

Positive Ways to Accept Criticism



Workplace

Do you hate being criticized even when you know you've made a mistake? If so, it's no wonder—criticism can make people feel incompetent, angry and just plain awful.

How do you, personally, respond to criticism? Do you make excuses or lash back with criticism?

“This fight-or-flight response is natural and common, but it isn't very productive. It cuts off communication, often just when it's needed most,” says Jean Lebedun, Ph.D., author of the video program “The Art of Criticism—Giving and Taking.”

Many supervisors don't give criticism in a tactful manner. Nevertheless, you should accept criticism so you can learn from your mistakes. But don't fret; it'll be easier when you use Dr. Lebedun's “4-A Formula—Anticipate, Ask questions, Agree with something and Analyze.”

Anticipate

Accept the fact that everyone makes mistakes and that you'll probably be criticized for yours. That way, criticism won't come as a surprise.

“You anticipate criticism by asking yourself, ‘What can I learn from this criticism?’ Then, whenever you feel yourself growing defensive or getting angry, you repeat the question ‘What can I learn?’” advises Dr. Lebedun.

Here's another way to anticipate: Take the wind out of the sails of criticism by admitting your mistake first, before your supervisor has an opportunity to say anything to you. This makes your supervisor's job easier and makes you appear more professional.

Ask Questions

Many times, people who criticize are letting off steam and may be exaggerating the problem. This is especially true when the criticism contains the words “always” and “never.” Therefore, it's important to pinpoint the criticism by asking questions like these: “What part of the report didn't you like?” “What aspect of my attitude makes life at work difficult for you? Could you give me an example?”

Asking questions accomplishes two things: It gives you specific information on how you can improve, and it teaches people they'll have to be specific when they criticize you.

Agree With Something

When faced with criticism, most people focus on the part of the negative feedback that may not be true and ignore the rest. This doesn't solve any problems, and you don't learn anything.

When you agree with one part of the criticism, you become open to learning. An easy way to agree is to say something like this: “You might be right; my report doesn't have all the details.”

“You don't have to agree with everything; even agreeing with one small aspect of the criticism will create an atmosphere of teamwork,” says Dr. Lebedun. “The focus then can become how you'll work together to solve a problem, which will lessen your feeling of being attacked.”

Analyze

Finally, take a break and evaluate what you've heard.

You need time to process the information, determine if it's a valid criticism and decide what you'll do to solve the problem or correct the mistake. If this is a complaint you've heard repeatedly, you should think about what you can learn from the situation so it doesn't happen again.

The benefits of the 4-A Formula are that you'll look for solutions rather than excuses and you'll be in control of your emotions, Dr. Lebedun says. “You'll also appear more professional.”

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