

## THE BIG IDEAS

**We're All Self-Made**  
Good thing to recognize.

**The Mind's Effect**  
On the body. Is huge.

**Nit-Pick**  
And get infested.

**Slingshots**  
+ Running starts & coral reefs.

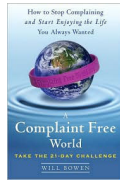
**Dissatisfaction -> Action**  
vs. Complaining -> inaction.

**Just Another Day**  
In paradise!

**The Complaint Factory**  
Time to shut it down.

**Sawdust & Plank-Checks**  
How's yours?

**Ripening**  
To the highest within.



# A Complaint Free World

How to Stop Complaining and Start Enjoying the Life You Always Wanted

BY WILL BOWEN · DOUBLEDAY © 2007 · 176 PAGES

“Less pain, better health, satisfying relationships, a better job, being more serene and joyous ... sound good? It's not only possible, it's probable. Consciously striving to reformat your mental hard drive is not easy, but you can start now and in a short period of time—time that will pass anyway—you can have the life you've always dreamed of having.”

~ Will Bowen from *A Complaint Free World*

Will Bowen is the lead minister at Christ Church Unity in Kansas City, Missouri who decided to challenge himself and his congregation to go 21 days without complaining, criticizing or gossiping. Nervous about whether he'd get thru them all, he bought 500 purple bracelets and set up the rules:

1. “Begin to wear the bracelet on either wrist.
2. When you catch yourself complaining, gossiping, or criticizing, move the bracelet to the other wrist.
3. If you hear someone else who is wearing a purple bracelet complain, it's okay to point out their need to switch the bracelet to the other arm; BUT if you're going to do this, you must move your bracelet first! Because you're complaining about their complaining.
4. Stay with it. It may take many months to reach 21 consecutive days. The average is 4 to 8 months.”

7 million (!) purple bracelets later, he's made a big dent in his mission to create A Complaint Free World (learn more and get your bracelet at <http://AComplaintFreeWorld.org>) and his book is a really fun, inspiring, practical look at how we can reformat our mental hard drives and create more happiness and goodness in our lives.

Alexandra and I have been playing the 21 Day Complaint Free Challenge game for just over 10 days now. After shocking myself in the first few days with how much I complain, criticize and gossip, I almost got my first day without a complaint yesterday.

I told Alexandra, “Hey, we've almost made our first whole day w/out a complaint!” Did a little happy dance and then 2 minutes later I complained about the bath mat (!) being a little weird. The bath mat?! OMG.... D'oh. Too funny.

Never fear, though. I shall triumph!

For now, let's enjoy some great Big Ideas from Will and his awesome book! :)

## WE'RE ALL SELF-MADE

“We are, every one of us, already creating our lives all the time. The trick is to really take the reins and steer the horse to where we want to go, rather than where we do not. Your life is a movie written by, directed by, produced by, and starring—you guessed it—YOU! We are all self-made. When asked about “self-made millionaires,” Earl Nightingale, the twentieth-

*“If you don't like something, change it. If you can't change it, change your attitude. Don't complain.”*

~ Maya Angelou

century motivational master and philosopher, once quipped, “We are all self-made, but only the successful will admit it.””

*“It is vital that we control our minds in order to re-create our lives.”*

~ Will Bowen

Love that.

We’re all self-made, yo.

It’s time to stop COMPLAINING about our upbringing, our boss or whatever challenges we think are getting in the way of creating the lives we want.

We talk about this \*All. The. Time.\* In fact, right after that quote above, Bowen drops some of my favorite Optimism quote bombs:

Aurelius (see Notes on *Meditations*): “*The universe is change; our life is what our thoughts make it.*”

Buddha (see Notes on *The Dhammapada*): “*We are shaped by our thoughts; we become what we think.*”

James Allen: (see Notes on *As a Man Thinketh*): “*You are today where your thoughts have brought you; you will be tomorrow where your thoughts take you.*”

It’s Principle #1 of Optimal Living 101: Optimism. We’ve gotta be PROactive rather than REactive. We’ve gotta realize that we always have the chance to step in between the stimuli of life and choose our most empowered responses as we steer the horse where we really want to go.

And, what’s cool is that playing the 21 Day Complaint Free Challenge game is a GREAT way to start getting more and more control of that little mind of ours.

