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Stuff that matters to Wayne

Tutorial: Making the World a Better Place with your Complaining

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Intriguing title? I had no choice. I knew that the people who really need to read this wouldn't if I didn't word it that way. The inspiration for this tutorial is based on one of those 'situations' that didn't need to become a 'situation' at all. As I was sitting there reading a tweet about my business and rolling my eyes asking myself how this is even happening, what I came to realize is that these 'situations' are usually caused by someone saying too much, too fast, or in the wrong way. Thankfully, there is no one more guilty of this crime than I so I feel qualified to teach the course. The great part about this teaching is that if you heed the suggestions, it can also apply to your marriage, and basically any other relationship you can think of where complaints abound. I'm going to use the customer-business example because it's more generic and easy to understand for everyone, and because it's based on a real-life situation. The Cast Bob: The employee Fred: The customer First, what most people don't think about is that Fred and Bob already need each other. If Fred doesn't buy his coffee, Bob won't have a job. If Bob doesn't make his coffee, Fred will go home and beat his dog. And so on, and so on. So, they are perfectly set up to build a relationship while both of their needs are met. It's somewhat heart-warming. Except that both Bob and Fred are men and have a hard time communicating and understanding each other. The 'Situation' Fred comes into the cafe and buys a coffee and sits down. He then proceeds to open his bag, remove a home-packed lunch box sandwich and begins to eat it. The cafe isn't busy. Bob sees Fred eating the sandwich and quickly, quietly, and politely asks Fred to refrain from eating the homemade sandwich while in the cafe and points him to the display fridge where he can purchase sandwiches. Fred seems to understand, puts the sandwich away, and then a short while later leaves. One day later, Bob finds that his twitter account is full of heated messages from Fred about what a rat-bastard he is and how the service sucked Hoover-style and how the chain no longer deserves his business because he obviously isn't appreciated. Bob is personally upset because these things are spoken of him personally, and the business owner is upset because there are these negative comments floating around with hashtags and @ symbols. Fred's expectations: a quiet place to eat his sandwich which should be ok since he purchased a drink Bob's expectations: that guests will not consume outside products in the cafe, especially ones that are available for sale in the display fridge You may agree with Fred that it's perfectly ok to bring a bite to eat with you into a food and beverage business, as long as you contribute to the business. You might feel that Bob is a soup nazi for enforcing such a petty policy. But what you might not know are Bob's reasons for enforcing. What you might not understand is that there are many private schools upstairs and that the students, in the past, would swarm the cafe and eat their own lunch, ruining the atmosphere for the customers who are paying good money to not see that and who are purchasing food items from the business. Some of those students didn't even make a purchase. It doesn't matter who is right or wrong in this situation. Both parties feel justified in their behaviour. What does matter, however, is the way that Fred went about dealing with his complaint. He didn't so much as voice his feelings to Bob on his way out. Even if he flipped him the bird and said, "Why didn't you just let me eat my sandwich, loser boy!" and left, at least Bob would know he offended someone and could think about whether he acted too strongly, or maybe the way he said it was in the wrong tone, etc. He at least could have known and learned, even if he believed he was in the right. I don't agree with flipping the bird

and walking out, though, because I will not hear the business' perspective on why they did what they do. I would miss a possibly interesting piece of the world that I know nothing about if I just flip 'n' walk. Maybe I was in the wrong? Maybe my parents didn't teach me this etiquette. I think there is a better way - a face-to-face conversation with someone in management right there, right now. No one stands to gain by letting hours pass before dealing with it. By that time, the molehill has become a mountain and you've already plotted how you're going to ruin this business with your flashy new smart phone. So, with that background, here is the step-by-step tutorial about how to deal with a complaint: -----

1. Don't wait. Don't leave. Now is the best time. Later will only make it worse.
2. Face to Face Face to face is always the best. No one can run away and body language cannot be hidden.
3. I'm not a Problem causer. Start by making sure they know you're not planning on bringing down their empire and that you're only going to discuss this because you are upset and you believe the business will benefit by knowing about it instead of doing what most people do and dumping it online in hopes of hurting their business. Tell them you're not that kind of person.
4. Stay Calm The person may not be familiar with face-to-face confrontations. Don't get upset even if they say something with a knee-jerk emotional reaction - no matter what. You're in the drivers seat if you remain calm
5. Always Apologize If you are Fred, start by apologizing for eating your home-packed sandwich in the cafe even if you don't think it was wrong. It's obviously the reason why Bob confronted him. Then proceed to explain why you think it should have been ok since the cafe wasn't busy - or whatever your reasoning was.
6. Express your side Give details about your perspective. It's very possible the employee, manager, etc, didn't think about it from that perspective before. Maybe they are new. Maybe they've seen weird stuff in the past. You really have a chance to help someone gain perspective here.
7. Listen to their side Encourage them to express their reasoning for doing what they did. Everyone needs a podium and loves to know someone is listening. Even if you don't think this person has anything worth listening to, you may be surprised.
8. Thank them No matter what, once you are done expressing yourself, thank the person, no matter how much you don't like them, for their time and for hearing you.
9. Follow up if possible It doesn't take much to make a quick phone call, email, or tweet to say something like "Thanks again for your time." I can guarantee you that 99% of business owners will be blown away that you are so awesome (they see some real losers during the day, if you didn't know) that they will probably either a) want to be your best friend b) allow you to do the thing they just hated as long as it is out of sight or c) give you a free product and invite you back. Now you've made a friend instead of gain an enemy.
10. Escalate only if necessary Some people are truly beyond discussion, rare as it is. If you did all the steps above and things still aren't working well then it may be necessary to escalate your action to something like a public blog or tweeting the bad experience online. However, this should be your last resort. You have no idea if the person you are dealing with just had a bad personal experience, is fighting sickness, lost all their money, or a loved one, etc. They could be completely different person just hours later. -----

After typing this tutorial I've come to realize also that I have a lot to learn about this process. Do I follow it perfectly each time? No. Am I better today than I was yesterday? Absolutely. I truly hope this post will help someone make a friend out of a bad experience. Trust me - I've seen it happen more times than you will believe. Keep it real and don't take the easy way out by talking dirt about someone online before you've attempted following these suggestions. It's so tempting, I know. I've been there and I'm sure I'll be there again. And to help you remember these steps, here they are in an easy acronym: DFPCAELTFE (pronounced 'defpcaeltuffy')

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