

Skills 360 - Dealing with Criticism (Part 1)

Discussion Questions

1. How do you feel when people give you negative feedback on your work?
2. Do you usually feel comfortable during performance reviews?
3. What do you think are good ways to respond when someone criticizes you unfairly?

Vocabulary

Criticism: comments or remarks about what is wrong, incorrect, or weak about something or someone; "I have to be honest, although it's difficult to admit, Jane's criticism of my designs is totally fair."

Performance review: a formal evaluation of an employee by a manager or boss, when they meet to talk about the employee's work; "A good manager knows how to make performance reviews comfortable for employees with some initial small talk."

To praise: to say good things to or about a person about what they have done; "Rather than just telling your workers what they do wrong, try praising them and they will actually work harder."

Sting: a small painful feeling; "It's been six months, and the sting of being laid off still hasn't gone away."

To linger: to last for a long time or continue to exist; "While many economies are currently healthy, the effects of the 2008 financial crisis still linger in some countries and markets."

"Let's face it": before we state a fact or idea that is true but not pleasant, we can say "let's face it;" "We have a well-recognized brand, but let's face it people, we're losing ground to the competition."

Source: the place or person where something comes from or where something started; "Our tech guys figured out that the source of the virus was a freeware program downloaded by an office assistant."

Superior: a person who is in a higher position; "In many cultures, the way you speak to your superiors at work is very different than the way you speak to those below you."

Constructive: helpful or useful; "I'd appreciate it if you took a more constructive attitude to this problem rather than just complaining about it."

Destructive: harmful or hurtful; "Tom's negative attitude is destructive; our workplace culture has suffered since he arrived."

To refer to: if a word or expression "refers to" something else, it means or describes that something; "Bread is something we eat, but informally it can refer to money."

Intended: meant or planned; if something is "intended" to do something, then that is its purpose; "The meeting was intended to help people come to agreement, but it just turned into a big argument."

Motivation: as a countable noun, "motivation" is a person's purpose or the reason he or she does something; "John might sound critical sometimes, but his motivations are really positive: to help you improve."

To deliver: to give or provide something, especially a speech, a presentation, or feedback; "If you want to deliver negative feedback to someone, it's best to do it in private rather than in a group setting."

Snarky: a person or comment that tries to make someone feel bad; "Gwen's been so snarky lately. I asked her how her weekend was and she said 'what do you care?'"

To mess up: to make mistakes or to ruin; "I'm really sorry if I messed up your meeting with the client by interrupting. Did everything turn out okay?"

No matter what: in any and all situations; "The audience might look happy or they might look serious, but no matter what, just keep smiling."

To take the initiative: to act or do something first or without being told or asked to; "We've had lots of great ideas, but nobody has really stepped up and taken the initiative to make one of them happen."

To take something seriously: to give attention to something because you truly feel it is important; "I understand your complaint and I'd like you to know that our company takes this type of problem very seriously."

To get defensive: to get upset or angry when you feel that someone is criticizing you; "When I told Ryan that his proposal had a few mistakes, he got really defensive and told me to focus on my own proposals."

Resentful: feeling angry or bitter because someone has done something wrong to you or you have been treated unfairly; "Several designers feel resentful that they've had to come in on the weekends to finish the big web project."

Nothing good will come of: we can say "nothing good will come of" an activity when the results or outcomes of that activity will always be bad; "Trust me Mike, nothing good will come of trying to argue with the boss at a staff meeting."

Fragile: not strong or easily broken; "Practicing corporate law requires a tough attitude; it's definitely not the right career for someone who is emotionally fragile."

To shoot back: to respond to a negative comment with another negative comment; "Listen Tammy, I'm sorry I didn't listen to what you had to say and just shot back right away with an insult; it wasn't fair of me."

To leave a lot to be desired: to be not good enough or very unsatisfactory; "Barry is great at dealing with clients, but his attitude toward his co-workers leaves a lot to be desired."

A one-way ticket to: if X naturally or normally leads to Y, then X is a "one-way ticket to" Y, especially when Y is negative; "Many investment advisors will tell you that putting all your money in one stock is a one-way ticket to financial trouble."

To be tempted: to want to do something that may bring benefits even though you know the consequences or result could be quite bad; "I was tempted to take that job with the tech start-up, but I decided to go with stability and a good benefits package instead."

Harsh: strict, unpleasant, unkind, rude, or unfair; "Hannah's harsh way of speaking has certainly not made it easy for her to win friends in the office."

Tone of voice: the way someone's voice sounds that shows emotion; "When giving a presentation, pay close attention to your tone of voice and make sure you're not too loud or soft."

To take things personally: to think a comment or action is directed at you and to feel hurt because of it; "Come on Brad, I just said that the email you sent the team was confusing; don't take it so personally."

To shine in the face of: to do well or be great even in a certain difficult situation; "Public speaking is difficult, but with practice and a confident attitude, you can shine in the face of the toughest audience."

Transcript

Hello and welcome back to the Skills 360 podcast. I'm your host, Tim Simmons, and today I want to look at ways to deal with [criticism](#).

