

Stop Chronic Complainers in the Workplace

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Inspiring leaders to live, love, and lead remarkably so they and their company become 'rockstars' in their industry



SHELLEY HOLMES

TRUSTED BY ...



By Shelley Holmes

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Combatting Chronic Complainers In The Workplace

We all know people who are chronic complainers. They spend inordinate amounts of time, each day, bending the ears of anyone who will listen! Going into great detail about what is wrong with other people, policies or departments.

And, because like attracts like, unless you have done a good job of nipping in the bud, this '[below-the-line](#)' type behavior (chronic complainers never seem to run out of others who will listen, share and commiserate with them... which only lends fuel to their fire) you'll end up with a team filled with people feeling hopeless, helpless and bitter.

The problem with chronic complainers, is that they are quick to point out what is wrong, but slow to be part of the solution.

Most complainers don't realize that their complaint really is a negative way of requesting what it is they want. A complaint like '*We aren't appreciated around here,*' is really a cry for attention. A cry that they want to feel important enough to be noticed.

If you have a lot of people complaining, take it as a clue ...

If you have a lot of people in your team complaining, take that as a clue, that maybe there is a bigger problem.

Maybe your People System and Work Processes need reviewing

Maybe people are feeling dis-enfranchised, unheard, or the systems, policies and procedures, you have in place, are hindering them (or making it more difficult than it needs to be) from successfully completing their work.

However, if it is only the odd one or two who seem to be complaining a lot (and you're fairly confident that your People and Work Processes are mostly in good shape) then these tips may well help you get these chronic complainers focused on being part of the solution, not part of the problem.

When it is Only a Couple of People Complaining ... Your Job is to Drill for the Truth

To successfully stop complainers, see yourself as a 'Discoverer of the Truth' and help those who are complaining to do the same.

Chronic complainers tend to generalize and make vague statements. They often times haven't actually got to the bottom of why they are so frustrated. As their leader you are responsible for drawing out from them what specifically it is they want.

Be like Sherlock Holmes - Ask Questions

By asking questions, you can discover what it is they are really thinking. And hopefully, you'll be able to inspire an 'aha' moment that helps them understand their reason for complaining. Once you've got that happening you'll be in a better place to shift them into focusing on the solution to their complaint.

Four types of complaints

The four types of vague complaints that you might frequently see are:

1. Comparisons
2. Universal Generalizations
3. Unquestioned Rules
4. Deletions

You will inspire individuals and teams when you become successful at handling these types of complaints.

Below are questions you can use to help defuse these types of complaints.

Comparisons

The person makes a comparison, but leaves out the basis for the comparison (which is a favorite tactic of advertising agencies). For example, *"This is the worst computer on the market."*

To make sense of this complaint, you need to get to the bottom of it by asking questions like, *"Which market?" "By what measure is it the worst - on price? battery life? speed? customer service? or what?"*

Universal Generalizations

In universal generalizations people tend to use words like always, never, every, all, everyone etc. For example: *"We never get our quality right."* It is most unusual for anything to be never right, or always right, or always wrong etc.

You want to ask the person if their generalization really is universally applicable. *"Are you sure we have never got our quality right, not ever once?"*

By doing this you help them to break their complaint down, to something more specific and manageable.

You can focus in on what actual events causes the quality to be off standard and start fixing the problem.

Unquestioned Rules

You've probably heard it before, "*That's the ways we've always done it.*" Here, the person is quoting an unspecified rule, for which there isn't any great justification.

So now you want to get the person thinking, by asking questions like:

- ✓ "What other ways could it be done?"
- ✓ "What prevents you from ...?"
- ✓ "What would happen if you did it another way?"

Deletions

Here, the person tells the story about an event, using 'high level' descriptions, or leaves out some essential information, for example: "*People think things are really going downhill fast here.*" You need to get to the bottom of this by asking questions like:

- ✓ "What in particular do you think has started going down hill"
- ✓ "Who else thinks this way?"
- ✓ "On what basis are you comparing this to?"