Although I’m a huge fan of meditation (haven’t missed a day in almost 2 1/2 years as I write this and don’t plan to ever miss a day again), this challenge is, in many ways, even more powerful.

It’s like a 24-hour meditation as we train our minds to become more and more aware of what’s coming out of our mouths. As we do that we diligently, patiently, persistently and playfully reign in the negativity. And, as a result, our lives transform.

*“Everyone who has become a 21-Day Complaint Free Champion has said to me, “It wasn’t easy, but it was worth it.” Nothing valuable is ever easy. Simple? Yes. But “easy” is not part of becoming a successful person.”*

~ Will Bowen

## THE MIND’S EFFECTS ON THE BODY

“Think about that. Two-thirds of illnesses originate in the mind. Indeed, the word *psychosomatic* comes from *psyche*, meaning “mind,” and *soma*, meaning “body.” Therefore, psychosomatic literally means “mind/body.” There is a connection between the mind and body. What the mind believes, the body manifests. Dozens of research studies have shown that what a person believes about their health leads to that belief becoming real for them. I heard a story on National Public Radio where doctors found that if they told patients the drug held great promise in curing them, the drug had a far greater beneficial effect than it did for patients who received the same drug without the suggestion. The story went on to report one study that found Alzheimer’s patients who had other physical illnesses, such as high blood pressure, did not get the full benefit of the drugs they took because, due to their diminished memory, they could not remember taking their daily medications. The mind has a powerful effect on the body.”

Amazing stuff, eh?

How about this passage from Herbert (Harvard-MD-proving-benefits-of-meditation) Benson who says: “*More specifically and personally, just how powerful can your personal beliefs and expectations be in the healing process? Let’s allow a 2002 study in the New England Journal of Medicine to suggest an answer.*”

*In this study, conducted by scientists at the Baylor College of Medicine, 165 patients with osteoarthritis (wear-and-tear arthritis) of the knee randomly received one of three treatments: arthroscopic debridement (removal of dead tissue inside the knee); arthroscopic lavage*

*"Doctors estimate that 67 percent of illnesses are a result of "thinking sick." Our thoughts create our world and our words indicate our thoughts. Complaining about an illness will neither shorten its duration nor lessen its severity."*

~ Will Bowen

(washing-out-of the knee joint); or placebo "sham" surgery. Arthroscopy involves the use of a fiber-optic device that is inserted to permit observation of the inside of a joint and to facilitate surgical procedures inside the joint. In this investigation, the placebo surgery involved having a physician make a surface skin incision on the knee and simulate a debridement without insertion of an arthroscope. The researchers assessed the outcomes of the procedures over a 24-month period. The results were startling: The investigators reported that at no point did the patients who had the real surgery have less knee pain or better physical function than the placebo group. The sham surgery worked as well as the real surgery. The researchers concluded that there was no clinically meaningful difference among the three groups. In fact, they said, at some points during follow-up, objective physical function of the patients was significantly worse in the debridement group than in the placebo group!

*This study is by no means an isolated example of the power of belief and expectation. Hundreds of other investigations, involving a wide variety of diseases and health problems, have demonstrated the power of the human mind over disease. The treatment principle might be summed up this way: Just as an antibiotic drug may stop an infection or surgery may eliminate a malignancy, so the mind—your mind—has the capacity to treat or even cure many of your serious physical and emotional complaints."*

I don't know what to say to that other than: "Wow."

And, me thinks it's a good idea to get our minds right! You? :)

## **NIT-PICK & GET INFESTED**

*"Complaining should happen infrequently; criticism and gossip, never... Most of the complaining we do is just a lot of "ear pollution" detrimental to our happiness and well-being."*

~ Will Bowen

*"If you're a person who normally gossips, you'll find that speaking only praise about those not present takes the fun out of it. In today's society, gossip usually means nit-picking. Do you know where the term "nit-picking" comes from? Lice eggs are called nits. To "nitpick" means to pick lice eggs from another's scalp. The thing about lice is that they love to move from one host to another. Don't pick nits, or you might become infested."*

Let's keep that image in mind the next time we're tempted to nit-pick.

And quit doing it. :)

## **SLINGSHOTS, RUNNING STARTS & CORAL REEFS**

*"I moved my bracelet so many times that I broke three of them before making it 21 consecutive days."*

~ Will Bowen

*"What determines how far a stone from a slingshot will fly? The answer is: how far back you've pulled the band of the slingshot. If you study the lives of successful people, you will find that often their success was not in spite of their life challenges but because of them. They took what happened to them and used it to help them grow. They stopped telling everyone how much they were wronged and began to look for the blessings in their challenges. And looking, they found them. Their slingshot was pulled back far, but as a result, they soared even further."*

How awesome is that?!

