

101

Habits of an Effective Complainier



Helen Dewdney

The Complaining Cow

“If complaining is an art form, Helen Dewdney is Rembrandt.” Robert Rinder

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**Dedicated to my son Ollie,
The Complaining Calf who
really likes complaining!**

Foreword

Paul Lewis, Financial Journalist

Let me be clear. I don't do endorsements and I don't do forewords. So don't ask. But I did recommend Helen Dewdney's first book *How to Complain* (now in its third edition) and am delighted to do the foreword for this new book. I am also breaking another rule – never write for nothing. How does she do it? Perhaps using tip (3) and tip (25)!

Helen Dewdney is a one woman consumer revolution. Accurate, clear, straightforward. This new how-to book should have firms that give poor service quaking in their boots.

101 Habits of the Effective Complain is the perfect companion to *How to Complain*. The first gave us the clearest explanation of our rights and the essence of what we could – and could not – expect to get when a firm treated us badly. I used to joke 'take it with you when you go shopping'. By now, I suspect, just waving it at somebody – in a tip (47) kind of way – would lead to instant redress!

Rights are one thing, asserting them is quite another. Like Helen's first book this sequel does, of course, do exactly what it says on the tin. It helps with that next step – this is my right, I know it is my right, now pay up.

Consumers who do complain face many barriers. Our own inertia is one. Many people find writing letters and emails difficult and making phone calls challenging. 'I'll do it tomorrow' is the bad firm's biggest friend. This book helps overcome that. It is a friendly and clear guide to what to put in that email – and what to avoid. And when you have read it your brain should be buzzing with ideas and leave you itching to write that complaint – or response to a refusal.

Of course, once we send that email, we meet the sheer intransigence and obduracy of the firms we complain about. They have devised a whole panoply of ways to frustrate our legitimate complaints.

I used a few slightly obscure words there because I thought this book was disappointingly free of them. Helen writes clearly and easily, never using words that people might have to look up in a dictionary. I thought I would put that right!

Seriously, I looked through her 101 ways and found a dozen or more lessons for me. Not least Don't be sarcastic (78). Don't keep on endlessly on twitter (54) – probably put in especially for me! Put in the effort (51). Act quickly (17). Give compliments (3).

Others, like Rehearse (39) and Take names (26), are of course my bread and butter as a journalist and broadcaster. Always good to write down the date and time too

and keep notes in an orderly fashion. Good, but not always easy. I know Helen does that very well having interviewed her many times!

If *How to Complain* is the essential companion to your shopping then *101 Habits* should be by your laptop whenever you think you have been treated badly by a retailer or a business you have dealt with. Breathe deeply. Flex your fingers. And get complaining! You can't lose anything. You should get your money back. And you may get compensation as well.

Paul (fully in compliance with tip 48) Lewis

Introduction

There are many kinds of complainers.

Ineffective complainers. These people moan but don't do anything about it. Often this is because they don't know how, don't know their legal rights or can't be bothered and are frequently left out of pocket because of it.

Creative, funny and innovative complainers are great. Think of Joe Lycett and his ideas, such as setting up food deliveries in a skip to make a company change its policies, wasting spammers' time and his infamous parking ticket appeal. However, these complainers are few and far between and sometimes the methods don't work. Think of the farmer spraying the council building with manure but having to pay for the damage. It's also incredibly hard to think of something different every time you need to complain!

Serial complainers. These people complain about anything and everything, often rudely and often to the same company. They may have received redress but they just carry on. This kind of complainer is often met with derision and can risk getting blacklisted by the company for vexatious or constant trivial complaints. These complainers are often wasting their time and are not being productive.

Shouty complainers. You'll have seen these complainers, in store or even on the telly. These people like their voices to be heard. They'll shout, often swear and try and throw their weight around. This achieves little. Often the mentality of these complainers is that if they keep shouting they may get what they want because the company will want them out of the store. However, this rarely works. The complainer often gets less than if they had been reasonable and polite, the store may just escort them out of the building and most often people stare not because they are impressed but because they are just watching the spectacle. Nowadays with the widespread use of social media these complainers also risk looking foolish to a bigger audience.

Rude complainers. Similar to shouty complainers, these people shout and swear, can't use manners and can be abusive. This can be in person, on the phone or in written correspondence. It is inappropriate and does not elicit favourable outcomes.

Extreme complainers. These people complain about anything and everything, often without merit and where the time spent is not comparable with the likely outcome. These complainers are rarely genuinely aggrieved.

Dishonest complainers. These are the lowest of all complainers. People who actually make up complaints. Complaining about acceptable food just to get free meals for example. Or deliberately break an item they no longer want and say it was

like it when they opened the box. Worth saying this is fraud.

Opportunist complainers. Similar to dishonest complainers but without the fraud. Always on the lookout for something to complain about to try and obtain monies to be paid to “go away”.

