

Constructive Criticism



Pointers for providing constructive criticism:

1. Constructive criticism has to be genuine. A person giving this criticism has to genuinely feel it is important to give it.
2. The person receiving the criticism must have some level of understanding of your role, and understand that you truly want them to improve.
3. Do not use statements like, "I want you to", "You must understand", "You must see the difference", "I need you to". You are immediately setting the stage for the individual to become defensive, especially if there is already a bad history of communication.
4. Take a team approach. In other words, sentences like, "Let us look at the following", "We can fix this by". By doing this, you have created a collegiate type atmosphere. Both individuals are on the same level. Now you can set the stage to critique, not criticize, and then begin to construct a foundation for improvement.

Here are a few things to consider before offering criticism:

1. **Is the criticism truly constructive?** Here are some synonyms for "constructive": Positive, helpful, productive, useful, beneficial, and practical. Antonym: Destructive.
2. **Why am I offering this criticism in the first place?** Is it because I'm trying to be helpful or just because I'm a jerk?
3. **Is the criticism necessary and appropriate?** Does it have a great impact on the "grander scheme of things", or am I just being nitpicky. Will focusing on this issue be worth the time and effort in the long run?
4. **Do I have the right, or better yet - have I earned the right to speak into this person's life?** The difference between "management" and "leadership" has a lot to do with the relationship you have with your team. "Managers" tend to focus on control, whereas real leaders take people to the next level.
5. **Finally, have I noticed things that I can compliment?** When I critique someone, I want to acknowledge the areas where they are succeeding to reinforce the desired behavior and then make recommendations for the areas where improvement can be made.

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A good "template" to a constructive critique:

1. Start off the critique with a positive note. "This is a good start" or "This piece is nice".
2. Give the negative points of the work. This should still be done in a positive way. Avoid such words as "bad, horrible, unacceptable, I don't like, etc". Try using words that pull you into the work such as "This area needs..." or "I believe that this area...". These need to be honest but still nice toward the person. Focus on what successful behavior looks like, do not offer generalities such as "Your work is *always* inferior". Be specific.
3. Give points on how to improve the negative areas you just pointed out. This is very key, if you say an area needs work and leave it at that, the employee will not know how to improve it. We can't read minds so we need to know specifically what it is you are thinking. If at all possible give examples, bring yourself into their field.
4. Give positive points of their work. This is the time to build the person up. By telling them the things that you like, this will help them realize what areas they are strong in. The negative shows them what areas they are weak in... see the pattern? You need to examine the picture, if you can't find a positive aspect then I suggest looking further or not giving a critique.
5. Finally end with a strong positive note. "This is good." "Keep up the good work", "You're coming along nicely" etc.
6. Remember the following: Think it through before you say something, don't just shoot from the lip, tackle only one point at a time...don't use a shotgun approach, offer constructive criticism with specificity-not labels or generalizations.

By thinking about these aspects you can help the person improve as well as build morale after all is said and done.