Your tone and way of approaching can either empower or send people underground

Because you are a leader, your tone and way of approaching their complaint, can influence to a great degree, whether their complaints go underground, or the individual(s) begins the process of feeling empowered enough to join with you and turn themselves into a solution finder who is operating above-the-line.

As you ask the complainer to get more specific, they will either stop complaining (at least to you) or, more hopefully, they will start to become more solutions focused.

Hot Tip

If you aren't careful, it can be easy to come across as an interrogator.

You want to use a 'charge negative' tone when you are asking the questions.

So you may want to soften the questions a little.

For instance, in the last example above, you could soften your question to something like, "*It's interesting that you say that. I'm wondering, what in particular do you think has started going down hill?*"

If you charge in with judgment, frustration or condemnation in your voice you can expect the discussion to go pear-shaped. And you'll certainly keep them in the complainer square rather than the solutions-finder square.

So do take some time to check your emotional state. If you've accessed the [Performing Under Pressure](#) training, make use of the tips and tactics to set yourself up for a successful discussion.

It's your intent to discover the truth of what is going on for this person. Not make them clam up and resent you.

When there is no solution to a complaint

Of course, there are times when there is no solution to a complaint, for example, "I hate winter... it's so cold!" There isn't a way to change the weather. Sure, you can explore the possibilities, but not everyone can move to the Gold Coast, Australia (hmmmm, wonder who lives there??? :)) or Florida.

In this type of scenario, (where something truly is impossible to change), you want to get the person complaining, to agree there is no viable solution to this particular issue, and ask that they stop complaining about it, and to turn their attention to the things they can do to lessen the problem.

In Summary

So, if you've got complaining going on, add questions like these to your tool bag and remember, you want to inspire the person(s) to discover the truth behind their complaint and become solution-focused.

- ✓ What would happen if you did it another way?
- ✓ What is it that you want?
- ✓ How can you fix that?
- ✓ What are you going to do about it?

- ✓ Where can you start?
- ✓ Who do you think can help you with that?
- ✓ What specifically isn't working?
- ✓ Who specifically ... ?
- ✓ How do you know it is bad?
- ✓ Always? Never? Have to? Must?
- ✓ What would happen if it wasn't ...
- ✓ What would happen if you did ...
- ✓ What would happen if you didn't ...
- ✓ Are you sure it has "never"
- ✓ What other ways could it be done?

About Shelley Holmes

Using tools, tips, ideas and strategies that help them to be really clear about what is 'success critical' and how to get there fast, Shelley inspires leaders to be a 'rockstar' in their organization and industry.

For several years, Shelley was a key leader in a High-Performance organization (that had national and international recognition). It is this real-world experience that underpins and brings to life the theory and insights gained, from her deep study of high-performance leadership.

Around the globe, she has worked with organizations (with total revenues in excess of \$116 billion) and supports thousands of individual leaders through, coaching, consulting, workshops, webinars, audio programs and the Make A Dent Leadership website.

Shelley's Philosophy...

It is essential for leaders to be transformational – because people and businesses deserve to scale up so they can thrive

Shelley's philosophy is that how you show up at work defines you as a human being, and the transformational dent you will make in the universe. She believes that everyone deserves to work with a leader who transforms: them, their business and their community!

On grand and small scales, the way you interact with others, the products, and services you are a part of delivering, all flow together to become a part of the legacy that you leave behind. The way you deal with others, the things you teach them, that cause them to grow, and become a better version of themselves as individuals, work colleagues, leaders, and parents ... now that defines who you are!

There are hundreds of resources like this at [Make A Dent Leadership](#) where you can join our community of leaders who are focusing on being inspired and inspiring and making their dent in the universe.

If you are ready to be the best possible version of yourself, to lead with more energy and passion than you thought possible... if you are ready to be a “Rockstar” in your industry ... then:

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