

Inside Every Complaint Is a Request

[Admired Leadership](#)

People complain for many reasons.

When things don't go as planned or expected, complaints are a common way to let frustration with the situation be known to others.

People also complain to have others validate their grievances and stand in solidarity with their dissatisfaction. Gaining support from allies who see events and outcomes similarly makes us feel better and more supported in our views.

But the most common reason to complain is to *exert influence*.

Complaints designed to influence, directly or indirectly, demand change. They highlight the issues involved and draw attention to our concerns.

Buried inside the complaint is a *request for change or resolution*. We complain in the hope that others will do things differently to address our discontent.

The more we complain, the more pressure we place on others to respond to our dissatisfaction. The idea that repetition strengthens our influence makes some people loud, persistent, and chronic complainers.

Unfortunately, those on the receiving end find complaints negative, annoying, and burdensome. Listening to people complain is akin to hearing a cat's screech. Complaints make us uncomfortable, defensive, and anxious. They destroy the positive outlook we prefer to take on matters. They especially wear us out and down when they focus on things we can't change or lack much control over.

In short, complaints and complainers are a killjoy.

Leaders do their best not to complain, especially about those matters they can't influence, and they often ask others to do the same. They remind themselves and others that inside every complaint lies a request for change. Hence, they ask people to make the request instead of the complaint.

Instead of the complaint, "The pantry refrigerator is full of spoiled food," they ask others to make the request, "Would everyone please do their best to throw away the food in the pantry fridge after it has expired."

Any complaint can instead be stated as a request. People respond much better to requests for change than they do complaints for change.

Turn the complaint, "I can't believe how long your presentation is," to the request, "Can you make your presentation shorter next time."

Replace the complaint, "We don't ever get the resources we need to complete our assignments with excellence," with the request, "We need more resources to achieve quality outcomes with our assignments." You get the idea.

Complaining that the parachute didn't open is never as smart as requesting the parachute packers do a great job. Instead of complaining, make the request. Teach others to do the same. Everyone will appreciate the difference.