

► Spring 1995

## Dealing with Difficult People: Taming the Critics in Life

When it comes to criticism, most people think it's more blessed to give criticism than to take it, especially if the criticism comes from a difficult person. What we need to realize is that the more active our lives, the more we will be criticized. So with all the criticism we're bound to get, how can we best handle it?? I'll provide you with three techniques I have found helpful to use in dealing with criticism.

**...true professionals  
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**The first technique is ideal for dealing with unjustified criticism.** Often this type of criticism comes in the form of advice (sometimes both unwarranted and unasked for!). An example might be a co-worker who overhears you on the phone with a customer and says, "Boy, I just overheard you on the phone with that customer. I don't think I would have said that.

Typically there are two ways to respond to that co-worker: (1) We could get quiet and mumble

and admit that we were wrong (a passive approach); or (2) we could tell that person where they could go with their opinion (the aggressive route). A far better approach would be to utilize the assertive FOGGING technique which calmly acknowledges that there may be some truth in the criticism.

For the previous criticism of your coworker, you could fog them by saying "Perhaps I could've responded to the customer differently." You don't say to the critic that they are absolutely right and you don't tell them they are absolutely wrong. You merely agree that there may be some truth in the statement. Other potential fogging responses might be: "You might be right about..." "You could be right about..." "What you say makes sense.

**When you are given valid criticism, the best thing to do is to ADMIT THE TRUTH.** That is, accept your mistakes and faults without over apologizing for them. Too often when we make a mistake we try and cover up the mistake. Perhaps the root of cover-ups lie in our childhood of getting "caught" and our fear of punishment. But in reality, the best thing we can do is to admit we made a mistake and move on into the future. Potential phrases might include: "You're right, I didn't..." "You're right. I did do that incorrectly. Now that I know the correct way to do it..." The key here is to not over apologize and beat yourself up for making a mistake.

Dealing with vague criticism is sometimes the most difficult and frustrating. In these cases, it is important to **REQUEST SPECIFIC FEEDBACK.**

You want to prompt criticism by listening to your critic and asking questions. Some examples are: "What did I do that..." "How could I improve..." "What am I doing specifically..." All of these questions will force your critic to be more clear in their criticism of you and will enable you to change your behavior to more effectively meet their expectations or needs.

The bottom line in handling criticism is that true professionals learn how to build a firm foundation out of the bricks that others throw at them. That is what handling criticism effectively can do for you...it can help you build a foundation of mutual respect rather than a barrier for protection.

For a list of additional "Ten Tips for Taking Criticism" or to order an autographed copy of Patti's book, *Giving and Receiving Criticism*, please call our office at #523-3633 or fax your request to #523-3515.

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Robert Blair, Chief Executive Assistant  
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