Last but not least... the **EFFECTIVE COMPLAINER**.

Effective complainers know their legal rights and can assert them to ensure that their complaints always gain refunds, redress and the required results. Ineffective complainers can learn how to become effective. Even some of the other types of complainer can learn too. Unless you are already effectively complaining and always getting what you want when you complain, it can take time and practice. But this book will help guide you. Take a few steps at a time and practice. Adopt the habits and you'll soon be complaining effectively in no time!



Keeping calm

This is probably the hardest habit of all! You want, wherever possible, to write, not do things in person or on the phone, so you have the evidence and it's easier to keep calm.

However, sometimes you need to phone or complain in person. When this is the case, keep your voice level consistent. Concentrate on this and

you won't accidentally go up a level and it will focus your mind, giving you time to think and be assertive.

EXAMPLE

Yup! I don't have patience and I can lose my cool very quickly! On every occasion where I have had to phone someone and they start to annoy me, I get louder! And

the trouble is, I have a loud voice anyway, so I just get louder! I walk away wishing I had said something differently or added something. Isn't it always the way?



Practice

Take on a few simple complaints to get you started. Do this for friends and family, as well as for yourself.

Easy wins on these will give you the confidence to take on more complex cases.

EXAMPLE

Consumers have often said to me that they have never complained and just don't know where to start. This means that when a big problem comes they really struggle. Had they practiced and

complained about the poor service in the restaurant or the kettle that didn't last a reasonable length of time, they would have a better idea and feel more confident too.



Give compliments too

When a staff member has given over and above what could be considered acceptable good service, write to the company to recognise the person for their good work.

This keeps things balanced for you, so that you are not always just

complaining. It will make you feel good, is a bit of “pay it forward” and you’ll feel more justified when you write to complain.

EXAMPLE

Yes, because it really does stop you complaining unnecessarily and being seen as negative. Today, whilst writing

this book I thanked and complimented a bank for dealing my query effectively and efficiently.



Improve your health by following these habits

Keeping things inside means that they will fester and eat you up! Get those complaints out effectively!

EXAMPLE

Mary never complained to companies. She did however get really angry about her TV and, despite it only being 18 months old, still didn't complain. She got upset every time she watched it, thinking about how much she had paid. The TV was very important to her as she had just had an operation and was stuck indoors for a few weeks.

Luckily, one day a friend visited and saw the poor picture and sound and told her to look up my blog and get it sorted! Together they followed the tips and the information about the Consumer Rights Act 2015 (she's in the UK where it applies) and got a repair. Mary was a much happier person!



Be polite!

Often the people to whom you are complaining to are not responsible for the faulty product or poor service and are more likely to respond to you positively if you are polite to them.

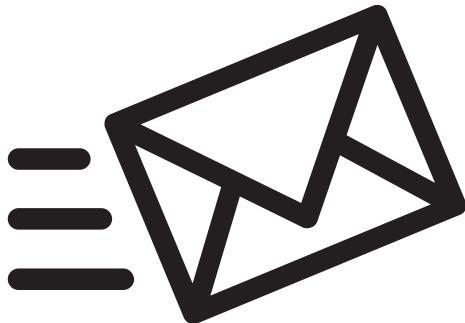
EXAMPLE

Think about it. If someone is rude to you, do you want to help them?

In a supermarket the other day, I saw someone being really rude to an assistant. He was shouting and then got abusive but the assistant was very polite and was trying to calm the situation down. The customer wanted a refund on something but didn't have the

proof required that he had bought the item there. She refused to leave until they gave it to her. The security man escorted him out, without his refund.

Had he been more polite the customer services assistant may have been able to offer to help by searching the loyalty card history. He wouldn't listen though, so he lost out.



Write, don't phone

Unless the matter is urgent and essential, always write.

On the phone it's easier to be fobbed off, cut off and you don't have a record should you need to take the matter further.

EXAMPLE

There are numerous examples of how people have been caught out phoning which wastes time and provides no evidence. But one example is on my blog: Jane commented that her 99 year old disabled father had received 3 packages from a company containing cheap plastic models of cars.

After the first package arrived she telephoned Atlas and, after a 25 minute wait on an automated call at 7p per minute, she spoke with someone who maintained her dad had telephoned them, ordered the 'free' first model and given them his bank card details.

There is debate over this because there is no record. The woman agreed to

put a stop on his 'account' so that "no further models would be sent out if he telephones us again" and she said he could keep the model without charge.

Just a few weeks later another package arrived addressed to her father with an invoice and a different customer number. A couple of weeks later a third package arrived, with another invoice.

She could not get through on the phone. Had this been dealt with initially in writing the further issues would not have arisen and even if they had she would have had a track record of evidence to show that the items should not have been delivered.



