

CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM

Compiled by
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Griet
**SKILL
SERIES**

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Constructive criticism is the process of offering valid and well-reasoned opinions about the work of others, usually involving both positive and negative comments, in a friendly manner rather than an oppositional one.

No one, no matter who they are, enjoys feeling criticized. It's why mastering the art of constructive criticism is such a helpful skill to develop when dealing with other people. Because no matter who you are, you're likely going to find yourself in a position where you'll need to give feedback, whether it be in your personal or professional life.



If you're about to have to give someone in your life feedback, or you find that you just never end up communicating your thoughts in a way that goes over well, here are nine ways to give constructive criticism that will truly change the game.

Start with praise

It's easier to hear something negative after we are praised for what we have done well. Be sincere about your honest appreciation for the other person and their hard work to soften the blow, and to avoid coming off as though you're reprimanding them. Try to avoid the word "but" after the praise and instead use the word "and." For example, "We're really proud of you for raising your grades, and if you keep up the good work, you can get your algebra grade up as well."

A large, bold, dark grey text graphic on a light purple background that reads "HOW DO I START?". The text is arranged in two lines: "HOW DO" on the top line and "I START?" on the bottom line. The font is a thick, sans-serif typeface.

Don't make it personal

Make your criticism about work or behavior you'd like to see change, not about personality or personal attributes. Give criticism without being critical of the other person and recognize barriers that might be in their way. Follow up with offering up why it'll be beneficial to the other person to change their behavior. For example, "I know we have a crazy schedule. Try to stick to your deadlines next time to avoid making your workload even heavier the following week," will be much better received than saying, "you're too slow and need to keep up with your deadlines." These phrases, on the other hand, can **make any argument worse.**



**DON'T
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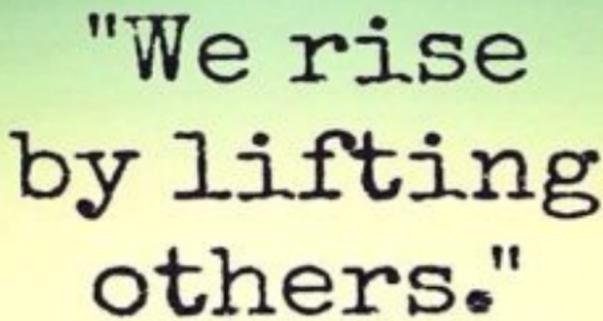
Be specific

Vague comments won't be taken seriously, and it's much more effective to give specific feedback. For example, "I'd love to see more graphs and images included in your presentations," or "This room could be used as an office if you removed some of the clutter." That way, the other person will know exactly how and what to improve in the future.



Be kind

Whenever you are about to give some constructive feedback, ask yourself how you can state your comments in the most positive way possible. People have a hard time accepting criticism, so try to avoid coming off as harsh or inconsiderate. If you're struggling, think about how you would want to receive the same criticism. In the end, it's all about being respectful. Here are **effortless ways to be nicer** to everyone in your life.

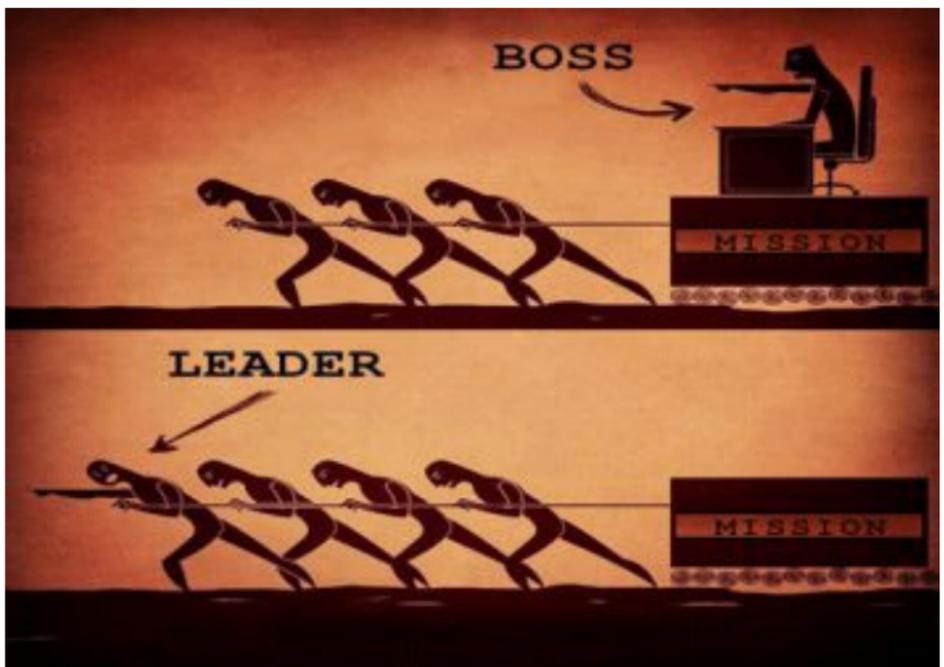


"We rise
by lifting
others."

