

# The Complaint Free® Organization

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Workbook



## A Program for Positive Transformation

Based on

**"A Complaint Free World – How to Stop Complaining and Start Enjoying  
the Life You Always Wanted"**

by Will Bowen

**"If you don't like something, change it; if you can't change it, change your  
attitude. Don't complain."**

**Maya Angelou**

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Kansas City, MO 64155

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## Introduction

# Introduction: A Complaint Free® World

*“Complaining is like bad breath. You tend to notice it when it comes out of someone else’s mouth, but not when it comes out of your own.” – Will Bowen*

## Getting Started

**W**e highly recommend you read “A Complaint Free World – How to Stop Complaining and Start enjoying the Life You Always Wanted,” by Will Bowen. This inspiring and easy-to-read book supplements the DVD with information and resources to help you create a Complaint Free World.

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### ICON KEY

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Exercises



Workbook review

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The DVD and this workbook are divided into four parts. As you view the DVD, use the workbook to fill in blanks and reinforce your learning. At the end of each section, stop the DVD for a few minutes to complete the accompanying exercises. Along the way, we provide some additional exercises to help reinforce the concepts you are learning.

### How this works:

**Scientists believe it takes 21 days to form a new habit and complaining is habitual for most of us.**

- 1. Begin to wear the bracelet, on either wrist.**
- 2. When you catch yourself complaining, (it’s ok, everyone does) move the bracelet to the other arm and start your 21 days over again at day one.**
- 3. If you hear someone else complain, you may point out their need to switch the bracelet to the other arm; BUT if you’re going to do this, you must move your bracelet first!**
- 4. Stay with it. The average person takes 4-8 months to go 21 consecutive days without complaining.**

## For Facilitators

### Preparation

- View the DVD, “Complaint Free Living—Go From Being a Person Who Whines to Being a Person Who Shines.” In addition, we highly recommend you read the book, “A Complaint Free World—How to Stop Complaining and Start Enjoying the Life You Always Wanted” by Will Bowen for additional context and information.
- Review this workbook to familiarize yourself with the questions, exercises and discussion points. The fill-in-the-blank answers can be found at the end
- Have enough Complaint Free purple bracelets and workbooks to distribute to all participants. Order Complaint Free bracelets and download free workbooks at [www.AComplaintFreeWorld.org](http://www.AComplaintFreeWorld.org).
- Set aside about two and a half hours for your group to watch the DVD and engage in the activities. If necessary, you can break the program into three 30-minute and one final 45-minute session. If you do so, for optimal results we recommend you schedule the sessions as closely together as possible (ideally all within the same week).

### Guidelines for Success

- Keep extra Complaint Free bracelets on hand to replace lost or broken bracelets over time. (It commonly takes several months for people to successfully achieve 21 days of not complaining.)
- Don't be a bracelet cop. Don't point out someone's complaints and discourage your participants from doing so. The objective of the program is to help individuals learn to catch themselves complaining.
- Celebrate success however small. Even 5 minutes not complaining is a big achievement for some people. Remind everyone this is not a competition; it's an individual journey.
- Keep it positive. During group discussions, set ground rules that there be no teasing or putting one another down in any way.
- Lead by example. If you complain while you're facilitating the session, move your bracelet and allow the others to share your journey.

**To increase the level of engagement and success of your group members, schedule follow-up meetings or provide a means to encourage one another and share successes.**

## Background

The Complaint Free® World program began in July of 2006 when Will Bowen handed out purple bracelets to people in Kansas City, Missouri. His objective was to encourage them to think more positively. The idea was simple: put a purple, rubber bracelet on either wrist and, when you catch yourself complaining, switch the bracelet to the other wrist.

Scientists believe that it takes 21 consecutive days of a new behavior for it to become habitual. So, by switching the bracelet from wrist to wrist with each complaint until one has gone 21 consecutive days without complaining, a person can establish the habit of being Complaint Free.

Inspired with their experience and results, the first participants began describing it to their friends, families and co-workers. A reporter at the *Kansas City Star* wrote about a story about the phenomenon. The news spread and Bowen began getting calls and doing interviews around the world. In 2007, he wrote, “A Complaint Free World -- How to Stop Complaining and Start Enjoying the Life you Always Wanted,” which has become an international best-seller.

