

## *Stop Complainers and Energy Drainers: How To Negotiate Work Drama To Get More Done*

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### **Summary**

There can be very real business costs associated with chronic complainers. Complainers can not only cost a company money in lost productivity, but can also infect the entire organization. This can result in low morale, loss of good employees, and sometimes even damage a business' reputation. Unchecked, chronic complainers can inhibit innovation and growth of a business.

Dealing effectively with chronic complainers is possible. Turning chronic complainers into chronic contributors is essential to moving a business beyond petty problems, gossip, and negativity and on to constructive criticism, growth and innovation.

Implementing the strategies and tools presented in *Stop Complainers and Energy Drainers* can help you to promote effective communication and help your teams get back to work.

### **What You Will Learn**

In *Stop Complainers and Energy Drainers*, you will learn to identify the various types of complainers.

- Whiners
- Complicators
- Prima Donnas
- Controllers
- Toxics

You will also learn effective strategies for handling each type, whether the complainer is your boss, a peer, or an employee. The author provides three key approaches to use with the different types of complainers and provides an example of how to use them.

In addition to complainers, energy drains can also slow down the productivity of an organization. You will learn the various forms that energy drains can take as well as how to improve them.

Lastly, you will learn that complaining is not always detrimental to an organization. There are ways to present complaints so that the problem is heard and action is taken. Teaching employees or peers to communicate their complaints effectively will end unproductive conversations and behaviors in the office and get employees back to work.

# Work Drama 101

Every business has its share of complainers. However in today's business world, when everyone is doing more work with fewer resources, there is simply no time for complainers who generally slow things down. Some of the main reasons that businesses should attempt to diffuse complainers include:

## *Reason 1: The Cost*

Complainers generate a real, and measurable, monetary cost to organizations. Not only do they waste their own valuable work time but they waste the time of their coworkers, multiplying the effect of lost work.

## *Reason 2: Negative affect and loss of good employees*

Productive employees do not want to work around or with complainers. Good employees may consider leaving a position in order to change their work culture and enjoy their job away from complainers.

## *Reason 3: Legal ramifications*

The legal ramifications of having an employee who is a complainer are a double-edged sword. If a complainer is not dealt with, it could lead to a harassment situation for which the employer is legally responsible. However, if a complainer is dealt with inappropriately, they may sue the employer. It is important to know how to handle complainers legally.

## *Reason 4: Environmental infection*

Just as a bacterial infection spreads through contact, so does the negativity and pessimism of a complainer. Complainers can cause other employees to disengage leading to higher and higher levels of lack of productivity.

## *Reason 5: Signal of problem or mental illness*

Sometimes complaining is a sign of some sort of personal or financial trouble. Because work occupies so much of a given day, it is often managers and peers who recognize that there is a problem and can potentially encourage the employee to seek outside help.

## *Reason 6: Your sanity*

It can be exhausting and draining to deal with a complainer and you may even find yourself taking on their work. Boundaries must be set so that complainers can learn autonomy and responsibility for their own work.

## *Reason 7: Business reputation*

If a complainer takes to social media or complains to customers, there is a good chance that your business reputation will be harmed. Studies show that negative news about your business travels farther and faster than positive news.

## *Reason 8: Complainer's potential*

Many complainers are hiding, or not living up to, their potential. Finding ways to help

complainers become positive communicators and learn how to better handle stress can unlock their ability to contribute to the organization.

*Reason 9: Counterproductive strategy*

Complainers foster an environment of negativity and take the focus off of the potential solutions. When complainers can transform their anger and frustration into positive action, the whole organization can benefit.

*Reason 10: The right thing to do*

As a leader you have an obligation to hold employees to a professional standard of behavior. Complainers who are unchecked have an effect on all other employees and by not handling them effectively, the risk of losing good employees is increased.

## **Introduction: How to Use This Book with No Complaints**

Readers will learn how to spot a complainer and then how to deal with the resulting behaviors.

Swindling's research has revealed five main types of complainers:

1. *Whiners* - Using the tactics of disapproval, venting or withdrawing, the whiner slows productivity.
2. *Complicators* - Frustration, complications, and creation of confusion are tactics employed by complicators to slow progress.
3. *Prima Donnas* - Prima Donnas are attention seekers who also gossip, create drama, and generally stir up trouble in the workplace.
4. *Controllers* - Aggressive complaints can be used as a tactic to control a certain outcome, situation, or to control people.
5. *Toxics* - Misinformation and complaints are used by toxics to manipulate and poison people and the work environment for their own agenda.

