

Criticism: Constructive or Destructive?

Have a preconceived plan to deal with criticism

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The Merriam-Webster Dictionary definition of a Critic is “one who expresses a reasoned opinion on any matter especially involving a judgment of its value, truth, righteousness, beauty, or technique.” In spite of this definition, many people view “criticism” as something negative. It is important to differentiate between “Constructive Criticism” and “Destructive Criticism.” Keep these points in mind when determining how to react to criticism.

1. Consider the source. Do you respect the individual? If yes, listen intently and determine the nature of the criticism. If you don't respect the person, listen and thank them for his or her concern but concentrate on positive thoughts. Unfortunately, some people are negative thinkers and enjoy pointing out what is wrong rather than working toward making it right.

2. Stay calm and smile. Research tells us that up to 85% of communication is non-verbal. Maintain a pleasant disposition and be aware of your facial expression and body language. A sincere smile with positive eye contact will often moderate even the most upset individuals. Much can be gained by allowing a person to ventilate without striking back. Eventually he or she will run out of things to say.

3. Listen and think before responding. If someone is emotional, the worst action a person can take is to become emotional also. This can lead to a shouting match where neither party is listening. Once again, stay calm and choose your words carefully if you wish to respond. A simple, “I'm sorry you feel that way,” or “I understand you are upset,” has a calming influence. Remember: **Stimulus - Think – Respond.**

4. Consider the other person's point of view. By putting yourself in the other person's shoes it is possible to view the issue from another perspective. Often a person is fixated on viewing the issue from only one point of view. This will lead to convoluted thinking and only generate more controversy.

5. Recognize constructive criticism. It is not as easy to recognize constructive critical statements about you or your work as you may think. Communication is complex, and your sensitivities and prejudices work against the proper deciphering of the message. At times, what can be interpreted as criticism might actually be a positive suggestion. Some people lack the ability to communicate their thoughts in a positive manner.

6. Consider the possibility that you might be wrong. As a person matures, it is easy to get in a rut and resist change. Keep an open mind toward the ideas of others and constantly look for more efficient ways to perform tasks. “But, this is the way we have always done it,” doesn't mean it is the only way to do it.

7. Act on constructive criticism. After careful analysis, you may realize that the criticism was just and some change is merited. Even the best of us are wrong at times, and it takes mature people, comfortable in their own skin, to admit when they are wrong. Keep an open mind and be receptive to the ideas of others.

8. Maintain your self-esteem. It is common for a person to interpret all criticism as derogatory and as a personal attack. In most cases, the person who is the critic is simply expressing displeasure with the policy or action and is not attacking you personally. When dealing with the public it is necessary to have thick skin and know when to consider the source and not take it personally.

“No one can make you feel inferior without your consent.”

Eleanor Roosevelt