

Receive Constructive Feedback

Brief: Receiving effective criticism offers opportunities to understand new perspectives, learn from mistakes, and improve performance.

Learning Objective: Understand how to use techniques for accepting constructive criticism.

Key Terms:

- **Blind spots:** Parts of ourselves that we are unable to see unless others point them out.
- **Self-criticism:** The act of searching for, recognizing, and accepting corrections to one's own behavior.

Overcome Obstacles to Receiving Criticism

Accepting any criticism at all—even constructive criticism—can be difficult. Too often criticism is delivered negatively. As a result, when we anticipate that we'll receive criticism, such as immediately after delivering a public speech, our inclination is to be defensive. Common defensive reactions include fear, defiance, and anger.

The audience has a responsibility to deliver feedback constructively, but the speaker also has a responsibility to be receptive to feedback. Receiving feedback can take practice, but it will make you a better public speaker.

Begin with a Willingness to Engage in Self-Criticism

Self-criticism requires a person to question their own thinking and behavior instead of believing that they are always right or unable to change. People who practice self-criticism are able to see themselves from different perspectives. They have the willingness to be objective about their own performances, for example, reflecting on ways they can use audience criticism to improve their speeches going forward.

Self-criticism is an essential component of learning. There's a limit to what we know about ourselves. We all have "blind spots"—parts of ourselves that we are unable to see unless others point them out to us. When you're open to receiving feedback, it becomes possible to gain insights about ways you can improve that you would otherwise never have known. Why not be open to receiving feedback so that you can be the best that you can be?

Tips for Receiving Feedback

Accept that you're not perfect. If you begin every task thinking that you will accomplish it flawlessly, you're fooling yourself. Everyone makes mistakes, but the important thing is to learn from them.

Even if you don't agree with someone's criticism, be open-minded and think carefully about it. For example, if someone thinks you're communicating in a negative or overbearing way, but you think you're being positive, maybe you're positive intention isn't translating. Perhaps you're sending negative nonverbal cues? Or maybe your word choice is a little bit off? Instead of dismissing feedback that doesn't immediately resonate with you, allow for the possibility that others might—at least to a certain extent—be right.

Take notes and ask questions. Seek clarity about aspects of a critique that you don't completely understand. If you do not understand the criticism, you can't learn from it.

Remember, sometimes receiving criticism will be easier said than done, but it will offer you opportunities to gain new perspectives, learn from mistakes, and improve performance.

From Concept to Action

Self-criticism is different than being self-deprecating. Engaging in self-criticism involves an objective appraisal of your performance to improve going forward. Being self-deprecating, on the other hand, involves being overly hard on yourself for perceived weaknesses or mistakes. Self-criticism seeks positive change. Being self-critical is a way to punish yourself that doesn't usually lead to positive change. Recall a time when you engaged in self-criticism and a time when you engaged in self-deprecation. Compare and contrast the two experiences. What can you learn from them?

OER TEXT SOURCES:

"Varieties of Criticism." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Varieties_of_criticism. Accessed 04 April 2019. [CC BY-SA 3.0]

"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]