

Give Constructive Feedback

Brief: Audience members at public speeches ideally act as constructive critics, providing well-intentioned, specific, objective, and positive feedback.

Learning Objective: Identify the qualities of effective constructive criticism.

Key Terms:

- **Constructive:** Carefully considered and meant to be helpful.

The Role of a Constructive Critic

As a member of a public speaking audience, you'll be expected to be a constructive critic. Too often critics are negative. The destructive critic looks for someone's shortcomings and uses disrespectful, insulting language to point out that person's weaknesses.

In contrast, the constructive critic is respectful: "Always respect the individual; focus the criticism on the behavior that needs changing—on what people actually do or actually say—rather than how that person is wrong." Constructive critics try to understand the speaker's perspective and then provide well-intentioned, specific, objective, and positive feedback.

Constructive Feedback

Well-intentioned

When you're preparing to deliver criticism, consider your intention. Do you want to point out flaws just to prove your own expertise? For criticism to be constructive, you need to be well-intentioned. The goal of well-intentioned criticism is to be helpful.

Constructive critics carefully craft their feedback, often acknowledging that their perspective is simply that—their perspective. Keep in mind that your word choices and nonverbal expressions send messages about your intention. This will help you to construct feedback that the speaker is more likely to receive.

Specific

When providing feedback, be specific. For example, "You moved too much" is general feedback that leaves the speaker unsure how to change their behavior going forward. More specific and helpful feedback might be: "On two occasions you wandered from the podium and turned your back on the audience, which was a little bit distracting." This more specific feedback allows the

speaker to know exactly which behavior they should avoid going forward and why they should avoid it.

Objective

Subjective messages are those that are simply a matter of opinion: “I don’t know anything about horses, so I think your speech topic was a bad choice.” Because your message is clearly about your own tastes and not about the speaker’s performance, the speaker will likely discount your criticism. But, if your message is objective, the recipient will be more willing to take your feedback into consideration: “I don’t know anything about horses, so it would have been helpful if you had included some basic information about what it’s like to own a horse.”



Positive

For your message to be constructive, you need to consciously avoid personal attacks and negative language. Avoiding evaluative language—such as “you’re wrong”—reduces the likelihood that the speaker will respond negatively, ignoring your feedback. Instead, use thoughtful language that reflects your positive intention.

From Concept to Action

Recall a time when someone offered you negative criticism. How did you respond? Did you get angry and walk away? Did you feel hurt and discouraged? How might they have made their criticism more constructive? Additionally, how might you have responded differently?

OER IMAGE SOURCES:

“Horse Mold Thoroughbred Arabian Pasture.” Pixabay. <https://pixabay.com/photos/horse-mold-thoroughbred-arabian-2063672>. Accessed 04 April 2019. [CC0]

OER TEXT SOURCES:

“Giving and Receiving Criticism.” Lumen Learning. <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/boundless-communications/chapter/giving-and-receiving-criticism>. Accessed 04 April 2019. [CC BY-SA 4.0]