

This is Lieutenant Roger McCort from The Salvation Army in Eureka with today's Community Comment.

People of Northern California, thank you so much for hearing me today. I have a problem.

Acknowledging our problems is the first step towards getting the help we need, and, although my problem is not drugs or alcohol, it isn't so different.

Addiction takes many forms, driven by a set of programming we implant into our brains through habit and reward. Any external reward, be it a chemical high, a word of encouragement, or even just a lack of condemnation, results in a surge of endorphins in your brain, giving you a burst of pleasure, causing a deep, subconscious cry of "Do it again!" When reinforced long enough, you begin to crave that rush; the pleasure becomes a need; and you repeat the behavior as often as you can get away with it.

Well, I'm tired of seeing this negative behavior in myself and it's high time that I quit! So, I am making a stand right here and right now that I will not – WILL NOT! – continue down this self-destructive path any longer! This is it. As of this moment, I will no longer support my unpleasant habit of whining.

That's right, I said it; you heard it: my name is Roger, and I am a whiner.

I'm sure this comes as a shock to you. While I haven't done a particularly good job of hiding it, the sad truth is that whining is so prevalent in our culture these days I've been able to get away with it by blending in to the other whininess going on around me. I've been careful about it too. My voice rarely turns into the nasally, high-pitched drawl that children seem to be born with. Oh, no! Now I find myself saying whining or complaining things without a trace of accent. They just come right out of my mouth in my normal tone of voice; slithering out like a nightcrawler leaving a compost heap during a rainstorm, pausing for a just a moment on the wet puddled sidewalk, then burrowing down into the soil which is the ears of those around me.

What differentiates whining from constructive criticism? Well, constructive criticism is usually a suggestion for change based on personal experience with a similar situation and it is always coupled with two or more ideas how to improve.

The more commonly heard “Criticism which is not constructive” is where one simply tells another how wrong they are or were, often including reasons which only the critic finds valid. If you can tag the phrase, “and the horse you rode in on,” to the end of whatever was just said, odds are it was this kind of criticism.

Whining is similar, but it is self-directed from the whiner. It may not actually involve the words “Poor me,” but it could. It’s unspecified complaining without offering any solution other than that everyone else should agree with the speaker, even though that wouldn’t really change anything. For those of you who watch cable news channels, you will recognize this as the behavior you expect from the talking heads at whichever channel you don’t watch. That’s because we are uniformly bad at recognizing whining that sounds like the voices in our own heads.

Well, I’ve heard mine, and I don’t like it, so I’m done. No more complaints without practical solutions to go with them! And by practical, I mean things that I can and will do, not just things I think others should do. Maybe if I stop, some of the rest of the world will too.

Grace and peace to you. This has been Lt. Roger McCort for today’s KINS Community Comment.