



Communications Digest

*Telling stories of how small businesses succeed and give back to our community.
Let me tell your story!*

Welcome Mid-February!

We have had more than a full share of arctic cold, this winter. But with much of winter's hoary breath now past us, I'm delighted to pen another issue of "Communications Digest."

In last month's issue, I wrote on the importance of cultivating self-compassion, as theorized and practiced by psychologist Kristine Neff. Self-compassion is urgently important, as we participate in our world and the challenges it brings us.

And from "Word Nerd's Corner," I turned to etymologist Bryan Garner to critique the "bureaucratese" inherent in writing "decision-making process," when simply "decide" will do.

In this month's issue, I follow up last month's insights on self-compassion, by featuring a related concept--***complaining*** (with a nod to my colleagues at the local gym, where we joke that rigour of morning work outs invites all kinds of complaints)!

And in "Word Nerd's Corner," I visit trusty etymologist Bryan Garner on the correct use of "objectionable."

As the cold continues, I hope you find some thoughts here that bring warmth and energy to you. Remember: Spring is coming!!

Sincerely,
Elizabeth

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Article One: Does complaining limit your entrepreneurial success? What do you do with your pain?

Entrepreneurs often endure psychological pain, due to the uncertainty and highly variable nature of their work. In last month's newsletter, I cited psychologist Kristin Neff's Buddhist insight that "[suffering = **pain** x resistance]."

Neff's insight piqued my curiosity, as I have met many entrepreneurs who tend to resist their pain. One form that resistance takes is complaining.

People who complain a lot increase their suffering and that of others (their listeners), too.

Consider the irascible Statler and Waldorf (the men in the balcony of the Muppet Show). Or, closer to home, the character of Oscar Leroy, town curmudgeon and resident complainer from the television sitcom, "Corner Gas." (Leroy was brilliantly played by SK born actor, Eric Peterson.)

These examples are wonderful modern versions of the ancient Roman "senex"—the classic archetype of the "cranky, old man" who always declares that among young people and in society today, "everything is going to ____ in a handbasket." Characters like Oscar date to classical times (and he also recalls "Oscar the Grouch" on "Sesame Street," a program with which so many us grew up).

In one episode of "Corner Gas" that I recall, Oscar complains to the entire town when he has been "gypped" of the money he deserved for his recycling (itself an entrepreneurial exchange). Every townsman who hears his lament responds by giving him the small amount of money he's after—just to shut him up! They all long to get away from his relentless complaining.

Some "venting" is usually necessary, when people experience loss. But no one enjoys overly negative people. Such negativity is associated with the most primitive origins of the human brain, when fear and suspicion were instincts we needed to keep ourselves safe from predators. (Recall the "lizard brain" in Seth Godin's *Linchpin*).

Now that we no longer have to hunt for food and ward off predators, the negativity of constant complaining, especially in entrepreneurial or professional circles, will cause you to lose friends and alienate people.

While recently contemplating the way self-compassion works, I realized that **complaining is what happens when we don't know what to do with our pain.** (To "complain" even has the word "pain" embedded in it.)

Twenty-first century life can be harsh. Entrepreneurial life is especially demanding--involving long hours, limited finances, little if any vacation time, sacrificed time with family and friends and so on—all of which can create much pain.

But complaining is what happens when we *don't know what to do with* our pain. As psychologist Kristin Neff writes, pain is inevitable in life and suffering usually follows, when reality does not match our expectations. The more we suffer, very often, the more we complain. And the greater the rut we dig for ourselves emotionally, the more potential suffering we endure. We also spread our suffering to others (who would rather not feel our suffering on top of their own).

Many marketing campaigns also appeal to our desire to dodge or evade pain. Common advertisements nowadays address how to escape physical pain, such as with “Extra Strength” headache pills or muscle cream, because “regular strength” won’t suffice. A promotional headline these days might well be: “Stop the pain in two minutes.” We want immediate relief. But such relief is always and only temporary. (Substance abuse and addictions sometimes result, when we try to extend that limited relief.)

Under it all is the unconscious fear that the pain will never end, that it will overwhelm and destroy us. So we resist it, it grows, and on and on we go, in a vicious circle.

