Are You An Effective Complainer?

Effective Complaining Quiz

[Adapted from Ombudsman Ontario’s Community Education Resource Materials, 2005]

1. Are you prepared?
   a) I thought about the issue, did some research and came up with a plan.
   b) My style is just to do it – jump in feet first.
   c) Why should I prepare? They are the ones to blame and who need to work to fix my problem.

2. Can you briefly summarize your complaint?
   a) It’s taken some work but I can clearly, concisely state my complaint.
   b) It’s just too complicated to summarize briefly. I need to explain the context and the details of what really happened for someone to understand.
   c) Why should I cater to them? They created this mess; they’d better be prepared to just listen.

3. How have you backed up your complaint?
   a) Through collecting evidence and documentation.
   b) By relating the whole story and its details in an interesting, entertaining way.
   c) By crying and showing how damaging the effect has been.

4. When you complain, would you describe yourself as:
   a) Cool, calm and collected.
   b) Anxious, confused and uncertain.
   c) Tough and demanding, sometimes just losing it; swearing, shouting, insulting.

5. Do you ask questions and listen when you complain?
   a) I prepare questions in advance and work at listening even if it is challenging.
   b) I don’t know; if a question comes to mind I’ll ask it.
   c) Why should I? They should be listening to me and asking how they can fix it!

6. Are you complaining to the right person or organization?
   a) Part of my research was finding out the complaint process and to whom I should take my complaint.
   b) It does not matter, they should help me anyway.
   c) I’ll give whomever an earful, who cares?

7. What role does your anger play in your complaining process?
   a) Processing my anger through writing and talking to friends energizes and motivates me, and allows me to let go/detach when I’m officially complaining.
b) I’m aware my anger is sometimes difficult to control because the complaining process is so frustrating.
c) Expressing the full extent of my anger makes people take notice and do something.

8. When you complain, do you have support?
   a) I ask my friends for advice or support. Sometimes I’ve found university resources that are also supportive to my complaint process.
   b) No, I don’t need help. I know what I’m doing and want to get on with it.
   c) Complaining is easy, just vent. I don’t need support for that.

9. Do you know what you want to achieve by complaining?
   a) I have specific expectations but might be willing to compromise.
   b) I don’t know – nobody ever asked me what I want.
   c) Who cares if my demands are reasonable or not? I want action!

10. Can you describe your process?
    a) Complaining can be complicated so I am keeping a record of all my calls, letters and responses, including the names and positions of people I have spoken to.
    b) I’m frustrated at getting passed from one person to another and from one department to another. When I call back, the whole process starts again. Who can keep track?
    c) When the phone gets answered, I start yelling. I demand immediate action or else. A few threats never hurt anybody.

Rate Yourself

Count up how many times you answered A, B and C.

A_____  B_____  C_____

A: 10-7 Excellent complainer. You are likely making changes for the better.

B: 7-4 On the right track. Increased organization and self-awareness will make you an effective complainer.

C: Over 3 You have a lot to learn. You may make things worse for yourself, not better! Ask for support and review effective complaining techniques.