# One bad review

*You can't stop thinking about a bad review, and one star can spend a night a business owner needed for something else. The review is not the whole shop. It is a note. Notes can be sorted. Nights cannot be refunded.*

**Tonight, copy the review onto paper and underline the one line that is true, or none. Do not write the real reply before morning.**

If the review is mixed, underline the true line. The cruelty around it is still noise. If the customer is waiting on you, one line holds until you have slept: "Thank you. I'm looking into this and will reply by noon." Then stop.

You read it once, and then you read it the way a prosecutor reads, looking for the worst faithful interpretation. You find it. You read it a third time to see if it is still there. It is.

You draft a reply that explains the whole history of the business to a stranger who wanted a shorter line, or a warmer one, or a different product. The reply gets longer as you get more tired. Length feels like justice. It is insomnia with a keyboard.

You tell someone who loves you, and you hear yourself make it bigger than the star, and you cannot stop, because if they do not agree it is a crisis then maybe you are the kind of owner who falls apart over nothing. The fear of being that person keeps you in the review. The review is now a test of your character, which is a lot to ask of four sentences on a website.

You check whether other people have seen it. You refresh. You are looking for proof that it is not as bad as your body says, and the proof never arrives in the shape you want, so you refresh again.

You cannot sleep. The shop opens in a few hours. You will be worse at the work because of a paragraph. You know this and you stay up anyway, because leaving the paragraph unanswered feels like agreeing with it.

A good week of good customers disappears behind one voice. The alarm is a spotlight. It does not do percentages. It does the brightest hurt.

If your stomach just clenched, you are in the right room.

We know. We have given a stranger's paragraph the keys to a night, and called it caring about the craft. Caring about the craft is the floor. The floor is not a reply written at the hour when you would not trust yourself to price a muffin. Sleep is part of the craft. A reply on no sleep is the alarm, using your standards as stationery.



© 2026 True Path Publishing. All rights reserved. · Circle 1 Living™ · Print it. Pass it to a friend. Please don't repost or resell it. 

## Where is the one true line?

Ken is awake too long. He decodes a one-star review and finds the data. He says it plainly. I did that.

The line the room gets, said once, is the whole tool in a sentence. Take it seriously. Do not take it personally.

Seriously means you look for the part that is true. A wait. A tone. A thing you skipped. A promise the shop did not keep. If it is there, it goes in the notebook. What happened. What you did. What is next, if anything is still next. A true line is a gift the review did not mean to give you. You can use it on Tuesday without writing a sonnet to the reviewer.

Personally means the star gets to name you. Careless. Finished. Not the real bakery, not the real shop, not the real you. The star does not get to name you. It has a few sentences and a mood. Moods are not a performance review of a life. Ken finds the one thing he did. He does not hand the review his worth.

Cruel and true can share a paragraph. Underline the true line. The cruelty around it is still noise.

The book sorts a review into three piles.

**Data.** Specific, checkable, something you could change or already know you did. "The rye was sold out at 9:00." "I did not call back." Data gets a next step or a plain admission. Ken's "I did that" is data with its coat off.

**Mirror.** The part that is about the reviewer's day, their expectation, their wish that a shop be a certain kind of mother. You can hear it. You do not have to marry it. If a mirror has a splinter of data, pull the splinter out and leave the rest.

**Noise.** Adjectives. Contempt. A story that does not match the day you were there for. Noise gets no vote and no midnight reply. A reply to noise, written to win, spreads the noise and signs your name under it.

The sort has one question first: am I regulated enough to hear this right now? Red, close the page and run the breath. Yellow, read it once and reply within a day. Green, go ahead. You do not have to swallow a cruelty to earn the right to fix a true line.

If it is a threat, or a lie that lands on a person on your crew, you use the platform's own process. Sleep before you type.

## What are you not writing tonight?

The public answer, if you decide you want one, is a tomorrow problem. Tomorrow you will be tempted to explain the whole shop. Do not. If you answer at all, three moves hold. What I heard. What is true. What we will do, and when. Then stop. No history of the business. No shot at the reviewer's character. No refund you did not mean, offered so the feeling will stop. A refund can be right. A refund that is a bribe for your nervous system is the alarm spending money to buy silence.


© 2026 True Path Publishing. All rights reserved. · Circle 1 Living™ · Print it. Pass it to a friend. Please don't repost or resell it. 

Before the first line, read the moment, not the reviewer: a fight review wants to be heard, a flight review is already gone. Slow it down. Then answer in three lines, or not at all.

And you may answer with nothing. Nothing is allowed when the review is noise, and when a reply would only feed it. Nothing is not allowed as a way to avoid a true line you owe the shop. If you did the thing, fix the thing in the shop, whether or not you type a word in public. The fix is yours. The performance of the fix for an audience can wait until you have slept.

The overcorrection is to stop caring about every review, including the true ones, and call that freedom. Take it seriously is the half that prevents the shrug. Do not take it personally is the half that prevents the all-nighter. You need both. Owners who only do the second become careless and call it boundaries. Owners who only do the first live in the refresh button. Ken, exhausted, still finds the true line. That is the picture. Not a man who does not care about the rye. A man who can say "I did that" and then go to bed.