A Complaint Free World has been featured on the Oprah Winfrey Show, NBC's Today Show, ABC Evening News, CBS Sunday Morning, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, and in People, Newsweek and a myriad of worldwide, magazines, newspapers and broadcasts. Thousands of schools, businesses and other organizations have used the purple bracelets to positively transform attitudes and life experiences.

Millions of purple Complaint Free bracelets have been sent to people in more than 105 countries.

A Complaint Free World is a non-religious, non-profit organization providing Complaint Free purple bracelets for those seeking to create a happier and more positive life. For more information, visit [www.AComplaintFreeWorld.org](http://www.AComplaintFreeWorld.org) or send us an email at [Contact@AComplaintFreeWorld.org](mailto:Contact@AComplaintFreeWorld.org).

### Visit our Web Site:

- ▶ Order bracelets, books, etc.
- ▶ Get support and connect with others
- ▶ Sign up for our free e-newsletters
- ▶ Share stories of your success
- ▶ Find out about upcoming Complaint Free seminars, workshops and trips
- ▶ Make a donation
- ▶ Download additional copies of this program
- ▶ Download *Certificates of Happiness*
- ▶ Read, view and listen to recent media stories about the Complaint Free Movement

[AComplaintFreeWorld.org](http://AComplaintFreeWorld.org)

## Part 1: What is Complaining?



### DVD

Fill in the blanks below as you watch the DVD. At the conclusion of part 1, turn off the DVD and complete the exercises that follow. If needed, you can find the answers on p. 16 of this workbook.

1. The dictionary defines complaining as to express \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_.
2. The average person complains \_\_\_\_\_ times per day.
3. Becoming Complaint Free is not about "shutting up and sucking up" what life brings. It is about developing \_\_\_\_\_ communication skills. It encourages you to speak \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ to the person who can \_\_\_\_\_ the change you seek.
4. Our \_\_\_\_\_ create our \_\_\_\_\_ and our \_\_\_\_\_ indicate what we are \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Complaining is like \_\_\_\_\_. We notice complaints when they come from someone else's mouth, but not our own.



### Exercise:

There are complaints and then there are statements of fact. Facts are neutral, complaints are charged with negative energy. Which do you think the following statements represent?

	Complaint	Fact
I feel cold.		
Why is this room <u>always</u> so cold?		
He's wearing jeans and boots to the office today.		
Check out Mr. "Business Casual" in his faded jeans and scruffy boots.		
Our revenues and profits are at historic lows.		
Business stinks.		
I feel tired.		
I'm <u>so</u> tired.		
This client is a basket case. You'll never make him happy.		
This client has a reputation of being difficult to please.		

**Journal and Share**

What person or situation do you tend to complain about most frequently?

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Who might you speak to directly and only to resolve the situation rather than complaining?  
What might you say?

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Who the most positive and optimistic person you know? How does it feel to be around this person?

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**“Complaining is not to be confused with informing someone of a mistake or deficiency so that it can be put right. And to refrain from complaining doesn’t necessarily mean putting up with bad quality of behavior. There is no ego in telling the waiter your soup is cold and needs to be heat up – if you stick to the facts, which are always neutral. ‘How dare you serve me cold soup?’ . . . That’s complaining.”**

**– Eckhart Tolle**

## Part 2: Why is Complaining Destructive?



### DVD

*Fill in the blanks below as you watch the DVD. At the conclusion of part 2, turn off the DVD and complete the exercises that follow. If needed, you can find the answers on p. 17 of this workbook.*

1. Complaining causes us to focus on the \_\_\_\_\_, rather than potential \_\_\_\_\_.
2. If you focus on what is \_\_\_\_\_, that is what \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Complaining damages both our \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ health.
4. Doctors estimate they spend as much as \_\_\_\_\_ of their time dealing with health problems that are sourced or made worse by a person's \_\_\_\_\_.
5. People who complain about their \_\_\_\_\_ tend to have poor health.
6. According to a recent University study, teenage girls whose relationships center on complaining had higher rates of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
7. A common thread in unsatisfying relationships is \_\_\_\_\_.
8. Morale filters down from the \_\_\_\_\_. A good rule of management is "No \_\_\_\_\_ in our \_\_\_\_\_."

**"It is a waste of time to be angry about my disability. One has to get on with life and I haven't done badly. People won't have time for you if you are always angry or complaining."**

**-Stephen Hawking**



**Journal and Share:**

Think of a time when you made a decision to focus on what was going well for you rather than complain. What was the experience like? How did you feel as a result of doing this?

