

# The employee's guide to complaining

By Catherine Milward-Bridges

31 Jul 2013

Employee complaints have a legitimate place in business, with some tempering needed - in some cases more than others.



A key role player in the engagement equation, employees need a voice and a platform that are both taken seriously. This voice should be allowed to speak freely but constructively, in the interest of business-building.

There is a difference between complainers and whiners - complainers get taken seriously and are generally [happier](#).



Consider these questions to help you think twice before complaining:

## 1. Is this something that I can change myself?

This assessment will help you to differentiate between what is within your control, and what isn't. It'll also allow you to evaluate if *you* are a possible cause of the problem. Best of all, it could earn you brownie points if you identify and solve the problem.

## 2. Does my anger stem from a need for personal/business gain?

Selfishness blurs a balanced perspective. When you're only looking out for yourself, you're bound to be blinded to what *you* could be doing unwittingly to fuel the problem. Your 'argument' will therefore not be substantiated and your credibility will take a dive.

## 3. Is my need to complain a guise for a personal grudge?

If you're bearing a grudge against a colleague, use the situation as a lesson in conflict resolution and get on with it. This will bring you a lot more satisfaction than whining about something that you know is not the real issue.

## 4. How does my expertise contribute to the success of our department/business?

We all have something unique to contribute. Often our whining stems from feeling that we're not good enough. This exercise should highlight your worth, boost your confidence and divert your attention from what might then start to pale in significance.

## 5. In a random, anonymous interview, would colleagues mostly describe me as a whiner?

This could be quite sobering, and might even warrant you actually asking a few trusted colleagues how you really come across.

Though seemingly paradoxical, 'constructive complaining' can play a key role in guiding leadership in their employee engagement efforts. It will help them to see the landscape from the employee's perspective and - because it's done constructively - it has the potential to unlock solutions that would otherwise not even have appeared on the radar.

Employees who complain constructively do the following:

- Identify the problem and volunteer possible solutions.
- Voice their misgivings on the right platform, in an appropriate tone. Using employee engagement sessions as a platform is more effective than whining to colleagues. If your approach is positive and solution orientated, you're more likely to get the attention of leadership.
- Encourage colleagues to voice their concerns constructively, rather than gossiping about them.
- Demonstrate a keen interest in the business and its workings. Knowing the company and understanding its direction will garner respect from leadership (and colleagues).
- Have a 'we', rather than an 'I' mindset, and will therefore see the bigger picture.

There's no harm in complaining. With a positive attitude and good motives you will get the right people - those who really matter - to sit up and listen.

## ABOUT CATHERINE MILWARD-BRIDGES

Catherine Milward-Bridges is a passionate communication specialist and founder of [simplyput.co.za](http://simplyput.co.za). Catherine guides her clients in taking their engagement efforts from good to great; and helps them optimise social media with strategic know-how.

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