Start with the store manager or customer services

like. If you go straight to the top your complaint may be sent back down to customer services, which will delay matters.

EXAMPLE

Jay commented on my blog: A supermarket had cancelled his delivery and closed his account. When he phoned for an explanation customer services couldn't tell him why. He was transferred to another store and was told the person that cancelled the delivery wasn't there and there was no record of the reason. He left his contact details and asked for an explanation.

He received an email telling him that the account was reopened and that he was a 'valued customer' but without an explanation and no record of his orders in his account so he would have to order again item by item.

He emailed back copying in the CEO. He received a reply the same day from his office acknowledging that it was their mistake, apologising and enclosing a £50 voucher.



Know your legal rights!

This is crucial. So many companies will try and fob you off but if you know your consumer rights it will be much more difficult for them! There are lots of consumer laws and regulations that can help with goods,

services, holidays, flights, telecoms, energy etc.

My book *How to Complain: The Essential Consumer Guide to Getting Refunds, Redress and Results!* gives you all you need to know!

EXAMPLE

All my complaint letters get redress and nearly all of them mention consumer law!



Keep evidence

An effective complainer has all the evidence at his or her finger tips.

Collate copies of receipts, emails and take pictures, where necessary. Send copies of evidence where appropriate. For example, receipts for travel or if a faulty washing machine has destroyed some clothes, send pictures of the damaged clothes.

If you prefer working on paper, keep everything in a ring-binder that's easy to find. If you prefer working on the computer, make a folder on the hard drive for each case. Then store all the relevant documents in that folder. You might even use a combination of the two methods.

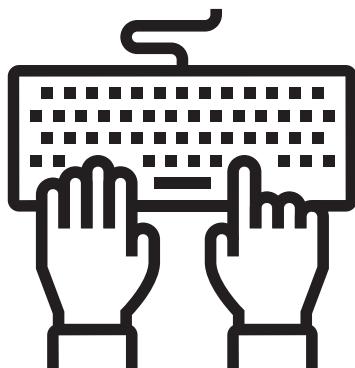
EXAMPLE

The Chief Ombudsman of Ombudsman Services informed consumers in a guest blog post for The Complaining Cow:

“Poor energy supplier responses can leave consumers feeling that the problem won’t be resolved without help. But Ombudsman Services can only help after a consumer has tried to resolve the problem with the energy supplier direct for several weeks. As frustrating as it is, consumers should plug

away with the energy company. Be clear about what the problem is and what needs to be done to put it right. Do it in writing otherwise it is one person’s word against another and the Ombudsman always makes decisions based on evidence.”

To read more of the article see the blog post entitled *Energy ombudsman shows how to keep heat on your supplier* on www.thecomplainingcow.co.uk



Write well

It's important to make sure your correspondence is written in good, clear English.

If the correspondence is not clear, you make it much harder for the reader to understand and provide assistance. Ask someone to help you if you think your letter writing isn't good or if

English isn't your first language. Never use textspeak (such as "ur", "tmrw", "l8r") as it may not be understood.

EXAMPLE

Unfortunately, too many businesses do not welcome complaints or do not make it easy to complain. If your correspondence is written poorly, many companies will assume that you won't take matters further and will ignore you or fob you off.

I have worked with companies who put in effort to understand what people want when correspondence is poor. But others do not, so if you want a solution to your problem then make your message clear in the first place.

To read the whole book
you can **buy a copy here**.

Sometimes complaining can be hard. You may need some confidence, it can take time or you just don't know where to start. Although written in a light-hearted style *101 Habits of an Effective Complainier* packs a punch and will help get you in the perfect frame of mind for complaining effectively. Read it cover to cover or dip into it when you need to find some inspiration from its clear examples and entertaining images.

“ If complaining is an art form, Helen Dewdney is Rembrandt. This book is easy to follow, beautifully written and – above all – teaches us that complaining effectively doesn't require rudeness or angry sharp elbows. Dewdney's book is a brilliant reminder that being a successful complainer (or getting what you were entitled to in the first place) is simple to achieve and can even be fun. Her superb how-to guide isn't for 'complainiers,' it's for anybody who has ever been a consumer and been let down – it's for all of us. ”

Robert Rinder
TV Judge, Barrister, Presenter and Columnist

“ Helen's book gets it spot on, and steers you away from all the complaining cul-de-sacs and coups de foudre. Before you pick up the phone or log in to Twitter – read it. A great result is probably closer than you think. ”

Matt Alwright
Television Presenter
and Journalist

“ Helen Dewdney is a one woman consumer revolution. Accurate, clear, straightforward. This new how-to book should have firms that give poor service quaking in their boots.

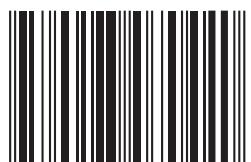
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