

No Whining on the Yacht

CHARTING A COURSE FROM COMPLAINT TO COMMITMENT.

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This admonition – *no whining on the yacht* – may sound familiar to you. Many claim its origination. A Google search attributes the saying to Representative Earl Blumenauer of Oregon (my home state) who, when asked about his experience with gridlock in politics, the declining economy and general lack of good news, responded by saying that while these are not the happiest of days, there is a saying in his family: No whining on the yacht. In other words, we have it a lot better than we sometimes like to acknowledge.

But just as we were all told to eat our peas because there were children starving in Africa (which never made the peas taste any better), hearing that we have it pretty good doesn't necessarily help much when we're not feeling great about our current circumstances.

While it's a far cry between starving children in Africa and the Wolf of Wall Street whining on his opulent yacht, the message is the same. Our attitude, personal operating principles, and the language we use influence how we navigate, both during challenging times and in relatively good times.

Before I go on, let me say that I'm not suggesting the conditions in which chiropractors practice today are irrelevant or that complaints are not justified. Practice today is more challenging than it's probably ever been. How will you navigate turbulent waters? Where is your boat headed? Who is responsible for charting your course? Whom do you want on your boat for the journey ahead? What personal operating principles help keep you pointed toward true north?

Perpetuating Negativity

Recently I was speaking with a friend about this article. He quipped in return, "What yacht? I'm still waiting for my ship to come in." This language – kvetching, if you will – is easily taken to high art as when Woody Allen said, "My one regret in life is that I'm not someone else." Language such as this (even if you're not quite this dramatic) can become habitual and lead to pessimism, cynicism and generally feeling negative about life, even when in reality everything is going pretty well.

A related type of language might, on the surface, seem less pessimistic, but can also be a slippery slope into a state of perpetual negativity. If you are of a certain age you might remember [a song](#) made popular by Dusty Springfield. The lyrics include: "Wishin' and hoping and thinkin' and prayin,' planning and dreamin.'"

When you live in a constant state of wishing and hoping for something different better or more, the result is missing out on what's right in front of you; or taking for granted the fact that you are an emotionally and intellectually high-functioning individual.

Imagine you're at your state meeting, sitting at the bar with a few colleagues after a long day of

educational sessions. The tales of the old days and the many injustices of today ranging from complaint to disappointment to criticism to outrage become the main topic. You're not getting paid what you are worth and your services are undervalued in other ways; patients won't take responsibility for their lives; your practice-promotion efforts are expensive and don't yield much; it's hard to keep good staff ... and on and on.

A few tales and a few drinks later, you and your colleagues are so depressed you're wondering why you bothered to come to the meeting at all – *the state of chiropractic is so terrible that you'll probably all be out of business before the next annual session anyway*. That's a semi-extreme example of the consequence of this sort of "water cooler" talk, but the point is that these conversations don't result in anything positive.

If you are a chiropractor who bemoans the fact that patients frequently won't take responsibility for their own health, it might be useful to look at yourself and see where there are parallels in your own life, practice or attitude. Read on if you are aware that your conversations with others or those that you have with yourself are flavored by an undercurrent (or a tidal wave) of complaint, criticism, whining or bemoaning.

Like Water to Fish

Speech is important. We live in language. It's like water to fish. And our language makes a difference in that it influences our inner and outer experience. There are consequences to defaulting to a particular language, whether it is a language of wishing for better circumstances, or a language of bemoaning, griping or fretting about practice. What are these consequences?

The biggest consequence of negative language is that it doesn't change anything and can become an end in itself. While complaining, venting or gossiping can be a way of letting off steam, if it becomes habitual it grows like an uncontrolled weed and becomes contagious. Unhappiness and dissatisfaction love company.

Energy follows attention. If your attention is on what *isn't* working or on what you *don't* like and you're using language accordingly, then you're more likely to feel exhausted, overwhelmed, disappointed and frustrated. This then leads to behavior that only adds to the problem, such as "checking out" or procrastinating – watching some more television, spending a few hours on Facebook or having another drink.

If, on the other hand, your attention is on what you're working on to improve the health of your practice or the quality of your life, your inner and outer language will be more positive, and your energy more likely to go toward activities that will help you reach those goals.

Want What You Have

Language matters. Whether the default is negative or positive, it has an impact on health, productivity, satisfaction, business success and relationships. Individuals who are able to recognize and appreciate what they have (and stop with all the whining on the yacht) tend to use language that reflects their more positive outlook. Those who are in a perpetual state of wanting something different, more, better and so on, tend to use language that keeps them stuck right where they are.

The secret to happiness may be wanting what you have, which seems like an oxymoron in the Western

world and in the profession of chiropractic, which has historically been growth-focused. I'm not suggesting you not aim higher or fight against the problems facing the profession. I'm just saying it is helpful to keep things in perspective and strive to accurately assess your current conditions.

What are you grateful for? What do you truly care about? How can you more fully appreciate that you are gifted with the ability to heal? How can you remember more often that you live in relative wealth and peace? What is precious about your imperfect situation? What can you embrace?

In his [book](#) *How to Want What You Have*, psychologist Timothy Miller speaks of the secret to happiness being just that – the title of the book – and offers ideas on how to practice gratitude and compassion. This is a recommended read.

From Complaint to Commitment

In another excellent [book](#), *How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work*, authors Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey suggest paying attention to whining as a way to move toward something more constructive, like committing to improving a situation. Kegan and Lahey suggest complaints hold a key to untapped or unharnessed potential for transformation. We complain when a value, conviction or principle we hold as essential and are committed to is violated in some way.

The nature of our complaints broadcast to ourselves and to others what it is that we can't stand. It can also tell us what we stand *for*. As we listen to our internal and external language – especially our complaints – we are able to explore more deeply, uncover what our most important principles really are, and become more committed to living according to those principles.

Understanding what you care about and being clear on your guiding principles can transform your attitude and help shift your energy from complaining to committing to change what needs to be changed.

Try to identify your most important guiding principles. Maybe it's making a difference in people's lives, establishing your practice as the "go to" place for personalized and effective care, fully experiencing your journey by being present each day, or providing for your family.

Perhaps you are frustrated because you are not making enough money. What, then, is the principle or value that is driving the desire to make more money? If you are working to provide a good life for your family or to ensure security in retirement, as you move toward these goals are you able to also be present for your family during your time with them, or are you frequently preoccupied with the performance of your practice? If creating and maintaining a good life by earning enough money is your guiding principle, what is your definition of a "good life?"

How do you give expression to what you stand for or care about most deeply? Most chiropractors have a mission or vision statement. Many know the direction for and the desired outcomes they have for their practices. Still, the question remains: How is that mission statement or direction realized in daily practice?

The success of a practice hinges on how well the leader of the practice embodies the organization's mission and vision, as well as how diligently they adhere to key personal operating principles. I'm guessing your mission and vision do not include whining on the yacht as a guiding principle.

Now What?

What are you going to do with the information and the ideas that came into your head while reading this article? How's your language? What needs to shift? What support do you need? You are in charge of navigating your future. Look around. How's the view from the deck? I'd be willing to bet it's pretty good, all things considered.

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