



IF YOU DON'T LIKE IT —

The people who supply your needs want to keep you as a customer, so if you have a genuine gripe, tell them about it.

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WHEN I BOUGHT a new car a few years ago, I became an unknowing and unwilling guinea pig for tubeless tires. I understand they've been improved considerably since then, but all the tires on that 1955 car quickly developed the alarming habit of throwing large patches of tread. Within several months, I had scattered tires all over the U.S.

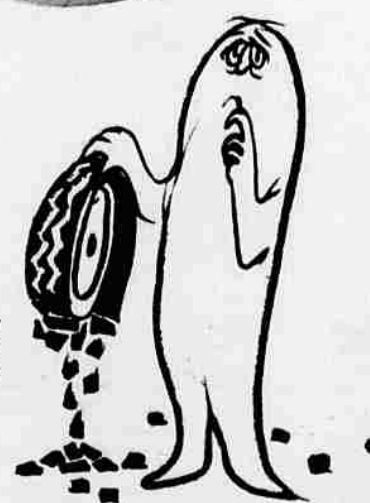
When the first tire disintegrated at 4,000 miles, we were far from home and the dealer who had sold us the car. I drove into a large service station advertising the offending brand of tires and demanded my rights. The dealer gave me a new tire at a liberal discount—charging me only for the mileage on my old tire.

This seemed satisfactory the first time it happened. But when the second, third, and fourth tires collapsed in much the same manner, I wanted no more of that brand. But it appeared I was stuck with them. All the dealers told me glibly:

"We'll be glad to give you a discount according to the wear on your used tires. But we can't give you your money back or sell you any other brand of tires. You won't have any trouble with the new ones, anyway."

But I did have trouble. I'd gone through seven tires—all the same make—when I told this sad story to a friend. He looked at me pitifully.

"What a sucker you are," he said. "The same thing happened to me—with the same tires. I put up with it the first time, too. But the second time, I told the dealer I didn't want any more of that brand—that I wanted my money back instead. He refused. So I



"When they replaced the first tire, I was satisfied. But when three more collapsed, I demanded a complete refund."

called the factory from his office, got an assistant sales manager, told him what had happened, and he instructed the dealer right then and there to give me a refund on the tires."

Since that day, I've quit being a patsy for people who are selling inferior products or services. Not that I'm obnoxious about it, but when I get short-changed, I complain—loud and long. And I've found that in many instances the people responsible are honestly glad I did. Oftentimes they had been losing customers without knowing why—because the customers meekly refused to complain about a poor product or inadequate service.

Most Americans are first-class chumps when it comes to demanding their money's worth. The present generation has been pushed around so much during depression years, war years, and shortage years that they've fallen into the mental slough of a perpetual seller's market—whether one exists or not.

This is especially true where services are concerned. During periods when we had to take it that way or not at all, we became used to shrugging off poor service from hotel room clerks and bellhops, bus drivers, waiters, cabbies, mechanics, and all sorts of tradesmen—to name but a few. Now we've been beaten down for so long that we continue to take it on the chin without a murmur of legitimate protest.

Recently my daughter saved pennies from her allowance to buy new batteries for her bicycle headlamp. After only a few weeks the light expired, and when I took it apart I found that one of the batteries had leaked acid into the framework of the lamp. So I packed up the defective batteries



COMPLAIN!

and the headlight and sent them off to the battery company with a request for replacement per their warranty.

About a month later I was sent two flashlight batteries, accompanied by a fatuous form letter, but no lamp—and no indication of when or if the lamp would be replaced. So I wrote a letter to the president of the company, pointing out that I would hardly spend 26 cents on postage to get two 10-cent batteries—and repeating the request for a new headlight.

The president's reply was immediate and apologetic. It turned out that the company couldn't find a lamp to match the damaged one, but they sent my daughter money to buy another of her own choice. This never would have happened had we not complained—and persisted long enough to get the complaint in the hands of someone who could act on it.

