



If You Want To Create Change, Complaining Doesn't Count!

by CLAUDETTE E S COOMBS

Have you ever felt tired of things being the way they are? You really want something to change but every day your dreams and expectations are once again dashed? Today looks just like yesterday except you are a little more disillusioned with the world? Well, if we don't like things as they are, then it is up to us to *do* something about them... and complaining doesn't count!

To create a different experience, whether at home, work or in our social lives, we must be proactive. It really is our responsibility to take control of the direction of our lives. We aren't interested in just having change happen in any direction; we want a specific result. The more clearly we define what we want, the greater our chances of developing a reasonable method for achieving it.

Common Complaints... Common Response

It isn't unusual to hear complaints about a lack of resources, a difficult colleague, unsupportive administration or an unsatisfying personal relationship. Some of these legitimate concerns require professional intervention to provide an effective resolution. Other issues include components well beyond personal control or influence, while still others are well within the realm of personal change. In each case we choose to do (or not do) something about the experience. Unfortunately, we often react to a negative situation by becoming angry. We don't like what has happened so we complain and become frustrated and angry as we think or talk about it. This presents a potential pitfall since we become so focused on the perceived unfairness that we don't make the effort to change the situation. This focus can also result in a great deal of conflict. We are in turmoil and we may then put blame on those around us. Obviously, this approach isn't working. It really is time for a change!

Check the mirror ... Interpretation is everything!

Have you ever found yourself complaining about, or justifying, some behaviour depending on whether you are doing it or having it done unto you? The facts

are the same, only the perspective and interpretation changes. An inconsiderate, dangerous driver may have cut us off in traffic, yet we may have pulled in front of a slow moving, inattentive driver who was holding up traffic flow. Something may have been added to the staff meeting agenda unnecessarily by someone with nothing better to do than listen to him/herself talk, or because "you" felt it was extremely important and always overlooked! Actions in themselves have meaning because we attribute an interpretation to them. If we aren't satisfied, we can choose to change the situation or the interpretation. That "dangerous" driver may be trying to get a sick baby to the hospital! That slow driver may have just witnessed a fatal accident!

How to create change...

To make our lives more enjoyable, we may need to make some significant changes in our attitudes and in our behaviours. Consider the following few points.

- *Select one area at a time.*

A magic wand to cure all ills would be wonderful. However, to avoid being overwhelmed in our real world, we need to take changes one issue at a time. Select a target issue and set a goal based on issues that are most urgent. It may be something causing you distress or requiring too much energy.

- *Make the plan manageable.*

Visualize a long-term, general goal for enhanced personal control and overall well-being. Use the big picture to motivate action but be sure to set single goals which are achievable and are clarified through a realistic plan. Do whatever you can to ensure that you set yourself up for success, not failure!

- *Gather your supports and resources. Seek the needed expertise.*

You may need to learn new skills, recruit a mentor or enlist a fan club to keep you on track. Whatever your requirements, ensure that they are in place before you attempt the change.

- *Regularly re-evaluate your strategy, actions and progress.*

The plan you initially dreamed of, prepared for and implemented may not be precisely suited to your current environment. Conditions, people or even your goals may have changed. Use this opportunity to celebrate progress and clarify any efforts which aren't working as intended. Revise the strategy to meet any new conditions or to adjust to your current experience and situation.

- *Acknowledge successes.*

Reaching a goal signifies the positive results of effective planning and committed action. Believing that our efforts actually achieve the desired outcome encourages us to engage in the process again, rather than abandon hope of things ever improving.

- *Select another area and keep the positive changes happening!*

When you feel comfortable with achieving your desired change, start working on the next issue. We are life-long learners and the aspiration to reach our capacity and to influence others positively is a journey which has fluid endpoints.

It's all about Choice

Making assumptions can prove to be dangerous to progress. This is especially true if the assumption is that someone else is responsible for change or that things will improve without our efforts. We each choose our response to what life offers. By choosing to complain we waste physical and emotional energy which could be better used to actively address issues or develop reasonable coping mechanisms. Despite life's difficulties, we can choose to enjoy life generally and celebrate something specific in each day.

Claudette Coombs is a Coordinator with the Employee Assistance Program for teachers. For confidential assistance contact Claudette Coombs (ext. 242) or Marie Wall (ext. 265).