The book also lists several assessment tools available on the web for identifying the type of complainer you are dealing with.

Once you have identified the type of complainer causing problems on your team or in your organization, *Stop Complainers and Energy Drainers* can be used to learn effective communication strategies that stop the negative behavior.

## **Whiners**

Other names for whiners are:

- Martyrs
- Spoiled Brats
- Dark Clouds
- Pouters
- Soap Opera Actors
- Weeds/Exploders

### **Traits of a Whiner**

- Complain about how things are not fair
- Play the victim and are powerless
- Always seem to have something wrong in their lives
- Are always upset about something or someone
- Never bring solutions, only problems

### **The Reactions of Whiners**

Whiners react by withdrawing, becoming moody, grumpy or crabby, or sulking. They will pout, sigh, and moan when they are unhappy and will repeat situations of perceived offenses over and over. They will become explosive and are prone to tantrums and outburst when they become frustrated.

### **The Reality of Whiners**

What whiners really want is to be soothed, comforted, and reassured. They are looking to have the problems and issues solved for them and may explode when they are feeling overwhelmed, ignored, or vulnerable.

### **Do's and Don'ts**

Do Not:

- Try to make a whiner see that their reaction is irrational and unproductive
- Force them into problem solving before they have vented
- Solve their problem for them or get caught up in the venting

Do:

- Listen
- Empathize
- Ask for Solutions

### **Whiner Bosses**

If your boss is a whiner it is still important to listen and empathize. It may not be appropriate to ask for solutions, but you may be able to present it in a friendly manner such as, "What do you think you will do?"

## **Whiner Peers**

If your coworkers or friends are whiners, it may be easy to get caught up in the complaining. Listen and empathize with your friends, but be careful to not be taken advantage of by solving problems for them. Ask them for solutions and repeat as necessary.

## **Whiner Employees**

A boss has an inherent responsibility to solve problems for employees. However, not all problems are the responsibility of the leader. A whiner may try to take advantage of this relationship to avoid solving the problems that they should. As a boss, ask for solutions to problems when appropriate and do not rescue whiner employees.

## **Appealing to Management for Help**

When dealing with a whiner, make sure that management knows and understands the situation you are faced with. Be sure to highlight the business cost of the whining behavior, the lost productivity, the missed opportunities for improvement, and the general gloom and doom brought to the workplace by the whiner.

Whiners may try to enlist sympathy from management, so it is important to gain their support for your efforts.

## **Complicators**

Other names for complicators are:

- Critic
- Nitpicker
- Know-It-All
- Diverter
- Historian
- Micromanager

## **Traits of a Complicator**

- Delay and put up roadblocks if something new is offered
- Nitpick and criticize others' work
- Bring up past failures and mistakes
- Protect systems and information
- Use knowledge and details to confuse and complicate matters

## **The Reactions of Complicator**

Complicators attempt to confuse everyone with specific terminology or complex rules. They can be stubborn and will point out flaws and incompetence with others easily. They will block attempts at change and will hide areas they feel incompetent in.

## **The Reality of Complicator**

In reality, complicators want to slow things down because they feel threatened that any lack of knowledge they have will be uncovered. Complicators have a need to be correct and their attempts to enforce exacting rules and complicated systems plays into their need to protect and control.

## **Do's and Don'ts**

Do Not:

- Appeal to complicators to be a team player
- Ask them to change their mind
- Ask them to adopt a more positive attitude

Do:

- Reduce Speed
- Respect and compliment their efforts
- Present change or new information as an upgrade

## **Complicator Bosses**

It can be difficult to deal with a complicator boss. However, by acknowledging their efforts and the work that went into their current systems you can alleviate some of their fears.

By talking of change as an upgrade to their system, or the logical next step, you may be able to lessen some of the complicating tactics in order to move forward.

## **Complicator Peers**

Peers can present special challenges if they are complicators. You will not want to confront them directly but will want to back off on pushing them a little bit until they have time to process the changes. Be sure to acknowledge their role in the current systems and talk to them about how logical these next steps are.

## **Complicator Employees**

Leaders with employees who are complicated may find their tactics especially challenging. Knowing the motivations of fear behind them may help managers to approach the complicator

on their own turf. By taking a step back from pushing for a change, a manager can ease some of the fear just long enough to show respect for the employee's efforts and then present the new changes as a logical next step or upgrade.