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Where do you find yourself complaining most often? How might your experience in this situation change if you refrained from complaining? What might you do or say to keep from Complaining?

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**FOR FUN AND EXTRA CREDIT:**  
Watch the Monty Python sketch, “The Four Yorkshiremen”  
<http://pythonline.com/node/241106>. It's a funny and telling demonstration of how people treat complaining as a competitive sport.

## Part 3: Why do People Complain?



### DVD

Fill in the blanks below as you watch the DVD. At the conclusion of part 3, turn off the DVD and complete the exercises that follow. If needed, you can find the answers on p. 17 of this workbook.

There are five basic reasons people complain remembered by the acronym G.R.I.P.E.:

1. **Get** \_\_\_\_\_.
2. **Remove** \_\_\_\_\_.
3. **Inspire** \_\_\_\_\_.
4. **P** \_\_\_\_\_.
5. **Excuse P** \_\_\_\_\_ P \_\_\_\_\_.

<b>Examples of Complaints</b> (Note: many fit into more than one category)	
<p><b>Get Attention</b> The primary need people have is to connect with others. A person may complain to a stranger about the weather or a local sports team as a means of starting a conversation.</p>	<p><i>Is it hot enough for you?</i> (Hello!)</p> <p><i>The traffic was horrendous this morning.</i> (Talk to me)</p>
<p><b>Remove Responsibility</b> People will complain to avoid trying to improve society and themselves.</p>	<p><i>Nothing will ever change.</i> (I don't have to try because what I do won't make a difference.)</p> <p><i>You can't fight City Hall.</i> (And I won't try)</p>
<p><b>Inspire Envy</b> A complaint may be a cry of superiority. It implies that the complainer feels they don't have whatever fault they are complaining about.</p>	<p><i>Nobody ever thanks me for anything I do.</i> (I do more than anyone.)</p> <p><i>My boss is incompetent</i> (I'm superior to her.)</p>
<p><b>Power</b> People often complain to incite others to abandon an alliance and switch to their point of view, and/or build support and power by focusing on what's wrong with another's position.</p>	<p><i>He is not a good leader.</i> (Tell others I should replace him.)</p> <p><i>Her idea is lame.</i> (Support my idea instead.)</p>
<p><b>Excuse poor performance</b> A person about to sing before a group may complain they have a scratchy throat to lower expectations should they not sing well.</p>	<p><i>I'm getting another headache.</i> (I'll fail because my head hurts).</p> <p><i>This client is constantly delaying the production schedule.</i> (And don't expect me to manage the situation any better.)</p>

**Journal and Share:**

What are three complaints you've either said or heard in the past week? Refer back to page 7 and decide which of the five basic reasons would you attribute to those complaints? (Note: many complaints fall under multiple categories.)

Complaint: \_\_\_\_\_

Reason: \_\_\_\_\_

Complaint: \_\_\_\_\_

Reason: \_\_\_\_\_

Complaint: \_\_\_\_\_

Reason: \_\_\_\_\_

Complaint: \_\_\_\_\_

Reason: \_\_\_\_\_

Complaint: \_\_\_\_\_

Reason: \_\_\_\_\_

Complaint: \_\_\_\_\_

Reason: \_\_\_\_\_

Consider the complaints you listed, above. How could they have been expressed, and to whom should they have been addressed in a positive, productive manner, for optimal effectiveness?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**“Man invented language to satisfy his deep need to complain.”**  
– Lilly Tomlin

## Part 4: How Do I Become Complaint Free?



### DVD

*Fill in the blanks below as you watch the DVD. At the conclusion of part 4, turn off the DVD and complete the exercises that follow. If needed, you can find the answers on p. 18 of this workbook.*

1. The average person takes \_\_\_\_\_ to become Complaint Free.
2. Scientists believe it takes \_\_\_\_\_ consecutive days to form a new habit.
3. The most common experience of people who become Complaint Free is increased \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Focus on what is \_\_\_\_\_ in your life to draw more good to you.
5. The goal of Complaint Free World is to distribute \_\_\_\_\_ bracelets around the world. That's \_\_\_\_\_ percent of the world's population, and can transform the \_\_\_\_\_ of the world.

**The greatest discovery of my generation is that human beings, by changing the inner attitudes of their minds, can change the outer aspects of their lives.”**

**—William James**

**Journal and Share:**

The opposite of complaining is gratitude. What are some of the things for which are you grateful?