-Robert Ingersoll

Lead by example

If there is something you would like an employer, friend, or child to accomplish in a specific way, it is best to lead by example. Dale Carnegie, author of the book *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, says that "an effective way to correct others mistakes is to call attention to their mistakes indirectly." For example, you can say, "Let me show you how I've organized my office space, it's really helped me to be more productive." Showing rather than telling is typically a well-received way to improve someone's behavior.



Criticize your own behavior first

Talk about your own mistakes with a personal anecdote as a way to relate to the person you are constructively criticizing. For example, "When I was in school, it was really hard for me to keep up with my deadlines, but I started keeping track of my assignments on my calendar and my work ethic really improved." This way, you're not talking down to the other person, but merely offering a suggestion from your own personal life. This tip can also work if there has been any kind of an argument between you and a loved one. If so, recognize your own fault in the situation, and then go on to say what you wish the other person had done differently.



Ask questions instead of giving orders

Use phrases like "You might consider this," "Do you think that would work?" or "What do you think?" Offer a suggestion, but ultimately let others make their own decisions. This will help them learn from their mistakes. Plus, asking questions stimulates creative thinking about a problem, which can ultimately lead to better solutions. Dale Carnegie says, "a technique like that saves a person's pride and gives him or her a feeling of importance. It encourages cooperation instead of rebellion."

Pick the right time

Try not to criticize someone in front of peers, co-workers, or friends. It's also best not to offer feedback about something in the moment or right after it happened. Pick a time when the other person isn't overwhelmed to give them constructive feedback in private.



Reasons Why Constructive Criticism Is Important

Here are just a few benefits that can be found when you make the most of constructive criticism:

Constructive criticism is a valuable tool in the workplace that allows individuals to learn and grow. But quite often people don't realize what a great resource it can be. The truth is, feedback and criticism can really help all of us succeed in the workplace and in life.

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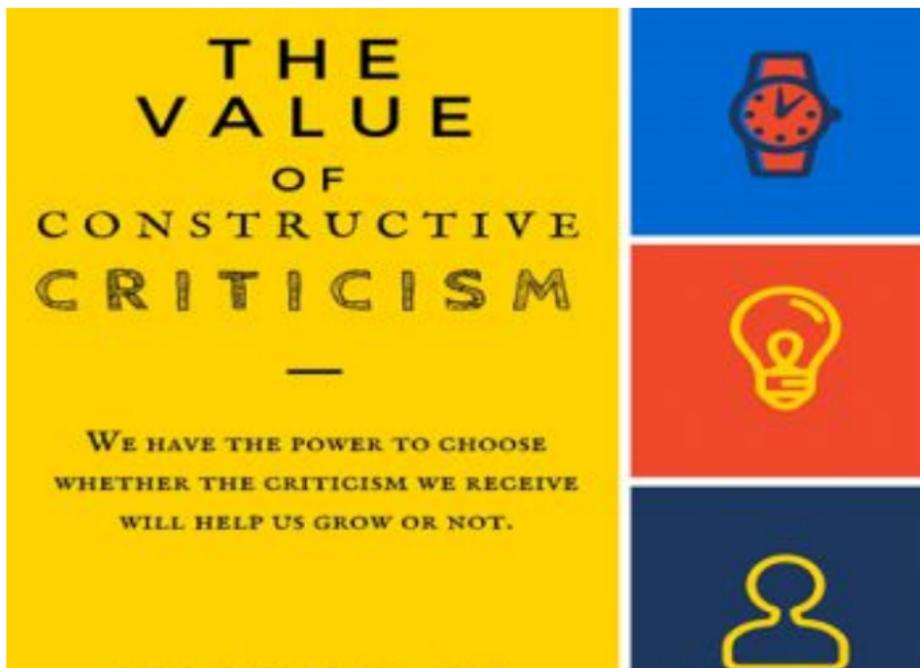
Increases insight and perspective:

First of all, criticism helps to give us a new perspective and opens our eyes to things we may have overlooked or never considered. Whether it's a peer review of your work or a performance review, constructive criticism and feedback can help you grow by shedding light and giving you the opportunity for improvement. Just remember, it's important that you don't take criticism so personally, it's meant to help you learn and grow and is not an attack on your skills or character.



