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8 ways to take the sting out of criticism

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No one is perfect. In trying to be the best version of ourselves, we must occasionally fail and learn from our mistakes. Part of this learning process involves receiving criticism from others. While it can be difficult to hear criticism from peers, co-workers, a manager or any authority figure, there are often lessons to be learned from their feedback.

In her book, "Communicate with Confidence," author Dianna Booher shares eight tips on how to accept and learn from criticism more easily:

1. Take a reality check: You're asking for criticism on the job if you're typically late, unprepared, disorganized, uncooperative, disrespectful of others or apathetic toward your duties. If you think you're under constant scrutiny, it may be worth evaluating whether the comments are true. Think about how you can change your behaviour to avoid such problems.

2. Stifle your denial and counterattack: If your manager sits you down for a healthy dose of performance feedback, don't immediately shut him down. Have an open mind, be willing to understand his viewpoint and ask for elaboration. By choosing to "one up" the person talking, you only aggravate what is likely an already awkward situation.

3. Own up: Don't blame others for things you can control. If you needed more help from teammates or co-workers on a big project rollout, ultimately it's your responsibility to ask a manager for help. Don't blame the folks in IT or

design over what is your responsibility. If a project fails to meet a deadline or your manager's expectations, accept responsibility for your part. Don't list all the reasons you're not at fault. Booher also says that accepting blame in a superficial or sarcastic way doesn't fix a long-term problem, and that convincing yourself that the issue is no big deal perpetuates problematic behaviour. However, there is a difference between accepting responsibility and accepting blame. By disengaging from the anger and resolving to help correct the situation, you move the conversation beyond finger-pointing.

4. Get facts or descriptions, not opinions: Opinions are assumptions made about you based on things that have transpired; if you're receiving criticism, be sure to get details and descriptions of the things that specifically caused the work problem. Don't accept generalizations; instead, ask for clarity or specific examples so that you're able to address issues in the future. This also keeps the conversation focused on your work instead of your personality or lifestyle.

5. Focus on the future: After owning up to a mistake or situation that may have gone awry, rechannel your emotional response and begin focusing logically on how to avoid such conflict in the future. Ask your boss what she might do in your shoes, agree on a plan for change and set timelines to help reinforce positive change. Mapping out a course of change is easier than just sitting at your desk and knowing you have to do something differently.

6. Take your time: If you're not sure whether to agree with someone's criticism, or if the person giving it seems to be upset or angry about something else entirely, feel free to take a moment to process it all. It's OK to acknowledge the criticism and ask for time to think it over. Instead of immediately reacting, your calm and collected demeanour can keep the issue from escalating or extending beyond the facts at hand.

7. Keep your perspective: As Booher suggests, "Either change your goal, change his or her opinion or decide that this person's assessment doesn't count." Bitterness is usually felt for things you can't -- or in some cases won't -- change. It's also good to remember your list of strengths and not let one weakness cloud over your positive traits or skills.

8. Evaluate word choice and body language: When dealing with criticism, try to understand the person offering it and the value of what is being said. By listening to the word choice and observing body language, you'll be able to tell if his comments are logical or emotional. "If that person's intention is to help you improve, try to forget the framework for the comments and latch on to the benefit," Booher says. She also says that some people are more inept at offering criticism than others. Some criticize just to criticize and pick apart someone's lifestyle, behaviour,

appearance, etc., without sharing anything constructive. It's important to remember that constructive criticism can help you improve your efforts in the workplace, but you shouldn't beat yourself up over one mistake.

By listening to and accepting constructive criticism, you'll not only improve your skills, but you'll also strengthen your ability to communicate and handle conflict in the workplace.

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