharing stories, asking questions, and encouraging people. Get creative with it and make gratitude part of the culture.

The bottom line is this. Complaining isn't harmless. It's toxic. It's contagious, and if left unchecked, it slowly erodes trust, communication, performance, and quality of life.

But it's also changeable.

You don't eliminate complaining by shutting people down. You eliminate it by raising the bar for how people think, speak, and show up. Because once people see the impact, they start choosing differently. And that's when everything changes. Replace complaining with better habits, clear expectations, honest conversations, ownership, and gratitude.

Once people become aware of the impact of complaining on themselves and those around them, it becomes much harder to justify continuing the pattern.

Take advantage of the information in this issue. Share it. Create conversations on it. Get the team involved in making some creative ways to diminish the complaining.

Also, check out the other stuff we have for you to use.

Budge is our podcast and we drop new episodes occasionally. You can find Budge on Apple and Spotify.

Scooch Leadership Labs are our 2-day in person deep dive into some topics created just for you. These are for all levels of leadership, even those who are still "up and coming" leaders. We have two more happening this year...Washington DC and Wichita.

And, of course, send Stuff Club to anyone you think might like it, need it, want it, love it.

I appreciate you all!
Steve

Click here for challenges that will help you refocus and stop complaining!

“When you complain, you make yourself a victim. Leave the situation, change the situation, or accept it. All else is madness.”

Eckhart Tolle

Click here for a cool looking graphic of this quote!

STUFF TO READ

short stuff

Read these articles and think about the questions. Then, send the article links to the leaders around you. Once they have read it, create some discussion around the included questions.

Culture Of Complainers? Seven Ways To Cut Workplace Complaining

Lisa Christen | Forbes

1. Are we allowing complaining to happen without addressing it? (Where are we staying silent instead of stepping in?)
2. Are we expecting perfection instead of progress? (Could our standards or feedback be pushing people to complain?)
3. Are we competing with each other or working together? (Is our environment creating tension instead of teamwork?)
4. When we complain, do we also suggest a solution? (How can we take more ownership instead of just pointing things out?)
5. What are we doing well that we're not talking about enough? (How can we build more appreciation into our culture?)

[Click here to read](#)

8 Ways to Deal with Chronic Complainers

Fast Company

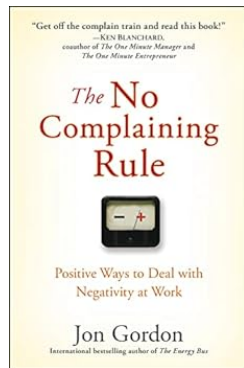
1. Am I agreeing with complaints to keep the peace? (Am I accidentally encouraging the behavior?)
2. How can I acknowledge someone without joining the negativity? (What would it sound like to listen without agreeing?)
3. Is this a moment to stay neutral or speak up? (Do I need to share a different perspective respectfully?)
4. What is this person really needing right now? (Do they want a solution, or just to be heard?)
5. How can we redirect this conversation toward something helpful? (What's one way to move from problem → solution?)

[Click here to read](#)

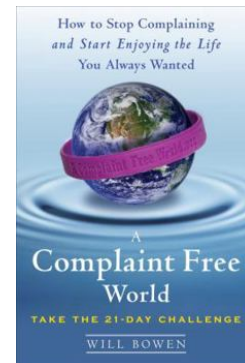
“The trouble with complaining is that it often solves nothing and spreads quickly.”

long stuff

Book Recommendations



The No Complaining Rule
Jon Gordon



Complaint Free World
Will Bowen

“Champions never complain, they are too busy getting better.”

John Wooden

Click here for a cool looking graphic of this quote!

STUFF TO WATCH

Watch these by yourself or with your team. Take time to time to journal thoughts or create conversations.



Wired: How Complaining Shapes Your Brain — And How To Break It

Addison Falat | TedXTalks (Watch time: 10:49)

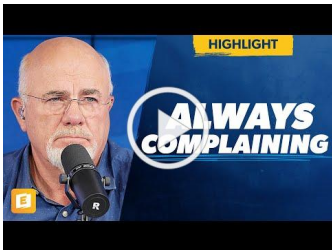
A great talk on the physical detriments of complaining.



Why Complain?

Allycia Fu | TedXTalks (Watch time: 9:09)

A teenager shares her take on the issues of complaining.



How to Manage Constantly Negative Employees

Dave Ramsey | EntreLeadership (Watch time: 7:16)

This is a portion of Dave's podcast in which he answers a question about negativity and complaining from a coworker.



Listen To This Every Morning and Stop Complaining

Coach Pain (Watch time: 8:42)

Just a cool video with a lot of challenge in regards to complaining.

“Have an attitude of gratitude and you will have more to be grateful for; have a complaining spirit and you will attract more to complain about.”

Zig Ziglar

Click Here for a cool looking graphic of this quote!

STUFF TO LISTEN TO

Budge

Budge is **The Scooch Project's** very own podcast — get ready to hear plain talk and everyday thoughts about leadership! Just Plain Talk and Thoughts About Leadership!

BUDGE PODCAST

Stuff Club!

Because you deserve to be inspired.

STUFF TO GO TO

Check out these **Scooch Leadership Labs**: a two-day power-up for your leadership *and* personal development! Think of it as a creative workshop meets team huddle — where bold ideas, real talk, and hands-on challenges collide. You'll leave energized and ready to lead with purpose (and maybe have a little fun, too)."

Upcoming Events:

May 14-15 | Washington, DC

October 6-7 | Wichita, KS

MORE INFO

“Complaining about a problem without posing a solution is called whining.”

Theodore Roosevelt

THESCOOCHPROJECT.COM

Where leaders get their stuff together!

We would love to hear your questions or comments. Please let us know [here](#).

The Scooch Project | Golf Road | Springfield, IL 62704 US

[Unsubscribe](#) | [Update Profile](#) | [Constant Contact Data Notice](#)



Try email & social marketing for free!