



The Pickle Pledge – a simple promise that will change your life

By:

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“We complain to get sympathy, attention, and to avoid stepping up to something we’re afraid of doing... We complain to get ourselves out of taking risks and doing things. The complaints seem legitimate, but they’re thin excuses.”

Will Bowen: *A Complaint Free World: How to Stop Complaining and Start Enjoying the Life You Always Wanted*

The Pickle Pledge is a simple (but not easy) promise that you make to yourself – to turn every complaint (my head is killing me; I had to park six blocks away and walk all the way to the mall) into a blessing (thank God for modern pharmacology; thank God you have legs that work and you don’t live in Haiti where there is no mall to walk to) or a constructive suggestion (the first symptom of dehydration is a headache so drink some water; maybe if you got more exercise walking six blocks wouldn’t be such a hardship).

I call it The Pickle Pledge because people who are always whining, pouting, and complaining look like they are sucking on a dill pickle. And because a pickle is a great metaphor for the toxically negative human being – it’s a fresh cucumber that has been soaked in vinegar.

Of all the techniques I teach, the one that has been most profoundly life-changing for me personally is this simple promise to turn every complaint into either a blessing or a constructive suggestion, and to not allow the negativity of other people to deprive me of the joy of being alive. When I really started paying attention to the soundtrack in my head, I was appalled at how much negativity there was up there. *I teach this stuff – I should know better!* But sure enough, every time I hit the road (an almost weekly occurrence) I found things to mentally whine about – delayed flights, bad food, the person sitting next to me on the flight: it almost seemed like my subconscious mind was seeking out any excuse to complain as a way of keeping me from thinking about my work.

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When I really internalized The Pickle Pledge and committed to making it a part of my life, it was the emotional equivalent of moving from a room filled with cigarette smoke to sitting in the clean air by the bank of a river. And like the reformed smoker, I will never go back to my pre-Pickle thought patterns and am highly intolerant of other people trying to drag me into their emotional toxicity. I've learned to appreciate how wonderful life is when you take The Pickle Pledge to heart.

The Pickle Pledge played a particularly important role in my life after Lasik eye surgery left me with severe double vision, impaired visual acuity, and chronic eye pain. With the help of a very good friend who administered a dose of tough love, I stopped whining and playing the role of victim and instead directed my anger toward helping young people be aware of the serious risks they take if they have the one set of eyes with which they will ever be blessed to be carved up for cosmetic reasons. I'm still angry at the unethical behavior of the Lasik industry, but I like myself as an angry activist much better than I would have like myself as an angry victim.