## **Appealing to Management for Help**

Dealing with chronic complicators can be challenging for organizations because complicators are generally well-prepared with data and knowledge for any attempt at redirection.

Be sure to highlight to management the costs in lack of forward movement that is caused by the confusing, complicated, and time-wasting behavior of the compicator.

## **Prima Donnas**

Other names for prima donnas are:

- Pot Stirrers
- Gossips
- Tourists
- Finger Pointers
- Freeloaders
- Drama Queens/Kings

## **Traits of a Prima Donna**

- Always strive for the spotlight, even to the exclusion of others
- Are quick to take credit, even for others' work
- Act superior and take no blame for mistakes
- Are really expressive and dramatic in their demeanor
- Spread gossip or negative information about others

## **The Reactions of Prima Donnas**

Prima donnas can be brash, excessive, and over the top. They can use humor to criticize and use words, voice tone, body, and facial expressions to express their opinions. They will take credit for the work of others, make promises with no intention of delivering on them, and may even lie outright. They procrastinate and point fingers when something goes wrong.

## **The Reality of Prima Donnas**

Prima donnas desire to be admired and adored, even at the expense of others. They will use their complaining to socialize and truly want to be recognized and heard.

## **Do's and Don'ts**

Do Not:

- Describe why their reaction is too extreme and excessive
- Put them on the spot
- Ask them to be rational

Do:

- Acknowledge that you have observed their behavior
- Avoid getting lost in the drama
- Publicize any expected new behavior to hold the prima donna accountable

## **Prima Donna Bosses**

Prima donna bosses do not give proper acknowledgement to their team and those around them who contribute to their success. As a team member, if appropriate, you may point out to the boss the contributions of the team and the fact that they failed to acknowledge this. Avoid any drama involved by way of explanation and make sure that your team's efforts are otherwise publicized.

## **Prima Donna Peers**

If you find that one of your peers is behaving in a prima donna fashion, it is necessary to confront the problem to keep yourself in good standing. Acknowledge to your peer the problem with the behavior but don't get drawn into drama if they begin to overreact. Be sure to let others know of your new agreement with your peer so there is no confusion with the prima donna as to how things are.

## **Prima Donna Employees**

Employees exhibiting prima donna behavior should be made aware of how their explosive or extreme behavior has affected the whole team. When the excuses and explanations start to fly, simply reiterate the problem that has been caused and move on. Be sure to publicize the expected change in behavior to the whole team, if appropriate, so that everyone is on the same page and does not accept bad behavior.

## **Appealing to Management for Help**

When negotiating or coaching prima donnas it may be wise to have management support and it may be necessary to have a management representative with you as well. Prima donnas propensity to overreact and become emotional may put you in a vulnerable position should they turn to management with a story about what happened that is less than the truth. To convince management that support is needed, it may be necessary to reveal their lies and how their disruptive behavior affects business.



# Controllers

Other names for controllers are:

- Tyrants
- Demanders
- Bullies
- Persecutors
- Slave Drivers
- Bulldozers

## Traits of a Controller

- Bulldoze, bully, or intimidate others
- Want to be in charge, even if not the leader
- Are avoided by others for fear of confrontation
- Interrogate and use questions to show dominance
- Enjoy making others squirm and feel uncomfortable

## The Reactions of Controller

Controllers can intimidate using their physical body by standing when others are seated, waving their arms, and pounding their fists. They may use a loud voice as their temper escalates. After their eruption, they expect everyone to get over it and move on quickly and back into action.

## The Reality of Controller

Their aggressive complaining is an attempt by a controller to accomplish their task. They lose patience when they perceive others are derailing these efforts. They stress over deadlines. Controllers think that by scaring others, they will be motivated to act.

## Do's and Don'ts

Do Not:

- Make multiple excuses or finger point
- Give a detailed account of what went wrong
- Engage in an aggressive counter defense

Do:

- Stand your ground but do not be aggressive
- Deliver solutions
- Let them decide between several options

## **Controller Bosses**

Controller bosses can be extremely intimidating and uncomfortable for employees who generally try to avoid them. However, it is generally better to stand your ground confidently in front of a controller boss, answer their questions to the best of your ability, and then offer them some choice as to what happens next. Employees who are doing their work well will have no problem diffusing a controller boss in this manner.

