

VIEWPOINTS

No Complaining. . .

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Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach him how to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.

Lao Tze

It is said that hunger is a great motivator. If only the hunger for knowledge were as great as the hunger for physical sustenance. This statement could be lodged as a complaint, but that would defeat the purpose of this essay. How is it possible to turn the toil of our learning into the enlightenment for self-improvement?

Goal-centered behavior is a paradigm that seems to be associated with our culture of instant gratification. We as a culture have become slaves to the need to have answers delivered in a matter of seconds on the glowing screen of our desktop computers, laptops, or smart phones. One could argue that the instant gratification of delivered information has created a “culture of expectation” that all questions or challenges can and should be answered easily. If not, we complain to ourselves and to others.

The word *complaint* is defined as “an expression of pain, dissatisfaction, or resentment.” To complain about one’s task then is to express one’s dissatisfaction with the pathway toward attaining one’s goal, and in our view, lies in the culture of instant gratification. The pathway to achieving our goal(s) becomes a barrier to achieving what one intends. How can we change this pattern of behavior?

Jon Gordon, in his book *The No Complaining Rule: Positive Ways to Deal with Negativity at Work*, attacks this notion head-on with effective strategies for dealing with our culture of expectation. The no complaining rule which follows is structured for businesses, but is equally suitable for families and higher education. “Employees are not allowed to mindlessly complain to their coworkers. If they have a problem or complaint about the job, their company, their customer, or anything else, they are encouraged to bring the issue to their manager or someone who is in a position to address the complaint. However, the employees must share 1 or 2 possible solutions to their complaint as well.”¹

Reprogramming deep-seeded attitudes of instant gratification is never an easy task. Our daily life in the 21st century Western world moves at a turbocharged pace, with us often not taking the time for reflection and appreciation. How can we relearn techniques of process-orientated be-

havior? Gordon suggests that we implement the “3 No Complaining Tools” as a jumpstart and effectively change the culture of any institution into a dynamic and solution-oriented environment.¹ We believe these principles, as discussed below, can be important tools in our work and life as pharmacy academicians, clinicians, scientists, students and as family members, friends, and colleagues.

- (1) The “but” positive technique. This simple strategy helps you turn your complaints into positive thoughts, solutions, and actions. It works like this: when you realize you are complaining, you simply add the word *but* and then add a positive thought or positive action. For example: “I don’t like all the preparation time I must commit for the ACPE Self-Study report, *but* it is gratifying to see our many accomplishments and successes bound in multiple binders, highlighting the outstanding program we are creating in our college.” Another example: “I don’t enjoy students coming to my office outside of normal office hours, *but* I love the satisfaction of seeing that ‘ah, ha! moment’ when they finally understand a new concept they have been struggling with for weeks.”
- (2) Focus on “Get to” instead of “Have to.” Too often we complain and focus on what we have to do. We say things like “I have to teach Self Care Therapeutics this afternoon.” “I have to attend the Curriculum Committee meeting on Thursday.” Instead, why not shift your perspective and realize it’s not about *having* to do anything. You *get* to do things! You get the opportunity to continually revise your curriculum. You get to learn from colleagues at your college/school or at various local, regional, or national meetings. Focus on what you *get* to do. Focus on gratitude instead of being stressed.
- (3) Turn complaints into solutions. The goal is not to eliminate all complaining. The intent is to eliminate the kind of mindlessness complaining that doesn’t serve a greater purpose and allow complaining that is justified and worthwhile. The former is negative and the latter is positive.

With mindless complaining, you are mindlessly focusing on problems; however, with justified complaining you identify a problem, and the complaint moves you toward new and innovative solutions. Every complaint represents an opportunity to turn a negative into a positive action. For example, what can you learn from your complaints in the assessment process for a course and curriculum? How can you turn each meeting into learning something new or contributing to a new idea or program?

We believe complaining is one of the biggest problems in our society and academy. It undermines the effectiveness of a team and organization, leading to contempt and an inability to adapt and change. Educators have a responsibility to be the agents of change for future practitioners. This process begins within the walls of the academy and extends outward into the experiential education of our students. We need to conquer negativity and inspire faculty members, students, preceptors, and staff members in pharmacy education to adopt a positive attitude. We are

the role models for our students! Perhaps they should think of it as another opportunity to learn something that could improve their lives.

The profession of pharmacy is based on the premise that an ingested substance or drug will alter one's physical and emotional well being in significant ways. The alchemy of instant gratification is, in some ways, extant in the metabolism of pharmacological protocol. With this in mind, student pharmacists today become the docents of gratification for a culture addicted to immediate gratification. As another academic year soon comes to a close and new pharmacy graduates enter the profession, clearly we must empower our students to live and work with more vision, positive energy, and purpose. We must encourage them to cultivate more positive work environments where individuals and teams create more success toward patient care and toward a meaningful life.

REFERENCES

1. Gordon J. *The No Complaining Rule: Positive Ways to Deal with Negativity at Work*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons; 2008.