## Whose star is it?

Circle 3 is the reviewer's mood, who else reads it, what a stranger decides, the fact that one voice is louder than twenty quiet regulars. You do not control the star once it is up. Refreshing is a ritual, not a lever.

Circle 2 is the customer you can still talk to like a person, the crew member who needs to hear the true line from you before they hear it from the internet, the regular who does not need a speech but might need to know you saw it and you are not fleeing. A conversation in the shop is worth more than a paragraph on a site, and it still does not have to happen at midnight.

Circle 1 is the sort, the sleep, and the Tuesday change if there is one. Worth lives in Circle 1. Nowhere else. The worth is in those. Not in a perfect average, and not in a reply that wins.

## What does a morning reply look like, if you reply?

Sleep first. Then, if the underlined line was data, the shop changes before the internet does. Move the thing. Call the person back. Bake the thing you ran out of earlier, or stop promising a time you do not keep. The public sentence is optional. The change is not, when the line was true. Owners hide in the reply because the reply feels like action and the change is dull. Dull is the work.

If you do type in the morning, three lines and no history.

What I heard: you waited, and the thing you came for was gone.

What is true: we were out by midmorning, and that is on us.

What we will do, and when: the batch time is posted, and if you come back this week one will be under your name until noon.


© 2026 True Path Publishing. All rights reserved. · Circle 1 Living™ · Print it. Pass it to a friend. Please don't repost or resell it. 

Then stop. Do not explain the baker's hours, the shortage, or your feelings. Ken needs the true line and a bed. Your version is the same shape with your product in it. If the review was noise, you may post nothing. Nothing, chosen in the morning, is a decision. Nothing, collapsed into at midnight, is avoidance. You can tell them apart by whether you slept.

Show the true line to one person on the crew before they hear it sideways. A crew can survive a true line. They have a harder time surviving a boss who is somewhere else, refreshing a star, while the oven or the phone needs the person who is supposed to be in the room. The rant feels like leadership and it is fear, looking for company. A true line does not need company. It needs a shop that can fix a thing without a speech. Say the line. Say the change. Go back to work. Do not refresh the star until tomorrow, and when you do, once.

## What do you do before you type?

Copy the review onto paper and underline one line, or none. If there is data, underline it and write the Tuesday change under it. If there is no data, write "noise" and put the paper in a drawer. Do not draft the public sentence in the same sitting. The sitting is contaminated.

If you cannot sleep, a sharper reply is not the next step. Lie down. If this is the second night, tell a person. If it has gone darker than a review, the line below is for that.

In the morning, decide once. Reply in three lines, or do not reply, and change the shop if the true line asked for a change. Then stop opening the page for the rest of the day. The refresh is the check you do on finished work, moved to a screen. That check has its own page: Why you can't delegate.

If this is keeping you from sleeping or eating, or it is not easing, talk to your doctor or a counselor. If it has gone darker than that, or you are having thoughts of not wanting to be here, call or text 988 in the US, any hour.

The book is where Ken finds the one true line and does not hand the star his worth.

Be first to know when *Someone Else Can Lock Up* is out

## More reasons

Can your business run without you?

Why you can't delegate

Small business owner burnout

Clients texting after hours

Afraid to raise your prices?

The loneliness of owning the place



© 2026 True Path Publishing. All rights reserved. · Circle 1 Living™ · Print it. Pass it to a friend. Please don't repost or resell it. 

PRINT THIS PAGE

# Tonight's move

Tonight, copy the review onto paper and underline the one line that is true, or none. Do not write the real reply before morning.

## What to do

Copy the review onto paper and underline one line, or none. If there is data, underline it and write the Tuesday change under it. If there is no data, write "noise" and put the paper in a drawer. Do not draft the public sentence in the same sitting. The sitting is contaminated.

If you cannot sleep, a sharper reply is not the next step. Lie down. If this is the second night, tell a person. If it has gone darker than a review, the line below is for that.

In the morning, decide once. Reply in three lines, or do not reply, and change the shop if the true line asked for a change. Then stop opening the page for the rest of the day. The refresh is the check you do on finished work, moved to a screen. That check has its own page: Why you can't delegate.



© 2026 True Path Publishing. All rights reserved. · Circle 1 Living™ · Print it. Pass it to a friend. Please don't repost or resell it. 

CIRCLE 1 LIVING
Where worth lives.

# When the book is out.

*Someone Else Can Lock Up*

*Get back to why you started*

## Get notified

Be first to know when Someone Else Can Lock Up is out. We write once, when that book is out.

circle1living.com/notify#owners

## Send it to a friend

The person who is still the only one with the key. Send this page. They can read it without an account.

circle1living.com/owners/why/bad-review-cant-let-go

Circle 1 for Owners · Brandon and Lorraine Cover · True Path Publishing



© 2026 True Path Publishing. All rights reserved. · Circle 1 Living™ · Print it. Pass it to a friend. Please don't repost or resell it. 