



TESS Newsletter

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Episode 131

“ Turning Possibilities into Realities ”

Building a Global Movement for Change [UNSG]: The Promise (part 63)



"Working Hard at Working Smart" (part LXXXIII)

Unity of Purpose: The Value of Constructive Criticism

feedback

“Generally speaking, the most miserable people I know are those who are obsessed with themselves; the happiest people I know are those who lose themselves in the service of others... By and large, I have come to see that if we complain about life, it is because we are thinking only of ourselves.”

Gordon Bitner Hinckley, June 23/06/1910 – 27/01/2008, Religious Leader & Author

The future we want: The Promise: The Force Beyond

How to Criticize Constructively

Source: www.wikihow.com

The art of giving critical feedback encourages a person to grow and to not feel bad. Constructive criticism improves a person's behavior and avoids blaming and personal attacks. Constructive criticism has a positive tone and focuses on clear, achievable objectives.

Part 1 of 3:

Giving Constructive Criticism

1. The difference between constructive criticism and destructive criticism. Constructive criticism improves a person's behavior, encouraging positive changes. Whereas destructive criticism condemns and discourages the person.
 - Destructive criticism demeans, discredits and hurts people.
 - In contrast, constructive criticism improves a specific behavior without personal attacks. Their self-esteem remains intact.
2. **Good intentions.** Your reason for critiquing someone's work or behavior affects how you deliver feedback. If you have an ulterior motive besides wanting to help the person improve, that come across as overtly negative. Reflect on whether the criticism you intend to impart will actually be productive.
 - Good intentions do not always get a positive response. Criticizing is one of those domains where intentions are less important than what you actually say and do.
 - Instead of acting on impulse, be thoughtful and ask yourself how it would sound if you told this person what you're thinking. Are the words you choose appropriate? What about the underlying social politics? What about yourself?
3. **Is the criticism warranted?** If someone requests feedback and is willing to change, then constructive criticism is warranted. Ask yourself if the person would be better off receiving constructive criticism. Would it have a positive impact on their life?

- Unsolicited criticism could be hurtful. It's important to use criticism as a means to help another person, not to help yourself or have your own opinions heard.
4. **Determine whether you are the right person to criticize.** If you are in a position of authority or someone has explicitly asked you for feedback, it's acceptable to give constructive criticism.
 5. **Choose the time and place.** It's important to choose a peaceful time and place to deliver your critique alone because receiving any criticism in front of others is stressful. For example, it would be a bad idea to give performance reviews for each person in front of their coworkers and colleagues at a staff meeting.
 - The environment where you talk should feel neutral and pleasant. If you're speaking with a loved one, it may be helpful to get out of the house to take a walk together, or go for a drive to a place you both like.
 - If you're speaking with a colleague or student, meet in a conference room or another neutral space where you can get some privacy.

Part 2 of 3:

Offering Constructive Criticism

1. **Begin in a positive way.** You can always find something positive to say when giving someone constructive criticism, even if it's just the effort the person showed. Start with a statement of sincere and honest appreciation (again, even "Thanks for trying x, y, and z...") to make the person feel valued. Then move forward and offer constructive criticism.
 - Whenever you ask someone to make changes, start out in a positive way. This will make the process and outcome positive, too.

Criticism, like rain, should be gentle enough to nourish a man's growth without destroying his roots.

Frank A. Clark

2. **Keep your emotions out of it.** If you're giving feedback on a personal matter, you may feel emotional. If you appear angry and upset, your body language and tone of voice will cause the other person to become defensive and less likely to consider your criticism.
 - Remain calm. You may feel anxious giving feedback and anticipating the other person's response. Maintain your poise by reiterating the main points and keeping your goal in mind. If tense emotions escalate, end the session. Return to it at a later time when you are cal.
3. **Smile and use warm body language.** Let the other person know that you are empathetic. This will help the person feel more at ease, and let them know you've been there, too.
 - Maintain steady eye contact without staring down the other person.
 - Keep your body open by not crossing your legs or arms. Tightly crossed limbs suggest that you are closed off or angry. Instead, being more open in the body suggests that there is room for discussion and dialogue between yourself and the recipient of your feedback.
4. **Watch the tone of your voice.** Keep your voice even and friendly. The tone of your voice can communicate as much and sometimes even more than the words you choose.
 - Avoid raising your voice or letting any edge sneak in. Use a tone of voice with the recipients of your feedback that you would be comfortable hearing if your situations were reversed.
5. **Avoid negative language, blaming and personal attacks.** This will reduce the likelihood that the recipient of your critique will respond in a defensive or angry manner.
 - Avoid harsh, evaluative language, such as "you're wrong" and "your idea is stupid."
 - Couch your criticism in "I" statements to speak from your own experience and also to show how the other person's actions are affecting you or

your situation. For example, "I feel that this report could have been improved. I wanted to see a clearer discussion of major ideas so that we could have a better sense of where we need to go from here."

