

Title Page

How to respond more constructively to criticism.

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Overview

While no one likes to be criticized by instructors, it is one of the most helpful tools one can use to improve their success. The way we respond to criticism can be very beneficial to us if we respond in the right manner. Unfortunately, most people (myself included) don't often do this. Rather we let the criticism hurt us emotionally and develop feelings of hatred and madness towards the critic. What we need to do is actually consider the points made by the critic and try to fix our shortcomings. By listening to our bosses, school teachers, and even athletic coaches, we can improve our ability to perform those tasks. Through this proposal, I will propose a method that will help anyone respond to criticism constructively so they can improve their ability to perform whatever tasks they are being criticized for doing wrong. This will allow them to develop healthier relationships with their bosses, coworkers, teachers, classmates, coaches, and teammates and lead to a happier life.

Description of the Problem

No matter if you're in school, playing sports, or on the job, you are going to get criticized at one point. How one responds to such criticism can make all the difference. We can all either allow the criticism to hurt us emotionally and be defensive. This isn't the most constructive way to respond to such criticism as it "pollutes the communication climate between people or working groups." (Adler & Elmhorst, p. 116). If the communication between a working group of people is polluted, then nothing is accomplished. An athletic team that can't communicate won't be able to win any games, or a group of employees that can't effectively communicate because of hurt emotions towards criticism, they won't get anything done and will lose the company money. Constructively responding to criticism can actually help "maintain-or even improve-working relationships." (Adler & Elmhorst, p. 116). An example of how responding badly to criticism in my life was when my hockey coach told me I needed to become a faster skater. I thought I was plenty fast and his advice was just ignorant. But because I didn't positively respond and work to get faster, I would often lose races to loose pucks to opponents and couldn't capitalize on many scoring chances.

Resources and constraints

There are resources all around us that can help us respond more constructively to criticism. The text *Communicating at work: SLCC custom text*, is an excellent resource that I will use to improve my ability to respond to criticism. While "the most two common responses to criticism are "fight" and "flight." (Adler & Elmhorst, p. 118), the text explains other ways we can respond to criticism that will help us improve our ability to succeed at the task we are

being criticized for as we attempt to perform it. Another great resource would be my hockey teammates. Whenever they receive criticism, they actually listen. Rather than argue against the criticism and develop a bad relationship with teammates, they adjust what they do on the ice to make them better players. Once when I told my teammate Alex to listen for me when I was open to pass the puck rather than just shoot it down the length of the ice, he did it. By listening to that criticism, we were able to keep possession of the puck rather than turning it over to the other team and develop scoring chances. I can look at Alex and my other teammates as examples when I'm trying to improve my ability to respond to criticism. There are some constraints that will prevent me from being able to constructively respond to criticism right away. My pride is my biggest challenge. I've always been a very good student, worker, and athlete, so often I think I don't need to listen to criticism just because they are wrong and I know more than them. However this is the worst possible response I could have. I need to be more humble and realize that I make mistakes so I can better listen to my critics and use their criticism to improve my abilities to perform the tasks (I'm being criticized for) to the best of my ability.

Recommendations

There are several ways you and I can improve our ability to constructively respond to criticism, and there are two I would like to discuss that I think are critical to being able to constructively respond to criticism. The first method is to "Seek more information." (Adler & Elmhorst, p. 118). Often times we respond negatively to criticism because we don't completely understand what the critic is condoning us for. If this happens, we can ask for examples or clarification. This will greatly help us in our ability to respond to criticism in a positive manner. By asking questions about the criticism, you show the critic that you "take the criticism seriously." (Adler & Elmhorst, p. 118). The text identifies 2 ways that I think will really help anyone who has a problem understanding the criticism they receive to "Seek more information." (Adler & Elmhorst, p. 118). One is to "ask for examples or clarification" (Adler & Elmhorst, p. 118). If we don't understand what the critic wants, don't be afraid to ask. By clarifying just exactly what behaviors the critic doesn't agree, we can improve our behavior and satisfy the critic while improving our talent at the same time. Just imagine this scenario of me working as a cashier at a fast food restaurant. If I received criticism on the job from my manager that I treat customers badly and I need to change my behavior, I should ask what exactly I am doing that my boss thinks is treating customers badly. Is he mad I don't tell them where the napkins are even if they don't ask, or that I don't smile at them as I take there order? That clarifies what he wants exactly and makes it much easier for me to fix that action he doesn't approve rather than just wondering how I treat customers badly. Another point the text

make that I really think will help anyone learn more about the criticism they receive is “Ask what the critic wants.” (Adler & Elmhorst, p. 118). If we know exactly once the critic wants, we can go straight to the problem and fix it, rather than fixing other behaviors we think the critic meant that they never did. If my hockey coach wants me to improve my skating speed, I know I need to work on improving that talent rather than my shooting accuracy. The second method we can use to respond more positively to criticism is to “Focus on the solution, not on finding fault.” (Adler & Elmhorst, p. 119). Whenever you receive criticism, don’t willingly point the finger at the critic’s faults. I will occasionally do this with my hockey teammates. When they criticize me for my inability to skate fast enough to win races to the puck, I’ll point out how they can’t catch a hard pass to save their life or can’t shoot the puck as hard as I can. This doesn’t solve anything. It only makes the relationship between me and my teammates bitter and we can’t work as well together on the ice. It will do the same to you if you respond this way with your their bosses, coworkers, teachers, classmates, coaches, or teammates. You won’t be able to work with them as well as you used to because both you and your critic are mad at each other for pointing out each other’s shortcomings. Rather than point out the critic’s faults, work towards a solution. Even if the solution the critic offers isn’t something you can do, willing to negotiate to find a solution to the problem that works for both you and your critic will allow you to keep your relationship with the critic positive and allow you to improve your negotiation skills as well as the skills to perform the tasks our critic is criticizing us for. I plan that by seeking more information from my critics by asking for examples and clarification and asking what the critic wants, as well as focusing on working towards a solution rather than pointing out my critic’s faults, I will be able to respond to criticism more constructively and will improve my abilities. Anyone can use these recommendations to more constructively respond to criticism. By doing this, they will be able to improve their abilities to perform required tasks athletically, educationally, or on the job.

Summary

Criticism is inevitable. We are all going to be criticized in our lives about something sooner or later. How we respond to this criticism will make all the difference in our relationships with the people who criticize us. It also gives us a unique opportunity to improve our abilities at performing the tasks that we are (in the critic’s point of view) doing incorrectly. By asking for clarification and seeking information to ensure we know what the critic wants to change. By asking what the critic wants, we can fix the problem immediately rather than fixing something the critic doesn’t even care about. By focusing on finding a solution rather than pointing out some of the critic’s faults, we can prevent our relationship with the critic from turning bitter and causing us to not be able to

work together anymore. We also improve our relationship with the critic once when we find a solution for the problem that we both agree on. By being able to negotiate, everyone's happy and you can still effectively work with the critic. By adopting these ideas of seeking more information by asking for clarification and focus on finding a solution rather than other people's faults, we will be happier as we will improve ourselves, help others improve, and develop an ability to work well with other people when disagreements arise. This proposal gives us the method to do such, and I believe following its recommendations will help everyone to deal with criticism better and use it to improve themselves and maintain positive relationships with others.

Works Cited

Adler, R & Elmhorst, J. (2013). *Communicating at work: SLCC custom text* (2nd ed). Boston: McGraw Hill.