

“Get off the complain train and read this book!”

—KEN BLANCHARD,
coauthor of *The One Minute Manager* and
The One Minute Entrepreneur

The No Complaining Rule



Positive Ways to Deal with
Negativity at Work

Jon Gordon

International bestselling author of *The Energy Bus*

THE NO COMPLAINING RULE

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John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

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Published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, New Jersey
Published simultaneously in Canada

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data:

Gordon, Jon, 1971–

The no complaining rule : positive ways to deal with negativity at work / Jon Gordon.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-470-27949-6 (cloth)

1. Employee morale. 2. Employees—Attitudes.

3. Negativism. I. Title.

HF5549.5.M6G665 2008

658.3'14—dc22

2007051635

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

For Jade and Cole

Always remember to choose the Positive Road

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Acknowledgments

This book would never have been written if it hadn't been for Dwight Cooper, the CEO of PPR, who told me about the No Complaining Rule he implemented in his company and the positive impact it was having on his culture. This book is based on Dwight's commitment and dedication to creating a positive company where his employees create success and enjoy their work. Thank you, Dwight.

I also thank my wife, Kathryn, who inspired me to take the positive road in life.

Thank you to my maternal grandparents, Martin and Janice, whose last name I have passed on to my children. Thank you for your love.

Thank you to my parents for the greatest gift you could ever give me: your love. I miss you, Mom, but know that your spirit is with me.

Thank you to my agent, Daniel Decker, who supported this project from the start and helped make it a success.

Thank you to my editor, Matt Holt, and to Kim Dayman, Jessica Campilango, and the wonderful

team at John Wiley & Sons for making this book possible.

Thank you to the other members of my team who work hard and never complain: Jim Van Allan, Cathy Garwood, Brooke Trabert, and Amy Walter.

Thank you to all my clients who allow me to work with your companies, organizations, teams, and individuals. I am grateful every day to get to work with so many wonderful people.

I also have to give a big thank you to the managing partners at Northwestern Mutual who supported our No Complaining Tour to benefit Pediatric Cancer. Thank you to Tim Bohannon, Tait Cruse, Matt Russo, John Wright, Bob Waltos, Joey Davenport, Harry Hoopis, Scott Theodore, and John Goodwin.

I'd like to thank Ken Blanchard for his continued support of my work. Ken, you have played a major role in my life both professionally and spiritually. You have the purest heart I have ever known and I'm honored to know you.

Most of all I'd like to thank the original creator of the No Complaining Rule, God. Thank You for the inspiration to write this book. You deserve the credit.

Introduction

A Simple Rule Is Having a Big Impact

I didn't invent the rule. I discovered it—at a small, fast-growing, highly successful company that implements simple practices with extraordinary results.

One day I was having lunch with my friend and client Dwight Cooper, a tall, thin, mild-mannered former basketball player and coach who had spent the last 10 years building and growing a company he cofounded into one of the leading nurse staffing companies in the world. Dwight's company, PPR, was named one of *Inc.* magazine's Fastest Growing Companies several times, but on this day PPR was named one of the best places to work in Florida and he was sharing a few reasons why.

Dwight told me about a book he had read that dealt with jerks and energy vampires (negative people) in the workplace. But after reading and

reflecting on the book, he realized that when it comes to building a positive, high-performing work environment, there was a much more subtle and far more dangerous problem than jerks. It was complaining and more subtle forms of negativity, and he knew he needed a solution.

Dwight compared jerks to a kind of topical skin cancer. They don't hide. They stand right in front of you and say, "Here I am." As a result you can easily and quickly remove them. Far more dangerous is the kind of cancer that is subtle and inside your body. It grows hidden beneath the surface, sometimes slow, sometimes fast, but either way, if not caught, it eventually spreads to the point where it can and will destroy the body. Complaining and negativity are this kind of cancer to an organization, and Dwight had seen it ruin far too many. He was determined not to become another statistic and *The No Complaining Rule* was born.

I Was a Professional Complainer

Now before I share a story of how the No Complaining Rule works, it's important that I let you know that just because I wrote this book doesn't mean I'm some Mr. Positive, Pollyanna, smile all the time, happy guy who is never negative and

never complains. In fact I used to be a professional complainer. I blamed everyone else for all my problems. I didn't like me and I didn't like my life. I complained about my house, my lack of success, my wife, my weight, my lack of money, and just about everything else. In fact if you've read my book *The Energy Bus*—a fable about a guy who is miserable, negative, and whose wife is about to leave him—you should know that the character was based on me. My complaining and negativity got so bad that my wife gave me an ultimatum. Change or I was off the bus. I was dejected, rejected, and about to be ejected!

The fact is, complaining was a big part of my life and upbringing. I often joke that I come from a long line of complainers. I grew up in a Jewish-Italian family with a lot of food and a lot of guilt—a lot of wine and lots of whining. My grandmother was full of love for her family but full of fear in her life. She was so scared of flying, she would say, “I know when they say your time is up, your time is up, but I don't want to be on a plane when someone else's time is up.” And every time I would see my aunt she would start off the conversation with what was wrong with her life. To this day I still get e-mails from her saying “Hi” and then listing her problems. Even birthday cards to my children say, “Happy Birthday, Wish I was not dealing with so many problems so I could enjoy it

with you.” But I don’t blame my family. As I said, I come from a long line of complainers. After all, my ancestors walked around the desert complaining for 40 years. In a trip that should have taken 11 days, it took them 40 years. Talk about inefficiency. But that’s what complaining does.

There’s even a passage in the bible where the Israelites are freed from Egypt by Moses. They had spent 400 years as captive slaves and now they were free. At first they were happy and thrilled. But within a month and a half they started complaining about being hungry. They complained about not having enough water. They complained about living in the wilderness. They even said it would be better to be back in Egypt as slaves rather than be free in the desert. Three hundred years of slavery, and all it took was a month and a half to start complaining again. Finally, God got so frustrated with all the complaining that He threatened their very existence. Turns out God is a big proponent of the No Complaining Rule. I would even venture to say that God originated it.☺

It turned out that my wife wasn’t a big fan of complaining either. Even though complaining was ingrained in my DNA and the cards were stacked against me, when she threatened the very existence of our marriage I had no choice but to take a long, hard look at my life and realize how my

complaining and negativity were manifesting in everything that was wrong in my life. I was dying every day instead of living. I came to agree with Abraham Lincoln that “A man is about as happy as he chooses to be.” And so I began to research the positive effects of being positive and the harmful effects of being negative. This led me to write, speak, and consult with businesses and organizations and this ultimately led me to the No Complaining Rule.

Do I still complain? You bet I do. Just a whole lot less. Do I still get down? Of course. We all get down, but the key is how we turn it around. Every one of us will face negativity, energy vampires, and obstacles on the road to success. That is why one of the most important things we can do in business and life is to stay positive with strategies that turn negative energy into positive solutions. Thus the goal of this book is not to eliminate all complaining, just mindless, chronic complaining. And the bigger goal is to turn justified complaints into positive solutions. After all, every complaint represents an opportunity to turn something negative into a positive. We can use customer complaints to improve our service. Employee complaints can serve as a catalyst for innovation and new processes. And our own complaints can serve as signals that let us know

what we don't want, so we can focus on what we do want. In this spirit I share with you a story about the No Complaining Rule and other positive ways to deal with negativity at work and at home.