

How to Handle Criticism by Peggy Morrow

We all think we are perfect most of the time so when we receive criticism, either in a performance review or informally, it can make you feel terrible. Oh, yes, I know about constructive criticism and all that and we need to hear it, but it certainly is no fun when you are on the receiving end.

Every person has to deal with criticism but it doesn't mean you are a failure or incompetent. It is just a situation to be handled with as much composure as possible. Here are some tips to try next time you are the target of criticism.

1. Change your attitude about criticism. Consider criticism as a source of information to help you improve. We all get criticized.
2. Gear up your listening skills. You will be tempted to try to explain or defend your behavior but wait until you hear the whole story. See my other article on listening skills in this issue.
3. If it is really upsetting to you, ask for time to think about it and respond at a later time.
4. Make sure you understand exactly which behaviors are being criticized. Ask for specifics. People often have a tendency to make a criticism too broad, like "You are not being a team player."
5. You need to ask more questions to learn which of your behaviors are causing the person to feel this way. Is it that you don't offer to help when you see your team members are overwhelmed? Is it that you are late to team meetings or don't participate enough? Try to understand exactly which behaviors you will need to correct.
6. If only part of the criticism is correct, agree with the part that is true. "Yes, I am late sometimes" in response to, "You are always late."
7. Determine exactly what kind of behavior change the criticizer wants. "What do you think I should do differently? Or, "How can this situation be changed?" Continue to ask questions until you understand exactly what is expected of you in the future. Focus on solving the problem and avoiding a repetition of the behavior.
8. Sometimes you will want to ask your critic to change, too, or take part of the responsibility for changing the situation if her behavior is part of the problem.

These ideas come from peggy@peggymorrow.com