

InPresence 0050: A Complaint is a Gift

with Jeffrey Mishlove

Video Transcript - *New Thinking Allowed* with Jeffrey Mishlove

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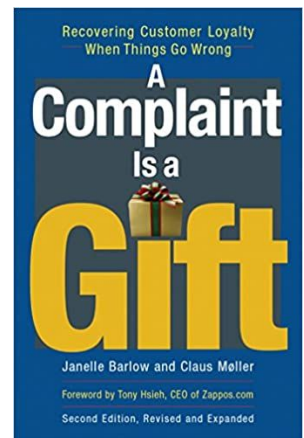


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(00:39) Hello, I'm Jeffrey Mishlove and my topic today is, *A Complaint Is a Gift*. This happens to be the title of a best-selling business book authored by, of all people, my wife Janelle Barlow. Incidentally, we'll be celebrating our 40th wedding anniversary this year. Now, Janelle is known internationally for her work in complaint handling and customer service. She's worked with many large well-known corporations. The interesting thing is there's always more to be done. In business, for example, a lot of companies have the attitude that their goal is to reduce complaints so that nobody complains at all. Sometimes the way they do that is when complaints come along, they kind of hide them and they don't address them. But, complaints in the world of business are one of the most valuable pieces of information that any business can have. Because how else are they going to know how they're impacting the marketplace, what their customers think about them.



(01:50) I can tell you this, there are lots of businesses these days who send out a little questionnaire after every single customer service interaction that you have with them. I find it annoying. I find it too intrusive and overwhelming. Every time I turn around it's like another questionnaire. I have to tell him whether I was satisfied or not. Yes, they're trying to get feedback and that is a good thing, but maybe they go a little too far. The question is, how are they addressing the complaints that they get? Are they thankful when people complain? Do they make changes when people complain?

(02:33) Now, we have feedback here on this YouTube channel. There's a comment section and every now and then I get complaints from people and I can tell you, I read them. I make a point of reading the comments. Occasionally, I get complaints and I think to myself, "My, that's a good idea." Somebody once suggested for example, "Put the microphone on the right side of your jacket rather than the left side because when you're talking to your guests in an interview format you'll be speaking closer to the microphone." And so I changed where I put the microphone.

(03:10) Somebody recently posted a very interesting, and I think it was a constructive comment - that is when you're in a conversation and you're listening to somebody and they're talking, you often say "Uh-huh, uh-huh," little sounds to let them know that you're hearing them, that you're listening to

them. But, this person wrote and said, you know, in a television interview format that's not professional. The viewer doesn't need to hear you say things like that. Just be silent or nod your head or something, it'll work better. I thought to myself, "Who is this person? I've been doing interviews for nearly half a century and I'm good at it and I'm not about to change." Then I thought to myself, "Wait a second, I can learn. I can be better. Even if I'm in my seventies, there's room for improvement." Even if I've been doing this work for nearly five decades, there's room for improvement.

(04:15) And so I take many of the comments and complaints to heart and try to change when I can. It doesn't mean that you have to take everyone into consideration. Some people make comments and I think, "Oh, they're off-the-wall." I do, I'll tell you this, I do delete some comments if I think that they are being insulting or vulgar or demeaning to guests or to the viewers or to certain groups of people. I will delete them. There are occasions when I delete comments because I think they're just so off-base, they have no room in the comments section. I guess that's my prerogative, but I try to keep as many comments on the comment section as possible because they may be meaningful to other viewers, even if I don't really relate to the comment.

(05:14) And so, for the most part, if you have a constructive comment and if you express it politely to people, it's likely to stay, even if I might personally disagree with you about it. Sometimes I'll even comment in response. But it's not always easy. Nobody really likes to hear complaints. Even though I try to respond to them, there's some part of me that, you know, a complaint is often uncomfortable. There is a moment of discomfort one goes through in taking in a complaint.

(05:54) Now, my wife Janelle points out that complaints are just as important in personal relationships as they are in business and they're not always easy to take in in a personal relationship. There are times when I might have a complaint for Janelle. Oftentimes, you know what happens when somebody complains to you, you throw it right back at them. They say, you know, "You do this, you leave your underwear on the floor." So instead of saying, "Thank you, I'll try to do better because you've given me a gift with your complaint," I might say, "Well, so do you. Look at that pile over there. You're no better than I am." That is not how to treat a gift, but it's only human. There are times when I might want to criticize Janelle and she doesn't want to hear it and I'll go, "Hey! A complaint is a gift, remember?"

(06:50) So, we try to have fun with it. But, it's a very serious business really. If you can deal with complaints in your life, if you can endeavor to see that when people are complaining to you - and sometimes they're doing it in a nasty way, not everybody knows how to give honest helpful constructive criticism, criticism that makes you feel good about receiving it - but still maybe you could learn from it. So, look at your life and as I try to look at my life and ask yourself, "Are you receiving complaints that you're not paying attention to?"

(07:34) One of the things that Janelle teaches people in the world of business, when they receive a complaint, is to say first of all, before anything else, "Thank you. Thank you for letting me know. If you didn't tell me this, I might not have known. So, I really appreciate that you're taking the time and

trouble to let me know, because in truth, in business, I think it's like 7/8ths of the people who feel dissatisfied will not complain. Most people don't. They don't want to bother or they think that they'll be treated rudely if they complain. Even worse than being treated rudely, maybe the business will retaliate in some way. Like if you're at a restaurant and you don't like the food that's being served to you, if you complain about it maybe they'll take it back into the kitchen and spit on it and then bring it back to you. People are literally concerned about that. So, when somebody does take the initiative and complain, they're being brave in a certain way. They're risking that you might retaliate against them in some way.

(08:44) So, it's good to thank people first and foremost when they complain. It's also good to see what can you do about it, can you correct it? Now, I know when people leave complaints on the comment section of a video tape, they are not expecting an immediate response, in fact maybe no response at all. But, I am letting you know that I do read the complaints and I am letting you know that any constructive complaint that I receive I will endeavor to take it to heart. What I'm suggesting is that you in your business life and in your personal life, do as much. I can tell you this, that businesses that work with Janelle's philosophy of a complaint as a gift often rise to the very top of their industry. It's one of the most successful strategies that a business can incorporate.

(09:39) I think the same is true in your personal life. If you're able to hear what other people are trying to tell you, if you're able to respond to their feedback in a positive manner and endeavor to make changes when and where you can, you don't have to, you might just as well tell a person, "Thank you. I appreciate your feedback but I really don't want to make that change and I have my reasons," and you can explain it to them.

(10:07) Even in business that's true, a business is not required to make changes every time a customer complains. They may have valid reasons for not wishing to do so and fine. But, most of the time that is extremely useful feedback, both personally and in business. So, let me leave you with this thought. How can you respond better to the complaints that you receive in your life? Thank you for being with me. (10:42)

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