

Understanding Criticism

All of us have been criticized at some point in our lives. It is important to understand why people criticize others and to recognize the difference between positive criticism, which is vital to our intellectual and emotional growth, and destructive criticism, which is not.

Why do people criticize others?

There are many reasons for criticizing others. A manager, for instance, must pass along feedback, positive and negative, in order for an employee to meet job expectations. Teachers must show students what they did incorrectly in order for them to learn. At times, however, criticism isn't an effort to improve one's knowledge or promote emotional growth but to cause emotional or psychological pain. The following are some reasons people engage in such behavior:

- **Feelings of inferiority.** They are trying to make themselves feel more secure by belittling others.
- **Personal failure.** They criticize others as a way to think that the problem is with others, not themselves.
- **Group acceptance.** They strengthen ties within the group by criticizing people who do not belong in the group.
- **Revenge.** They feel slighted due to some previous situation, and they use criticism as a form of punishment.
- **Ego.** They feel they deserve better and other people are preventing them from achieving their goals.

Types of Criticism

Criticism can be constructive or destructive. Constructive criticism is intended to provide useful feedback to help the recipient improve. It is healthy and, in many situations, necessary for us to grow personally and professionally. Destructive criticism, on the other hand, is invalid and often delivered in a manner meant to belittle or hurt the recipient.

Handling Destructive Criticism

Unfortunately, we are all subject to destructive criticism. The following are some suggestions for dealing with destructive criticism:

Disagree. Filter the information and, if there is some validity to it, find a way to agree with a small part of what is being stated.

Respond to words, not tone. By staying calm and refusing to be provoked, criticism can be separated from the style of criticism.

Pause before responding. A pause allows you to reflect on the message and to respond appropriately.

Thanks but no thanks. When receiving destructive criticism, be polite, thank them, but let them know that similar feedback is not beneficial or not welcome in the future.

It might not be you. Often personal or overly harsh criticism has more to do with the critic's personal life than with your actions. It can be worth your time to consider the motivation.

Seek perspective. A third party might be able to look at the situation more objectively than you.

Here when you need us.

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