

How to Complain Effectively



Before you begin your Complain conversation, check to be sure you're following these ground rules:

1. Only complain to someone who can do something about your complaint. For example, don't complain to a co-worker about your boss. That's gossiping and whining.
2. Only complain if you originally got a commitment from the person – otherwise you only have a request (more on this below).
3. Only complain when you are “centered” emotionally. When you are upset you don't have access to your best thinking. If your goal is to improve performance instead of simply satisfying your emotional needs, take some time to cool down before you have the conversation.

It is your responsibility to complain to a person when that person made a Commitment and didn't honor it. Leaving it as an “open loop” by saying nothing, puts you out of integrity and doesn't produce the desired change.

Building blocks of the Complain conversation

Read through the steps to get the gist and practice your conversation.

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| 1. Set context | “Have you got a moment? I'd like to check something with you.” |
| 2. Softening statement | “This is difficult for me to bring up.” Or, “I have a dilemma.” |
| 3. Check facts/assumptions | “My understanding was that you would do X by Y. What was your understanding?” “Have you done that?” Or “I don't think you did it, did you?” |
| 4. Declare a breakdown | “Looks like there is a breakdown.” Gap, misunderstanding, disconnect. |
| 5. Ask what happened | “What happened?” or “What do you think caused the breakdown?”
(listen for Victim speak!) |
| 6. Empathize/Validate | “I hear you, I know that's a challenge.” |
| 7. Declare damage to you | “As a result of this breakdown, what do you think the impact was...” |
| 8. Make a new request | “In light of these new circumstances, I request that you do A by B, would you agree to doing that?” (get a promise!)
Plus – if your prior experience with the person suggests it... |
| 9. Additional request | “Also, if for any reason you realize you won't be able to complete that on time, would you please let me know as soon as possible?” |
| 10. For Repeat Offenders | “If we sit here next week and you again didn't fulfill your commitment, what should be the consequence?” |