- Avoid "you" statements that directly blame the individual receiving criticism. For example, instead of saying "Your report failed to effectively convey the main ideas," try saying "This report could have been more specific in terms of the main ideas."
6. **Be specific.** The more precise your feedback is, the more actionable it is for that person. Focus on objective points as opposed to your own opinion. Just telling the person you didn't like something isn't helpful. Instead, break your feedback down into key points and give specific examples of each point so that the person knows how to proceed.
 7. **Encourage self-critique.** In some cases it might be more appropriate to let the person come up with his or her own solutions before giving your opinion on what should happen.
 8. **Focus on the behavior, not the person.** Think carefully before critiquing someone's personal appearance or character traits; it's almost guaranteed to cause hurt feelings. However, if you do feel the need to give feedback on a personal matter, try to separate the person from the situation. Comment on the issue and not the individual (e.g., say "the report is late" and not "you are late." Consider the following detailed examples:
 9. **Make your feedback helpful.** You want to help the person make a positive change; this means that you need to address things that the person can do something about, rather than things which are outside of her control. Critiquing on the former makes your criticism constructive and will empower the person; critiquing on the latter will just make the person feel bad since she can't do anything about the situation, even if she wanted to.

Criticism and pessimism destroy families, undermine institutions of all kinds, defeat nearly everyone, and spread a shroud of gloom over entire nations.

Gordon B. Hinckley

Every human being is entitled to courtesy and consideration. Constructive criticism is not only to be expected but sought.

Margaret Chase Smith

10. Don't say too much at once. You don't want to overwhelm the person with too much information. Even if your criticism is couched in positive terms, it will begin to sound like you have a laundry list of issues you want the person to address, and eventually the tone of the conversation will feel negative.

- Limit your critique to a discussion of a few actionable items. People can only take in and process so much feedback at one time. If you have more to address, bring it up in a different conversation.

11. Know when to stop critiquing. After you've given constructive criticism on a particular topic once or twice, you've probably said enough. Harping on the same issue over and over isn't going to be productive, and could lead to negative feelings on the part of the person you are critiquing. Pick up on cues that the person has had enough, and don't say more until you are asked for your opinion.

12. Follow up. Check in with the person after your consultation and assess the progress being made. Subsequent conversations about the issues you critiqued should focus on improvements the person has made. Discuss what concrete steps the person has taken toward the goals you laid out and praise any improvements she has made. Seizing on and praising the success of the person will encourage her to continue with her good work and make her feel valued and respected.

- Make sure the praise is specific. For example, don't just say "I really like how you did the report this time." Instead try something more precise, such as "Thanks for your hard work on this week's report. Great job at catching those typos in the recommendations section - if you hadn't caught those, that could have made the company look bad in the meeting this week."

The better a work is, the more it attracts criticism; it is like the fleas who rush to jump on white linens.

Gustave Flaubert

Part 3 of 3:

Using the Feedback Sandwich Method

1. Start with the strengths. Tell the person what you liked about the item in question. For example, if your employee completed a memo, tell them about some of the positive things about it. This is important because you're letting the person know that you are on her side and that this is not an attack.

- Starting positive also recognizes the things that the person is doing right and gives them positive reinforcement, rather than only talking about the areas that need improvement. Focusing only on the trouble areas can come across as being insensitive and rude and may make the person less willing to consider your constructive criticism.

2. Provide the criticism. Inform them of the things that didn't work regarding the item in question and identify the key areas that need improvement.

3. Refer back to the positive. Reiterate the positive comments you started with and also reference the positive results that can come about if the criticism is considered and rectified. Ending the conversation this way helps leave the person on a high note, rather than feeling deflated. It also reminds the person of what she is doing right and the benefits of acting upon the criticism effectively.

- This method is called **the sandwich method** because you wedge your criticism between a positive opening and an ending – like a patty wedged between two buns.
- Here's an example of an effective feedback sandwich: "You did a great job on the first part of this report, but the middle section could use some tightening up. There are also some typos. With a bit more work, I have no doubt that you can polish this up into an excellent report!"

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