



healing words

BY MARK W. McCLURE, MD, MEDICAL EDITOR

a complaint-free world

Just over two years ago, Unity Minister Will Bowen conceived a program that is destined to transform the consciousness of the world. He challenged his congregation to go 21 consecutive days without complaining, gossiping, or criticizing. He chose 21 days because that's the time it takes to ingrain a new habit. He issued purple bracelets to willing participants that were embossed with the words "spirit" and "a complaint free world." The word spirit serves as a reminder to pause and take a deep breath anytime there is a temptation to complain.

Whenever someone complains, gossips, or criticizes, they are instructed to immediately switch the bracelet to the other wrist. The process of switching the bracelet reinforces the idea that our thoughts create our lives and our words indicate what we are thinking. Changing your thoughts changes your world. Thus far, six million bracelets have been distributed in 80 different countries. According to some estimates, people complain an average of 20 times daily. Multiple this number by 365 days and six million people and imagine how many complaints have been left unuttered.

Sounds easy, doesn't it? According to two Cornell psychologists who studied people who were attempting to learn new skills, "ignorance more frequently begets confidence than does knowledge." Dubbed the Kruger-Dunning effect, some humbling experiences come to mind in this regard such as having a baby, building a house, doing your own taxes, getting married, assembling children's toys, starting your own business, and—yes—going 21 days without complaining.

According to feedback from participants, it generally takes between 4 to 8 months to complete the 21-day challenge. Thus far, after a week of trying, I have yet to go 24 hours without complaining, which is surprising to me, because I don't consider myself to be a complainer. That's the rub; people generally don't consider themselves to be complainers. Will Bowen likens complaining to bad

breath: you immediately notice bad breath if it comes from somebody else's mouth, but not if it comes from your own.

Will acknowledges that it's okay to complain, occasionally. According to Eckhart Tolle, author of the books *The Power of Now* and *A New Earth*, "Complaining is not to be confused with informing someone of a mistake or deficiency so that it can be put right. And to refrain from complaining doesn't mean putting up with bad quality or behavior. There is no ego if you stick to the facts, which are always neutral." Furthermore, processing and complaining is not the same thing. Processing is sharing your feelings about something that happened without getting caught up in the drama. It's okay to say that an experience made you mad, sad, glad, angry, afraid, etc., but whining about it is complaining. It's also okay to gossip as long as what you're saying about the absent person is complementary, and you would repeat word for word what you are saying if the person were present. Criticism is complaining with a sharp edge."

The challenges facing president-elect Barack Obama are daunting. Yet he is not discouraged. Although he doesn't have all of the answers, he's sincere when he says "Yes we can." When President Kennedy declared that America would land a man on the moon within a decade, he didn't have the answers either; he simply knew that America would rise to the challenge. When Dr. Martin Luther King announced that he had a dream, he didn't preface his vision with a litany of complaints.

I join Will Bowen and challenge the world to stop complaining and start living the change we wish to see in the world. Impossible you say? Margaret Mead reminds us to "never underestimate that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." Start making a difference. Stop complaining and order your bracelet today by logging onto www.AComplaintFreeWorld.org.
h&h

Dr. McClure, founder of Landmark Urology and Complementary Medicine in Raleigh, is this publication's medical editor. Visit him on the web at www.urolmd.com, or contact his office at (919) 571-4399.