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How does it make you feel when you focus on things and people you appreciate?

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Sometimes what we'd call stumbling blocks are actually stepping stones to greater fulfillment. Can you think of something that happened to you that you thought, at the time, was a problem which turned out to be a fortunate occurrence?

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What is a problem you are facing right now? How might it actually be a "blessing in disguise?"

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## Conclusion

### Commit to A Complaint Free World

- ❖ Complaining is habitual for most of us. Scientists believe it takes 21 days to form a new habit. So the goal is to go 21 consecutive days without complaining.
- ❖ Begin to wear the bracelet on either wrist.
- ❖ When you catch yourself complaining (it's okay, everyone does) move the bracelet to the opposite wrist and start your 21-day count over again.
- ❖ If you hear someone else complain, you can remind him or her to switch their bracelet. But you may only do so after you've moved your own bracelet first because you're complaining about their complaining. Remember, the goal is to increase your own level of self-awareness and transformation.
- ❖ Stay with it. The average person takes four to eight months to go 21 consecutive days Complaint Free.
- ❖ When you reach your 21st Complaint Free Day please share your experiences with us. Visit [www. AComplaintFreeWorld.org](http://www.AComplaintFreeWorld.org) and submit your name to include on the 21-day champions list. While you're there, download your very own "Certificate of Happiness" to print and frame.

**“What you are creates an impact on your world. In the past, your impact may have been negative because of your propensity to complain. Now, however, you are modeling optimism and a better world for all. You are a ripple in the great ocean of humanity that resounds around the world.”**

**–Will Bowen**



**Exercise**

Turn to someone and complain, then switch your bracelet. Turn to someone else and complain about something else, (just for fun; use a “whiny” voice) then switch your bracelet again. How do you feel when you complain? Refer to your gratitude list on page 10, how does this experience of complaining compare with your making a list of things about which you are grateful?

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What do you feel will be your greatest challenge in becoming Complaint Free? How can you plan now to maintain your resolve in this situation?

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**Extra credit**

Create a Complaint Free Zone (see page 14). Establish an area, it might be the break room at work, it might be your office, cubicle, or it might be a corner of your work area. If you are in this zone and someone complains while you are there, let them know that this is a Complaint Free Zone. Tell them, "It's ok if you want to complain, but let's step out of the Complaint Free Zone."

What has been your experience of using a Complaint Free Zone? Send us an email at ***Contact@AComplaintFreeWorld.org***.

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## Success Story

We frequently receive feedback from participants of A Complaint Free World programs in schools and businesses throughout North America. Here's one example of a business success. Share your own experiences. Send us an email at [\*\*Contact@AComplaintFreeWorld.org\*\*](mailto:Contact@AComplaintFreeWorld.org).

### **AFLAC –**

“The sales organization in Michigan was combining three sales organizations into one. Our sales were flat and morale was low. As the State Sales Coordinator, I needed to do something.

My wife read about the Complaint Free World program in a magazine and ordered 150 bracelets. At the meeting where I gave out the bracelets, we talked about the kind of leaders we wanted to be and the image that we wanted our organization to portray to the public.

The bracelets gave us an opportunity to talk about what was going on with one goal: a positive outcome. We would openly discuss the negative thoughts that were getting in the way of our success.

Coordinators would complain that the economy was bad, making it difficult to sell policies. Then, we realized that it was during tough economic times that people needed our product the most.

The team quickly realized that when you are focused on why you are not making sales, you are not focusing on the most important part of your business making sure that your customers are getting what they need.

The team held each other accountable for their thoughts. If someone made a negative comment at a meeting the group, in unison, the group would tell them to move the bracelet.

The power of positive thinking has helped turn the Michigan sales team around. We went from being a sales organization to being a family. State Sales Coordinators in other Aflac states have heard about our success and are calling me to find out how the bracelets can help them build their team and grow sales.”

Andy Glaub, AFLAC Michigan State Sales Coordinator



## Success Story

### Salon on Kirby, Houston, TX –

“I can pretty much guarantee that almost every salon across this planet is known for the employee break room, as the den of inequity. It is the spot where they gather and complain, complain, complain.