The (painful) reality is that constant griping to others (an attitude that could be seen as abusing ourselves and our listeners, because we deny a place for self-compassion) is just another form of resisting pain that begets more suffering. As Ryan Holiday says in his book on stoicist philosophy (discussed last fall in this blog), “The obstacle is the way.” The only way to get past our pain is to go through it. Complaining isn’t just annoying--it also doesn’t work.

This insight makes the writing and videos of Kristin Neff and the blogging of the Buddhist Bodhipaksa (on offering compassion to ourselves) so valuable to entrepreneurs. But finding and applying self-compassion to our lives take strength and courage. Until we emotionally experience our own pain, we can’t alleviate our suffering. We can’t share healthy relationships with prospects, clients or anyone else. (When it comes to pain and suffering, we must address our own selves, first; only then can we offer care or concern to others.)

Because it’s not just ourselves that pain (and complaining about pain) affects. Neff recalls that her four year old, autistic son had tantrums that grew worse when he responded to her own panic and anxiety; his tantrums dissolved much more readily when she found compassion for herself, and then could respond to him with calm and empathy.

So if you find yourself bemoaning an injustice too often, remember that *you do know* a better way to deal with your pain: breathe deeply and treat yourself with compassion. (Know what the pain is about, feel it and it will eventually dissipate.)

If we all did so, a revolution of peace (and the potential for joy) would ensue. And that in place

of so much wailing.

Have you noticed more pain and suffering as an entrepreneur? Do you find time to experience that pain, rather than simply trying to escape it? Please share your ideas on the "contact" page of my website. I'd be delighted to hear from you.

WORD NERD'S CORNER

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Is it "objectionable" or "objectional?"

In another of his trusty recent blog postings on language use and abuse, American etymologist Bryan Garner distinguished between "objectionable" and "objectional."

He writes that "objectionable" refers to that which is "open to objection; unacceptable; offensive." This is an ordinary word.

By contrast, he says that "objectional" is a "rare word," frequently misused for "objectionable," where the writer refers to "of, relating to, or like an objection."

Here is one example from Garner: "The plan *isobjectional* [should read *objectionable*] to some, because it envisions free-standing retail businesses along Crabapple Road, which residents want to keep residential" (Dian Stepp, "City Council Action," *Atlanta J.-Const.*, Sept 15, 1994, H4).

SHOP NEWS

Particular thanks this month go to colleagues and mentors from various business organizations:

A "shout out" to Monica Kreuger, CVO of Praxis School of Entrepreneurship, for inviting me to facilitate seminars on business blogging and on media release preparation to junior entrepreneurs of her program. The challenge has been rewarding!

And to Elaine Mantyka and Silvana Cracogna who inspire so many junior entrepreneurs with the service they provide (which is brilliant, if also unacknowledged by some of those folk).

To Heather Stuart, bookkeeping consultant, for her great accounting expertise and patience, as I prepare for tax season, 2017.

To Lesley-Anne McLeod, novelist, who always inspires me with her discernment, her realistic outlook on matters of faith and spirituality, her generosity to others and her inspiring creativity.

To Liz Barker who ordered multiple copies of my recently published ebook to share with her book club in Penticton, BC: thank you!

To Josh Derak for his help in the tech department, even when Pre-Calculus beckoned.

And a final thank you (in no particular order) to fellow women of the Freelancers' Roundtable Group which is now convened by Julie Barnes. These women include Julie, Ashleigh Mattern, Katherine Duncombe and Leanne Bellamy, Katee Pederson, Ashlyn George, Hillary Klassen and others soon to join, including Merle Massie! The support is so valuable and we try to avoid complaining!

ABOUT US

Since 2011, Elizabeth Shih Communications has provided B2B marketing and communications services on the Prairies and across Canada.

Do you need help telling your story of an entrepreneur or company?

Please contact me through my website, via the CASL-compliant email form, on the right-hand side of each page (www.elizabethshih.com).

After I have received your permission, I'll be pleased to discuss projects with you!

I specialize in entrepreneurial storytelling--chronicling the successes of small businesses that also give back to the community.

Please visit my website for more information (www.elizabethshih.com).