



Whining with Purpose

by Patti Hathaway, CSP

When we encounter work change, we naturally want to whine and complain about the decision that was made . . . “Why didn’t they ask for our opinion?” “This will never work. They didn’t think about _____.” “How do they expect us to _____?”

We need to develop the ability to "whine with purpose", in other words - - to give constructive feedback. If you really think about it, when we are whining and complaining we are really giving criticism. In order to be effective, we must learn how to give honest, constructive criticism to others. One of the most difficult things to do at work (and in life) is to tell the truth with love. It is particularly challenging to give constructive criticism to your boss.

So, how do you tell your boss that the change they have initiated won't work or that a particular behavior of theirs is causing a problem for you? Here is a technique for how to give critical feedback to the coach (your boss) without getting kicked off the team. I suggest using the **DASS Script** and this is how it works.

Step 1: Ask for permission. Since your boss has ultimate authority over your pay and promotion, you will want to be very careful how you give feedback to him/her. Before plunging into the script, you will want to ask their permission to provide them with some feedback. You may want to ask their permission by saying something like ... “*Jack, I have an idea that I think may help us work more effectively as a team. Do you have some time this afternoon when we could discuss this?*” What boss isn't going to allow you the opportunity to share an idea that will increase your team effectiveness?

Step 2: Describe your boss's problematic behavior. You need to be very specific in your description of your boss's problematic behavior by giving a recent and specific example. Let's say your boss calls you into his office for a discussion about a new change and then promptly begins answering the phone each time it rings (this seems to be a common complaint of employees!). You may want to start out by saying, “*Jack, yesterday when you called me into your office at 3:00 to discuss change x, we were interrupted by 4 phone calls during our half hour meeting...*”

While you are providing someone your unsolicited feedback, be very aware of your tone of voice and gestures. Don't pout or sound aggravated, it will only make things worse. Sound genuine and caring -- you'll have a much better chance of being heard and listened to.

Step 3: Acknowledge your feelings and the impact on the team. It is important to share your feelings about the situation because it personalizes your criticism. It is impossible for another person to invalidate your feelings because they are just that -- your feelings. I'm reminded of the times when I got in trouble with my parents when I was a teenager. I recall preferring any punishment over my parents saying they were "disappointed" in my behavior. With a punishment, I could complain about my parents and their behavior. However, their "disappointment" caused me to think about my own behavior. Feelings are very powerful and can make a significant difference in how criticism is taken.

Let's continue with Jack's problematic behavior. (Describe) *"Jack, yesterday when you called me into your office at 3:00 to discuss change x, we were interrupted by 4 phone calls during our half hour meeting... (Acknowledge) I feel really frustrated (watch your tone of voice) because I know we could have finished our discussion in about 10 minutes rather than the 30 minutes it took..."*

If you stop after step 3, I consider this "whining". You're just complaining to your boss about their irritating behavior. You are venting and getting it off your chest, but that's it. Instead consider Whining with Purpose. That is, move immediately to steps 4 and 5 that is focused on ***solving*** the problem. In other words, have a purpose with your whining.

Step 4: Specify a Solution. Tell your boss what you would prefer. Provide an action plan and solution to the problem. Back to Jack: (Describe) *"Jack, yesterday when you called me into your office at 3:00 to discuss change x, we were interrupted by 4 phone calls during our half hour meeting... (Acknowledge) I feel really frustrated because I know we could have finished our discussion in about 10 minutes rather than the 30 minutes it took... (Specify a Solution) What I think would work much more effectively is if we could hold our phone calls when meeting. Therefore, I'm wondering if you would be willing to use voice mail when we meet?..."*

The final and most important step is Show the Team Benefits. Envision everyone (your boss, employees, co-workers, children) all walking around with the following stamped on their head: **WIIFM?** What's in it for me? Your boss will not be motivated to change his/her behavior unless there is some benefit in it for them. So consider -- why should they change their behavior? What is in it for them?

Let's conclude our example with Jack: (Describe) *"Jack, yesterday when you called me into your office at 3:00 to discuss project x, we were interrupted by 4 phone calls during our half hour meeting... (Acknowledge) I feel really frustrated because I know we could have finished our discussion in about 10 minutes rather than the 30 minutes it took... (Specify a Solution) What I think would work much more effectively is if we could hold our phone calls when meeting. Therefore, I'm wondering if you would be willing to use voice mail when we meet?... (Show benefits) The real benefit of limiting our interruptions is the time savings. By using voice mail, we'll only need to spend about a third of our time meeting and I'll be able to get back to work on those projects I'm working for you and get them done on time. (Wrap-Up) Would you be willing*

to try this” Be open to compromise and discussion as Jack considers your ideas.

The bottom-line is this: Become part of the solution and not part of the problem by sharing your truth in love. Samuel Butler once said, "If people would dare to speak to one another unreservedly, there would be a good deal less sorrow in the world a hundred years hence"

Let's change our work world!

*Excerpted from the book **Untying the ‘Nots’ of Change Before You’re Fit to be Tied**. Patti Hathaway, CSP, The CHANGE AGENT, is one of fewer than 7% women worldwide to have earned the Certified Speaking Professional designation from the National Speakers Association for her proven presentation skills. She is a Business Advisor and the author of 6 books that have been translated into 5 languages and have sold over 100,000 copies. Patti solves your people challenges by providing highly customized solutions to meet your needs. Contact Patti at 1-800-339-0973 or at her web site: www.thechangeagent.com for information on her speaking and consulting services or to receive her free e-mail newsletter/blog.*