

### 3.5.8: How Do You Respond to Criticism?

#### Learning Objectives

- Discuss key points to a professional response to criticism.

How you respond to correction, criticism, and negative feedback demonstrates who you are. Thus, it is essential to learn how to take criticism gracefully, and treat these instances as opportunities to grow. If you immediately shut-down and act defensively, you're unlikely to learn and grow from past mistakes. Receiving correction is pivotal to your development.

#### Positive Responses

The first step in receiving criticism is to listen actively and make a concerted effort not to be defensive. Remember that giving criticism can be almost as hard as receiving it, so neither you nor your critic are likely to be entirely comfortable. Once your reviewer/critic has said their piece—whether in person or in writing—the following effective tools can help you respond:

1. Gratitude. Avoid extremes: don't get gushy or pretend it doesn't hurt. Just say thanks for your feedback.
2. Questions. Avoid statements until you've asked clarifying questions.
3. Restatements. "I hear you saying..."
4. Request for solutions. Ask for suggested solutions. Simple is essential; one or two is enough.
5. Happiness. Do corrective behaviors make sense and feel good? If the path forward isn't inviting, you'll avoid it.
6. Follow-up. Ask for a check-in meeting in two weeks for a progress report. Four weeks is too long. If your behaviors elicit negative feedback, solve them quickly.
7. Gratitude again.

#### Time

Sometimes it's worth taking a pause and delaying your response, rather than responding with your first reaction (which could likely end up being an overreaction). Correction is tough to hear. Listen, and if necessary, ask for some time to think it over. Be honest in your responses, and don't be afraid to ask for time: "This is hard to hear. Could I have an hour to digest your feedback?"

#### Transparency

Include those who were impacted by negative behaviors. Explain what you're working on and corrective actions. You go further when others know where you're going. In a few days, ask them how you're doing.

Open up don't push away.

Drop it and move on.

Ask for affirmation when you achieved goals. Reject nitpicking. Move on.

Responding well to negative feedback, toughens character, increases influence, and strengthens connections.

According to communications expert Jack Griffin, there is a six step process that you can use to respond to negative feedback in a constructive manner. Here are excerpts from his guidelines.<sup>[1]</sup>

**Step 1:** Accept criticism as an opportunity. All criticism, even unmerited criticism is useful to you. Criticism, after all, may actually point out things that you are doing ineffectively or poorly—things you could do better.

**Step 2:** Fight the impulse to respond defensively. Listen and learn.

**Step 3:** Realize that the criticism is a perception, nothing more.

**Step 4:** Do not meekly accept unjust or unfounded criticism, but don't reject it. Learn from it. Learn about creating more positive impressions.

**Step 5:** Seize the opportunity to respond to criticism, to communicate in a way that can strengthen and enhance your relationship with your boss.

**Step 6:** While listening to criticism, demonstrate that you are hearing the criticism.

## ? PRACTICE QUESTIONS

### Negative Responses

Of course, while there are a variety of good ways to respond, there are poor or unproductive ways to respond to criticism. Here are examples of how **not** to respond.

1. “It’s your fault too.”
2. Making it personal.
3. Standing aloof
4. Minimizing.
5. Arguing.
6. Feeling attacked.
7. Finger pointing.
8. Excuse making.
9. Denial.
10. “I’ll never be good enough.”

Negative responses to negative feedback delay growth, destroy progress, and lose respect.

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1. Jack Griffin, “How To Say It At Work”, 1998.

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