



How To Turn Negativity Into Laughter

© 2005 David Granirer

We all complain from time to time. It might be about the weather, our job, our boss, or more general topics like “life sucks” or “why me?”

Known in Yiddish as “kvetching,” this recycling of negativity serves little purpose, poisoning our interactions with everyone. The only people it attracts are other complainers, and we all know how depressing and draining a marathon whining session can be.

Let me also distinguish complaining from emotional pain. True emotional pain is tied to a situation like an illness, death in the family, loss of job, etc.

Emotional pain can also come about as a result of depression, unresolved grief, loss, or abuse issues from the past. In these cases it’s very helpful to support and listen to people. Complaining comes from a place of emotional deadness. It’s like we’re playing old tapes that have little true emotional resonance. It’s often very unconscious and tends to focus on things outside of our control, making us feel like disempowered victims, or as a counselor I know terms it, “passengers in our own cars.”

Underneath the complaining there may be true emotions of sadness, anger or despair, but the act of complaining about how “life sucks” does nothing to resolve

these underlying feelings, and instead reinforces them.

So how do we bring humor to all this? One way is to exaggerate something until it becomes absurd. The next time you need to complain, do it consciously and deliberately. Here are two techniques:

1. Instead of going to someone and complaining, go to him or her and talk about how much you love to complain. Tell your partner to agree that complaining is a great thing, and together talk about all enjoyment you get from sitting around and whining. Most people can’t do this for more than a minute or two before cracking up.

2. Find a friend or a

coworker, and for three to five minutes try and outcomplain each other. If she has a mild headache, you have a migraine so bad it threatens to kill you. If he's overworked this week, you've been overworked for the past ten years. Once again, you probably won't be able to keep a straight face for more than about a minute or two.

These techniques also work well in groups. If you're part of a work team or attend regular staff meetings, have the whole group do this together. It's a great way to break the cycle of complaining and create an atmosphere where people are ready to move on to something more productive.

Counsellor and stand up comic David Granirer leads Stand Up For Mental Health, a program teaching stand up comedy to people with mental illness as a way of building confidence and fighting stigma. For more

information call (604) 205-9242 or go to <http://www.standupformentalhealth.com>

For information on his humor in the workplace presentations go to www.psychocomic.com