## **Controller Peers**

Controller peers can act like they are the boss rather than a co-worker. It is important to stand your ground with controller peers and take their power away by delivering your portion of the work. You then put the decision and choice of behavior on them.

## **Controller Employees**

Employees who are controllers should be made aware of their behavior and offered opportunities for retraining. Leave it up to them to decide if they will take advantage of the opportunities you present.

## **Appealing to Management for Help**

It is important to gain management backing with controllers since their aggressive behavior can present a high risk of lawsuits. The intimidation and resulting lack of productivity can be shown to affect the success of major projects as good employees do not perform at their best.

## **Toxics**

Other names for toxics are:

- Narcissists
- Egocentrics
- Whack-a-doodles
- Puppeteers
- Borderline
- Sociopaths

## **Traits of a Toxic**

- Are deceitful, deceptive, and charming
- Twist information and present it in a fraudulent manner
- Manipulate and enjoy turmoil, drama, and chaos
- Exploit and corrupt work teams
- Are passive-aggressive and have no empathy for others

## **The Reactions of a Toxic**

Toxics may react irrationally and aggressively. They are not team players and can put on a very good act to get out of uncomfortable situations. They are adept at dishonesty and at charming higher-ups.

## **The Reality of a Toxic**

In reality, many toxic complainers may have untreated emotional and psychological issues including bipolar disorder, borderline personality disorder, or narcissistic tendencies.

## **Do's and Don'ts**

Do Not:

- Describe why their reaction is unproductive or causing problems with coworkers
- Question or coach them so that they can understand the fault of their approach
- Appeal to their ethics or sense of doing right

Do:

- Protect yourself
- Watch how others react to them
- Steer clear while determining your actions

## **Toxic Bosses**

Toxic bosses can make employees feel crazy with their irrational behavior. Be sure to protect yourself with documentation and follow up and steer clear of a toxic complainer's wrath as much as possible.

## **Toxic Peers**

If you determine a peer is a toxic personality, it is best to keep interactions to a minimum. If you are known as someone who associates with a toxic, you may be viewed as an accomplice in the mayhem they create.

## **Toxic Employees**

Managers can try to help toxic employees with coaching, however, they should always protect themselves from a toxic employee who could easily turn on them. Toxics have no problem lying to upper management and getting themselves on their good side through lying.

## **Appealing to Management for Help**

Management support and assistance may be the key to dealing with a toxic personality in your company. Toxics can easily fool upper managers into believing they are model employees, all the while wreaking havoc in their department.

## **What to Do If You're the Complainer**

It's possible that by reading the explanations of the different complainer types, you may have found that you are also a complainer.

If you want to change this newly recognized behavior, start by determining your complaining type and the reasons for it. Next, understand your strengths and value to the organization. Understand the value that more effective communication can have on your career and business relationships.

Lastly, be proactive. Complaining without solutions is not productive. Adopt a problem-solving manner.

## **Energy Drains**

Work drama can also be caused by energy drains in the form of:

- Environmental factors
- Organizational constraints
- Systems and processes that place unnecessary stress on employees

When faced with an energy drain situation, it is best to use the following tactics:

- Identify the problem and potential changes that can make a difference
- Control what you can by putting systems in place
- Negotiate those items out of your control

### **How to Negotiate Work Drama**

To negotiate the drama created by complainers, you must first be sure that you have good reasons for doing so. Ask yourself how you will benefit personally or professionally and if it is worth it to you to continue.

If you decide to negotiate, be sure to gather supporters: others who will support you through the next step. Many times, there are others who would also benefit by changing the work drama.

To be successful, try to anticipate the challenges you might face, as well as the worst-case scenario. Always have a plan B, but give the plan adequate time to work.

## **Go Ahead, Complain**

In reality, not all complaints are destructive. Every workplace should make it clear to employees how a valid complaint is constructed and presented so as not to disrupt the whole organization from the inside.

Managers can preempt destructive complainers by identifying and taking the positive steps outlined to address their unspoken concerns.

Complaints can be constructive to an organization even when they originate with customers, especially if they are handled correctly.

*Stop Complainers and Energy Drainers* is a helpful resource for getting a handle on frustrating work situations. Complainers, energy drains and work drama can all be handled effectively using these tools and strategies to spot the problems and stop the behavior.