THIS IS IMPORTANT: getting the complaint to someone with authority. Returning from a business trip recently, a friend and I went to a small-town airport to catch a scheduled airliner on which we had reservations. It was dusk on a clear Summer evening when we arrived at the airport about a half hour before plane time. We found the field deserted, and a man standing at the door of the air-line office, apparently preparing to lock up for the night.

"Hey, what's the big idea?" we asked him. "What happened to Flight 185 to Chicago?"

"Oh, that," he chuckled. "It's been canceled. Won't be coming in. Next flight out of here won't be 'til tomorrow noon."

We had a long and uncomfortable train ride back to Chicago, giving us

plenty of time to work up a good case of anger at the air line. At home, we lodged a strong complaint with their main office. We were told that no equipment had been available.

Just what this meant or why it wasn't available for a scheduled flight in perfect flying weather wasn't at all clear. So my friend and I wrote the Civil Aeronautics Authority and told them the whole story. They promised an investigation and action if it was warranted. As a result, perhaps some other passengers who might have been stranded as we were will be provided the transportation they were promised.

Another acquaintance—a \$25,000-a-year business executive—bought a new car recently. When he negotiated the deal, he was wearing old, paint-daubed clothing because he had been working around the house and hadn't bothered to change. When he went over to pick up the car a few weeks later, he wrote a check for the full amount. The dealer was appalled.

"This didn't look like a cash deal to me when I talked with you before," he said. "I just assumed from your clothes that you would finance the car. If you intend to pay cash, it'll cost you \$100 more."

The buyer refused to pay the extra \$100. He said the deal had been agreed on and now the dealer was reneging. The dealer, in turn, refused to part with the car on the original terms.

So my friend telephoned for the president of the corporation making the cars. He didn't get him, but he got one of his assistants. He was promised an answer as soon as the aide had time to investigate. Within a few hours, my friend received a call from the factory.

"Would you be willing to accept the

original deal from another local dealer?" he was asked.

He complied—and got the car at the price first agreed on. This man could have

paid the additional \$100 without undue strain. But a principle was involved, and he stuck by his guns. More American consumers should follow his example.

1 Here are a few ground rules that should be observed in registering an effective complaint:

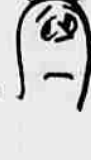
IT COULDN'T BE WORSE



2 PRESIDENT



3 THE HANDLE BROKE



Have a legitimate grievance. This seems so obvious as to be unnecessary, yet there is a class of chronic complainers in which you most certainly don't want to be included. These are people who complain about everything—good, bad, or indifferent. Your complaint should be reasonable, well-founded, and easily substantiated.

Make your complaint to someone in a position to act. A bus driver isn't the man to talk to about poor transit scheduling any more than a sales clerk should be scolded about a shortsighted policy of the store in which she works. These people have nothing to do with setting or changing policy. Your complaint should be directed to someone who can act. Aim high. Send it to the president of the company. If your point is well taken, you're likely to hear directly from him or one of his immediate subordinates.

Be brief, specific, and to the point. Don't get so carried away by the terrible injustice done you or so enamored of the sound of your own words that you ruin your chances of redress by incoherent ramblings. Be factual. Substantiate as far as possible.

Then stop. Don't prejudice your case by overdoing it.

Suggest a solution. Too often people complain without offering what they consider a satisfactory solution to the problem. This leaves a vacuum which the company or individual receiving the complaint frequently doesn't bother trying to fill. Result: dissatisfaction on both sides. When you complain, suggest a solution that will satisfy your wounded sensibilities. This faces the other party with a clear choice of either accepting your proposal, refusing it, or offering a compromise counter-proposal.

Write a letter of praise when it's merited. There are two sides to the letter-writing coin. If you exercise your right to complain, you should also offer praise where a product or service merits it. Americans not only don't complain frequently enough; they also don't praise as often as they should.

Remember, the next time you feel imposed on by a product or a service, chances are the people behind it would like to know how you feel. And most of them will do something about it. If they don't they're soon likely to find themselves out of business.

4 REPLACE IT



5 IT'S GREAT, SIR!

