

Ground Rules for Giving and Receiving Criticism

When you need to criticize another:

Practice giving affirmations. There are a dozen ways to say you appreciate a person's efforts.

Whenever possible, state criticisms in a positive statement. Never attack the person. Address the work, the circumstances, the product, the results, but support the person.

Resist the temptation to heap criticism on someone who has made a mistake. If it can't be changed, this kind of criticism can only hurt the person.

Choose a proper time and place. Check your own mood. You'll do better when you are calm. Reassure. Begin with praise. Be specific. Identify ways to improve. Express confidence. It will make change seem easier to achieve. Praise improvement. Be there tomorrow. If you've taken the time to criticize, take the time to praise.

Respect Diversity: Gender/ age/ status/ power/ role/ ethnicity/ experience.

In communications, the sender is responsible for the message. Solicit feedback to clarify perceptions. Reevaluate statements for understanding. Learn to really listen. Make no assumptions. Remove value laden vocabulary. Keep your eye on the goal and not on the exchange.

Always end on a positive note. Find some area of agreement and build on it. Even if the only area of agreement is that you will never agree on anything.

When you are on the receiving end of criticism:

Criticism is easier to accept when we learn not to take it personally. It is a mistake to think, "If you criticize me, you dislike me." Try to disassociate yourself from the criticism. Just because you may have experienced a failure, doesn't mean you are a failure.

Focus on the criticism only. Do not focus on the critic, the emotion surrounding the criticism, or your own feelings. Resist the temptation to argue. Remember that the person must care about you to take the time to criticize.

Find the value in the criticism. It may be an important message, even if you are uncomfortable with the way the message is delivered. Ask for specifics. Ask yourself if this is the first time you have heard such comments. Is the critic a competent, if not impartial, observer? A person can vent frustration and still make a valuable observation. Make a commitment to yourself to do better.

Thank the critic and enlist the critic's help to assist in making necessary changes. You do not need to tolerate being berated, but by keeping a clear head and listening to what is being said, you can learn valuable lessons about yourself and the critic.