Reminds me of Dan Millman's wisdom from *Body Mind Mastery* (see Notes): "Now that you have a better understanding of the mental mechanisms that influence your performance, you'll realize that although we all find ourselves in slumps occasionally, we don't need to get stuck in them. And when you feel like you're going nowhere or even slipping backward, you may actually be backing up to get a running start."

Also reminds me of Denis Waitley's mojo from *The Psychology of Winning* (see Notes): "One of the best ways to develop adaptability to the stresses of life is to view them as normal. Earl Nightingale tells of his visit with his son recently to the Great Barrier Reef which stretches nearly 1800 miles from New Guinea to Australia. Noticing that the coral polyps on the inside of the reef, where the sea was tranquil and quiet in the lagoon, appeared pale and lifeless... while

*"To be a happy person who has mastered your thoughts and has begun creating your life by design, you need a very, very high threshold of what leads you to express grief, pain, and discontent."*

~ Will Bowen

*"The way to inspire change was summed up by Benjamin Franklin: "The best sermon is a good example.""*

~ Will Bowen

*the coral on the outside of the reef, subject to the surge of the tide and power of the waves, were bright and vibrant with splendid colors and flowing growth... Earl Nightingale asked why this was so. 'It's very simple,' came the reply, 'the coral on the lagoon-side dies rapidly with no challenge for growth and survival... while the coral facing the surge and power of the open sea, thrives and multiplies because it is challenged and tested every day. And so it is with every living organism on earth.'"*

Fact is, we always have a choice: Will we whine about the challenges in our lives or will we alchemize them into strength and service?

If you're currently facing a challenge, what's YOUR choice? :)

## DISSATISFACTION → ACTION VS. COMPLAINING → INACTION

"But every great thing in our country began with people complaining... think about Thomas Jefferson and Martin Luther King!" an email I received started.

I realized that in one respect I agreed with the woman who sent the email. The first step toward progress is dissatisfaction. But if we stay in dissatisfaction, we never move forward to brighter vistas...

Were the great leaders of the United States also great complainers? I'd have to say no. These important men and women allowed dissatisfaction to drive them to great visions, and their passion for these visions inspired others to follow them. Their relentless focus on a bright future raced the collective heartbeat of this nation. Their method of transforming our consciousness as a country and, as a result, our future, was best summarized by Robert Kennedy: "There are those that look at things the way they are, and ask why? I dream of things that never were and ask why not?"

To be clear, being Complaint Free isn't about pretending there aren't any challenges in our lives or in the world. There are. A lot of them.

The question is, what do we DO about it?! Let's say we're dissatisfied with something. Do we choose to DO SOMETHING constructive about it or do we choose to sit around and complain about it?

That's really what this is all about. Will we be a Victim or will we be a Creator?

That moment to moment decision shapes our destiny so let's choose wisely.

## ANOTHER DAY IN PARADISE

"When asked how they are, I have heard people groan sarcastically, "Another day in paradise." I decided to adopt this as my own genuine answer to this question. Not being sarcastic, but sincerely responding, "It's another day in paradise," when asked about my well-being. It was uncomfortable at first, but it has now become second nature. I've noticed that this comment makes others smile brightly, and it reminds me that I have a choice in that moment to be happy or sad; to be in heaven or hell.

You have a choice with the words you use to create the life you live. Choose wisely."

"It's another day in paradise!"

Hah.

Makes me smile just *imagining* saying that. :)

## SHUTTING DOWN THE COMPLAINT FACTORY

"After you have gone the months it takes to become a Complaint Free person, you will find that

*"A mind stretched to a new idea never shrinks back to its original dimensions."*

~ Oliver Wendell Holmes

*"No price is too high to pay for the privilege of owning yourself."*

~ Friedrich Nietzsche

*"Love is unconditional acceptance and looking for the good."*

~ Denis Waitley

*"Success is going from failure to failure without losing enthusiasm."*

~ Winston Churchill

you will have changed. Just as, over generations, the blind cave fish left behind what was no longer needed, you will find that your mind no longer produces the deluge of unhappy thoughts you used to live with. Because you are not speaking them, you have no outlet for them, and the complaint factory in your mind closes down. You have shut off the spigot and the well has dried up. By changing your words, you have reshaped the way you think. It has now become Unconscious (you don't notice) for you to be Competent (not complain). And as a result, you are a different person. You are a happier person."