On New Years Eve 2007, I went up to the salon and painted the break room purple and stenciled "A Complaint Free World" on the wall. As each employee arrived on January 2nd I gave them the CD, book and bracelet. I told them to listen, read what they could and showed them the chart I made with everyone's name on it and counting the 21 days. I then let them know there would be a reward for everyone that finished the 21 days.

The first week was fun for everyone. The second week I panicked! By Wednesday three people quit, saying. "If you are not going to confront the problems in the salon then we don't not want to work here any more", I held the door open as I escorted them out. I spent some in prayer and meditation that night, making sure I was doing the right thing. The 3 that quit were my 3 biggest complainers. The response from the rest of the staff was "Thank God their gone, they were always so negative". I have since replaced the 3 that left. The interview process always begins in the break room, showing off the wall and telling them this is a Complaint Free salon. **The 3 new replacements produce twice the income as the ones that left.**

The first one to the 21 days came about 4 months into it. As if things had not improved enough already and the feeling in the salon was great, when everyone found out that upon completing the 21 days, they would receive 100% of their commission for their total revenue of that week, they worked really hard. I believed so much in this transformation that the return more than outweighed the cost.

Well, it's been over a year now and everyone made it to the finish line. Every now and then I see a few people wearing their bracelets; they inform me they needed a reminder. I get pulled aside by customers all the time telling me how much they love the energy in the salon, that while it's a beautiful salon, it's the people that work here that make it really beautiful.

Your energy that has been put into this I know is spreading across the planet. I know its spreading across Houston. We service over 800 people a week that are recipients of your positive energy. I thank you from my heart for transforming my life, my salon, and all that we touch.”

Alden Clark, Owner, SOK



This area is hereby designated an official  
**Complaint Free Zone**

If you wish to:

- Complain
- Criticize
- Gossip

Please step away to somewhere else.

**A Complaint Free World.org<sup>TM</sup>**

# Answer Key

## Part 1: What is Complaining?

1. The dictionary defines complaining as to express (grief), (pain) or (discontent).
2. The average person complains (15 to 30) times per day.
3. Becoming Complaint Free is not about "shutting up and sucking up" what life brings.  
It is about developing (healthy) communication skills. It encourages you to speak (directly) and (only) to the person who can (affect) the change you seek.
4. Our (thoughts) create our (lives) and our (words) indicate what we are (thinking).
5. Complaining is like (bad breath). We notice complaints when they come from someone else's mouth, but not our own.

	Complaint	Fact
I feel cold.		√
Why is this room <u>always</u> so cold?	√	
He's wearing jeans and boots to the office today.		√
Check out Mr. "Business Casual" in his faded jeans and scruffy boots.	√	
Our revenues and profits are at historic lows.		√
Business stinks.	√	
I feel tired.		√
I'm <u>so</u> tired.	√	
This client is a basket case. You'll never make him happy.	√	
This client has a reputation of being difficult to please.		√

## Chapter 2: Why is Complaining Destructive? (p. 3)

1. Complaining causes us to focus on the (problem), rather than potential (solutions).
2. If you focus on what is (wrong), that is what (persists).
3. Complaining damages our (physical) and (emotional) health.
4. Doctors estimate they spend as much as (2/3) of their time dealing with health problems that are sourced or made worse by a person's (thinking).
5. People who complain about their (health) tend to have poor health.
6. According a recent University study, teenage girls whose relationships center on complaining had higher rates of (depression) and (suicide)
7. A common thread in unsatisfying relationships is (complaining).
8. Morale filters down from the (top). A good rule of management is "No (weeds) in our (garden)."

## Chapter 3: Why do People Complain? (p.5)

**There are five basic reasons people complain remembered by the acronym G.R.I.P.E:**

1. **G**et Attention
2. **R**emove Responsibility
3. **I**nspire Envy
4. **P**ower
5. **E**xcuse Poor Performance

#### Chapter 4: How do I Become Complaint Free? (p.9)

1. The average person takes (four to six months) to become Complaint Free.
2. Scientists believe it takes (21) consecutive days to form a new habit.
3. The most common experience of people who become Complaint Free is increased (happiness).
4. Focus on what is (good) in your life to draw more good to you.
5. The goal of Complaint Free World is to distribute (60 million) bracelets around the world. That's (1) percent of the world's population, and can transform the (consciousness) of the world.
6. A Russian Proverb reminds us that if we want to clean up the entire (world), we should start with our own (doorstep).
7. You can't complain your way to (health), (happiness) and (success).