Criticism is something we all have to face. During a [performance review](#), we have to listen as our boss criticizes our work. In meetings, people criticize our ideas. And every day we might hear people criticize us in the staff room and over the phone. We might also hear [praise](#) in these situations, but more often than not it's the [sting](#) of criticism that [lingers](#). And [let's face it](#): hearing people criticize our work, or criticize us, is never really *easy*.

So, how can we face criticism with the right attitude and approach? Well, start by thinking about the situation and the [source](#). The situation might be formal, like your performance review or another evaluation process. Or it might be informal, like in the staff room. In formal situations, it's often a supervisor or [superior](#) who is criticizing; in informal situations, well, it could be anyone. It's important to think of the situation and the source, because that might help determine whether the criticism is [constructive](#) or [destructive](#).

Although some people use the word "criticism" to [refer to](#) unfair negative comments, a lot of criticism is actually constructive. I mean, it's [intended](#) to help us do something better, to improve, to change in positive ways. Of course, there's always destructive criticism, which has different [motivations](#). Destructive criticism is sometimes personal, intended to hurt people rather than help people. You need to be able to handle both.

Now, we've talked about formal and informal situations and constructive and destructive criticism. You can probably see the difference here: constructive criticism in formal situations is just a part of working life! More than that, it's *necessary*. And your job probably requires *you* to [deliver](#) this type of criticism too. So you should look at this criticism as an opportunity – as hard as that might be to do.

Okay, but what about destructive criticism, especially in informal situations? I mean, what do you do when Dave your [snarky](#) colleague says "Geez, you really [messed up](#) that presentation, didn't you?" Well, your attitude and approach shouldn't actually be too different, even though you want to tell Dave exactly what you think of him.

You see, the best thing to do first, [no matter what](#) the situation, is to ask a question. If your boss says you need to [take](#) more [initiative](#), you can ask "can you give me an example of a situation where I should have taken more initiative?" And if Dave tells you you're terrible with PowerPoint, you can ask, "what do you think I need to do better, Dave?" By asking questions, you show that you [take](#) constructive criticism [seriously](#), and you can challenge destructive criticism. Either way, you are maintaining a professional attitude.

The alternative to maintaining a professional attitude is [getting defensive](#), angry, or [resentful](#). In other words, responding emotionally. [Nothing good will come of](#) that type of reaction, regardless of the situation. In fact, studies have shown a connection between emotional responses to criticism and a lack of confidence or self-esteem. It's true! If you get defensive, you show people that you're [fragile](#), and that's not one of the qualities that leads to success.

Maintaining a professional attitude also means not [shooting back](#) with your own criticism against the other person. So that means we shouldn't say "Oh yeah Dave? Well your writing skills [leave a lot to be desired](#)." That kind of response is [a one-way ticket to](#) a nasty argument.

Of course, you probably wouldn't be [tempted](#) to respond critically in a formal situation, when you're listening to your boss review your performance. Still, in these formal situations, criticism can still be tough, and some people are not very skilled at giving criticism gently. We've all had bosses who sound [harsh](#), or rude, without even knowing it. But we still need to separate the *how* from the *what*. That is, it's not about [tone of voice](#) or word choice. It's about the work, the performance, and the [outcomes](#).

That's the secret right there: think about outcomes. Don't [take things](#) too [personally](#). Instead, leave your [ego](#) out of it and consider your work objectively. Think about what you do and how you might do it better. If you can focus on improvement, and maintain a professional attitude, you'll [shine in the face of](#) criticism, no matter what the situation.

That's all for today. If you'd like to test yourself on what we've just covered, have a look at the [myBEOonline.com](#) website. There you'll find a quiz about today's show as well as a complete transcript.

So long. And see you again soon.

Review

1. When we face criticism, we should start by considering two factors. What are they? [choose 2]
 - A The source
 - B The tone of voice
 - C The situation
 - D Our own feelings
2. Which of the following statements is true about "criticism?"
 - A Criticism refers to unfair negative comments.
 - B Criticism is feedback on ourselves and our work.
 - C Criticism comes only from our supervisors or bosses.
 - D Criticism is normally unacceptable in the workplace.
3. How should you learn to view constructive criticism in formal situations?
 - A In the same way as destructive criticism in informal situations.
 - B As a chance to demonstrate your professional attitude.
 - C As an indication of your supervisor's skill in delivering criticism.
 - D As an opportunity and a necessary part of work.
4. Not matter what the situation, what is the best thing to do when you first hear criticism?
 - A Ask a question.
 - B Prepare to defend yourself.
 - C Criticize the other person.
 - D Ask for a meeting to discuss the matter privately.
5. Which of the following are NOT appropriate ways to respond to or react to criticism? [choose all that apply]
 - A Responding emotionally.
 - B Maintaining a professional attitude.
 - C Getting defensive.
 - D Focusing on how something is said.
 - E Showing interest in what is said.
 - F Responding with your own criticism.
6. In separating the *how* from the *what* of criticism, we should remember to focus on _____?
 - A Style and substance.
 - B Outcomes and improvement.
 - C People and emotions.
 - D Reasons and situations.

Review Answers

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6. In separating the *how* from the *what* of criticism, we should remember to focus on _____?
B Outcomes and improvement.

Online Practice

Click the "Launch" button to open the **online practice**:

Launch Quiz