First, love the idea of "shutting down the complaint factory" in our minds. Hah. :)

And now seems like a good time to point out that the book is organized in four sections:

1. Unconscious Incompetence
2. Conscious Incompetence
3. Conscious Competence
4. Unconscious Competence

Essentially, Bowen tells us that we start in "Unconscious Incompetence." In other words, we're not even aware that we complain as often as we do.

When we take up the Challenge, we move into "Conscious Incompetence." In this stage, we become aware of just how incompetent we are—we see just how much we complain! And, trust me, it's a LOT more than you think you do. :)

I consider myself a pretty positive person. And, I was pretty shocked at just how much I complained, criticized and gossiped during the first several days of the Challenge. Bowen stresses something REALLY important though. He tells us that most people quit during their Conscious Incompetence phase. It's overwhelming and we just want to give up!

But we need to EMBRACE this phase. We need to laugh at ourselves and KNOW that we simply need to do the work moment to moment and day in and day out and things will change! I took this wisdom to heart and didn't expect to go a whole day without complaining for at least a couple weeks. It took me about 10 days for things to settle down a bit and almost get that first Complaint Free day. And now, altho I'm still dropping the complaint bombs, I'm doing it WAY less often and I know I'm bound to be successful as I keep on diligently, patiently, persistently and playfully showing up.

From Conscious Incompetence I'll move into Conscious Competence and, ultimately, into Unconscious Competence—where I will have literally re-wired my being such that I "naturally" show up Complaint Free.

Fun!

So, remember: EMBRACE the awkward Conscious Incompetence phase—with this Challenge and with EVERYTHING you learn in your life.

It's the only way we grow, yo.

## SAWDUST & PLANK-CHECKS

"If we want to change the world, it must first come from healing the discord within our own souls... You can't treat others any better than you treat yourself. It all begins with you. In Matthew 7:3, Jesus said, "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?" If you are noticing a great number of people around you complaining, you might want to look in your own eye and do a quick plank-check."

We've mentioned this before, haven't we?

Indeed we have!

Gandhi tells us we need to be the change while Benjamin Franklin tells us the best sermon is a good example.

While Wallace Wattles (see Notes on *The Science of Being Great*) tells us the world needs demonstration more than it needs instruction and Michael Beckwith (see Notes on *Spiritual Liberation*) reminds us that: “An enlightened society can only be created by awakened beings.”

*“If we want to change the world, it must first come from healing the discord within our own souls.”*

~ Will Bowen

It’s pretty much unanimous. So, back to you.

Are you noticing some saw dust in the eyes of people around you?

How about a quick plank-check?

In fact, how about a 21 Day Plank-Check Challenge? :)

## RIPENING TO THE HIGHEST WITHIN

“In a vineyard, one grape will begin to ripen and in so doing will send out a vibration, an enzyme, a fragrance, or an energy field of some kind that is picked up by the other grapes. This one grape signals the other grapes that it is time to change, to ripen. As you become a person who holds only the highest and best for yourself and others in your words and thoughts, you will signal to all around you simply by who you are that it is time for a change. Without even trying, you will raise the consciousness of those around you.”

Well isn’t that a beautiful image?!

Here’s to ripening and inspiring those around us to do the same, my friend!

B

**Brian Johnson,**  
*Chief Philosopher*

If you liked this Note,  
you’ll probably like...

Spiritual Liberation

Meditations

The Dhammapada

The Psychology of  
Winning

The Science of Being  
Great

## About the Author of “A Complaint Free World”

WILL BOWEN



Will Bowen is the Lead Minister of One Community Spiritual Center in Kansas City, MO. In July 2006 he suggested his congregation use purple bracelets to monitor their success at eradicating complaining from their lives. His idea exploded around the world and more than 7 million purple Complaint Free bracelets have been sent to people in over 106 countries.

## About the Author of This Note

BRIAN JOHNSON



Brian Johnson is a lover of wisdom (aka a “Philosopher”) and a passionate student of life who’s committed to inspiring and empowering millions of people to live their greatest lives as he studies, embodies and shares the universal truths of optimal living. He harts his job.