

Constructive Criticism: A How-to Guide

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Have you ever been in a situation where you are on the receiving end of constructive criticism? How did you handle it? On the other hand, have you ever been in a position where you had to give someone constructive criticism? How did you do this? Did you choose your words correctly? The bigger question is does everyone know what constructive criticism is? Constructive feedback is the procedure of providing useful comments and suggestions that contribute to a positive outcome, a better process or improved behaviours in someone. The goal is constructive criticism is that it provides encouragement, support, corrective measures and direction to the person receiving it.

A phrase published in the Harvard Review (2017) stated that “No one likes constructive criticism but everyone wants to hear”. Everyone wants a chance to improve themselves but we all appreciate it being done objectively and constructively

Benefits of Constructive Criticism

- Promotes Growth - Positive in nature, constructive criticism is designed to help employees realise their full potential. Rather than focusing on what they did wrong, this type of feedback offers advice on ways to improve performance next time. Gaining a different perspective allows people to expand their horizons and become more well-rounded individuals (The Wood Companies, 2021).
- It builds trust - Constructive criticism is given to help the employee. When properly administered, it will strengthen the employee-manager bond, because it adds depth to the relationship. Knowing their boss cares enough to give out advice in a respectful manner will make them feel valued. This creates trust because they know their manager has their best interests at heart and wants to help them become their best self.

How to Give Constructive Criticism

Criticism is something that others may not take lightly. Even with the purest intentions, it is important to ensure that it is done in an objective manner where one does not feel targeted in any way. A survey done by Alvernia University (2017), highlighted that 57% of respondents preferred constructive criticism over the 43% of respondents who preferred positive criticism.

This goes to show how individuals, appreciate feedback that will help them grow in any possible way. Below are some ways to ensure that a constructive feedback session flows smoothly.

The first step is to establish trust between the person giving the constructive criticism and the one receiving it. If you are working with someone regularly and know you will at some point need to give feedback to them, whether as part of your job duties or simply due to the nature of your work together, it is important to establish an open, trusting relationship with them (Krakoff, 2021). Having a baseline of trust will help set the tone of your future conversations, and will both help you deliver your feedback, and help them accept it and put your suggestions to use. It's very difficult to accept feedback or criticism from someone you do not trust to have your best interests at heart - you want the receiver to truly know that, first and foremost, you recognise their abilities, believe in their potential, and appreciate their work. This means they'll be more likely to view your feedback as constructive, and will further open communication channels to make this kind of exchange even easier and more [productive](#) in the future.

During this feedback session, it is important to make sure that as the one providing the feedback, you are presenting a balanced perspective, whether your feedback is ultimately positive or negative. This is more obvious when it comes to negative feedback - while you should not have to feel like you must paint a picture that is different from the reality of the situation, especially if you have major concerns about the work or behaviours being discussed, it's helpful to be able to point out some positives in that person's attitude or output (Krakoff, 2021).

An example is when a subordinate produces less than standard work, a good approach to take is to highlight the great work they have done in the past and that it does not match the current work that they have submitted. This shows appreciation of the work they always do but you expect better. Going straight to the point and pointing out the negative aspects of there may be demotivating for them to do better in the future.

Be Specific in your criticism. One of the best ways to give constructive feedback is to focus on specifics. Telling someone that their work needs improvement, but not giving details on what exactly is lacking or how it might be fixed, isn't helpful to anyone - the individual won't know what you're looking for, so they'll be frustrated and you most likely will not get the results you hoped for (Champion College, 2021).

For example, telling someone that the structure of their presentation is strong, but is missing key information on a specific topic is a good way to help someone feel good about what they've done so far, and give them the specific instruction they need to bring it up to par. This goes for positive feedback, too: instead of just saying "great job" or "nice work," give a meaningful compliment that shows that you really took the time to observe their work and that you truly appreciate their contribution.

Provide face to face feedback. Whenever possible, it is almost always better to deliver constructive criticism in face-to-face [meetings](#) rather than via email, instant messenger, or phone (Krakoff, 2021). All of these technologies, while useful in other situations, are much more open to misinterpretation, because they eliminate important contexts such as vocal tone, body language, and emotional inflection. It's easy to read negativity into a statement that was meant as neutral or to dismiss the importance of an issue that has serious consequences when you're not talking in-person. Face to face conversations also is more dynamic, as both parties can ask questions and dig deeper into the issues at hand. This also saves time for both parties rather than waiting on turnaround time for responses.

Conclusion

Constructive criticism is an important aspect of personal growth. As mentioned above, no one likes it but most people appreciate the value of receiving this criticism. When found in this position, it is crucial to take the feedback with an open mind and not take it personally. When someone takes the time to show you areas of improvement, it is evident that they care for you to do better in the future. As someone giving the criticism, always remember to separate yourself from the feedback you are giving someone. This helps in keeping things objective and giving the best solution to the person on the receiving end.

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