Creates bonds:

Criticism is especially beneficial at work because it shows that your managers and peers care about you and want to see you succeed. Receiving feedback, whether it's positive or negative, is a good thing because it just goes to show that your peers are invested in your future and they want to help you learn. Rather than letting you fail and replacing you, these people feel that you're the right person for the job and they want you on their team. With a little bit of guidance, you will be an even better fit for your position and learn a thing or two along the way.



Cultivates a trustworthy workplace:

In an environment where people are able to share feedback and constructive criticism, everyone is a winner. Creating a transparent, collaborative atmosphere at work gives us all the opportunities to become better workers and people. With feedback and input from our peers and managers we are able to learn and expand our horizons while creating trusting relationships with others. Most importantly, an open environment like this allows us to be proactive and share our input without putting people's personal feelings in jeopardy.



Taking Constructive Criticism Like a Champ

1. Stop Your First Reaction

At the first sign of criticism, before you do anything—stop. Really. Try not to react at all! You'll have at least one second to stop your reaction. While one second seems insignificant in real life, it's ample time for your brain to process a situation. And in that moment, you can halt a dismissive facial expression or reactive quip and remind yourself to stay calm.



2. Remember the Benefit of Getting Feedback

Now, you have a few seconds to quickly remind yourself of the benefits of receiving constructive criticism—namely, to improve your skills, work product, and relationships, and to help you meet the expectations that your manager and others have of you. You should also try to curtail any reaction you're having to the person who is delivering the feedback. It can be challenging to receive criticism from a co-worker, a peer, or someone that you don't fully respect, but, remember: Accurate and constructive feedback comes even from flawed sources.



3. Listen for Understanding

You've avoided your typical reaction, your brain is working, and you've recalled all the benefits of feedback—high-five! Now, you're ready to engage in a productive dialogue as your competent, thoughtful self (as opposed to your combative, Mean Girls self).

As the person shares feedback with you, listen closely. Allow the person to share their complete thoughts, without interruption. When they're done, repeat back what you heard. For example, "I hear you saying that you want me to provide more detailed weekly reports, is that right?"

At this point, avoid analyzing or questioning the person's assessment; instead, just focus on understanding his or her comments and perspective. And give the benefit of the doubt here—hey, it's difficult to give feedback to another person. Recognize that the person giving you feedback may be nervous or may not express their ideas perfectly.

4. Say Thank You

Next (and this is a hard part, I know), look the person in the eyes and thank them for sharing feedback with you. Don't gloss over this—be deliberate, and say, "I really appreciate you taking the time to talk about this with me." Expressing appreciation doesn't have to mean you're

agreeing with the assessment, but it does show that you're acknowledging the effort your colleague took to evaluate you and share his or her thoughts.

5. Ask Questions to Deconstruct the Feedback

Now it's time to process the feedback—you'll probably want to get more clarity at this point and share your perspective. Avoid engaging in a debate; instead, ask questions to get to the root of the actual issues being raised and possible solutions for addressing them.

For example, if a colleague tells you that you got a little heated in a meeting, here are a few ways to deconstruct the feedback:

- Seek specific examples to help you understand the issue: "I was a little frustrated, but can you share when in the meeting you thought I got heated?"
- Acknowledge the feedback that is not in dispute: "You're right that I did cut him off while he was talking, and I later apologized for that."
- Try to understand whether this is an isolated issue (e.g., a mistake you made once): "Have you noticed me getting heated in other meetings?"
- Look for concrete solutions to address the feedback: "I'd love to hear your ideas on how I might handle this differently in the future."

6. Request Time to Follow Up

Hopefully, by this point in the conversation, you can agree on the issues that were raised. Once you articulate what you will do going forward, and thank the person again for the feedback, you can close the conversation and move on. That said, if it's a larger issue, or something presented by your boss, you may want to ask for a follow-up meeting to ask more questions and get agreement on next steps. And that's OK—it'll give you time to process the feedback, seek advice from others, and think about solutions.

Constructive criticism is often the only way we learn about our weaknesses—without it we can't improve. When we're defensive, instead of accepting and gracious, we run the risk of missing out on this important insight. Remember, feedback's not easy to give and it's certainly not easy to receive, but it'll help us now and in the long run.





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