



# The One-Sided Complainer

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**O**ften enough, as leaders of our enterprises we are continually besieged by people who complain about this and complain about that. As a result we begin to turn a deaf ear to the complaints and label the complainers as trouble-makers. CCCC guides CEOs to recognize that complainers are offering a valuable service. However, there is one exception to the rule: the one-sided complainer.

## 1. Everyday Complainers

The reason complainers offer us a valuable service starts with the idea that to complain takes courage. At the very least we do not want to belittle people who are showing courage – there is precious little courage around. Something must be wrong in order to take the courageous act to complain. Since people complain because their perception is that something is wrong, it behooves you to get to the bottom of that complaint because (a) you actually might have a serious issue to solve (b) if one person perceives a ‘fault’ you can be sure that another dozen feel the same; you need to straighten out the mis-perception of many.

As a reminder to readers, much of CCCC coaching is based on the understanding of four personality types (PAVF), among which, V stands for Visionary. Complainers are usually Visionaries; Visionaries constantly seek improvement. Our studies show that the common malady of dying companies is a lack of Visioning. That is, a company dies when it lacks vision because it

ceases to be sufficiently tuned to what is going on in the world out there, becoming out of touch with reality – with its markets and its employees. Complainers offer ongoing tests against the vision of reality.

So much for everyday complainers.

## 2. One-Sided Complainers

The second, and key point of this paper, stems from what we call ‘one-sided’ complainers. These people vehemently complain about issues but with one major difference from everyday complainers. They offer no solutions and rarely suggest what they themselves can do to make the situation better. That is the complaint is one-sided: ‘Everyone else is at fault except precious me’. Quite frequently one-sided complainers have reached a position of power within the organization so that what they say cuts deeply and may even have other, responsibly-minded employees, feeling shame towards the issue under siege.



### 3. Examples

An everyday complainer might, for example say that employees are not getting their annual reviews on time and should be reviewed within two weeks of their anniversary date of hiring.

A one-sided complainer might complain that the quality of the production group is terrible: no specific details; no recommended actions to improve it; and certainly no suggestions of his or her personal steps that might be taken to get things back on track. It is if they are saying “Everyone is terrible around here and making my life difficult”. And if they are in a position of power, people continually try to dance around them.

### 4. Solutions

You have got to stop dancing around the self-centred complainers and bring them into the decision loop, getting them involved so that they pay a price, or take responsibility, for their part in the process. For example, let us say the one-sided complaint is that “You production guys swing into overtime to meet delivery dates, but make the job unprofitable by that overtime.” While the ‘loss’ may be a valid concern worthy of a complaint, the lack of a suggested solution does nothing to help the situation. To bring the one-sided complainer into the loop you could change your process. Imagine a situation which started with Harry, a sales manager (the one-sided complainer) issuing an order to Production to make sure product X delivery is speeded up to meet a customer demand. (And the overtime needed to meet that delivery would make the project unprofitable.) Instead of simply complying with Harry’s demand, the Production department upon getting the request for speedier delivery, should

feed back to Harry the consequence or price paid for the speedier delivery. “We can provide that faster delivery but the impact has an added labour cost of \$10,000 as well as a three-day delay on product Y. Let us know if you wish us to proceed.” Now the responsibility for any impending ‘disaster’ is a joint one of both Production and Sales. Harry has been brought into the decision loop. Of course, the actual decision made has to be documented with a change in work order signed by, or registered by a simple email exchange, with Harry.

### 5. Conclusions

You cannot let one-side complainers disrupt your operations or create divisiveness within your enterprise. It is all about ‘us’, not just about ‘me’. Once a one-sided complaint arrives (lacking a suggested practical solution), take steps to get the one-sided complainer involved in the decision-making loop.

Good luck

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