

Co-operantics

Co-operative skills for everyone

GIVING AND RECEIVING CRITICISM ASSERTIVELY

Steps to giving criticism

Talking to a colleague about unsatisfactory work is difficult. Many of us shy away from it or let it build up until we come out with a criticism which is angry or resentful. It's better to deal with it assertively.

1. Check that your goal is clear in giving criticism.

It is not just an end in itself. The aim is to change some aspect of the way another person carries out their job. Let's take the example of a colleague whose job it is to bring you monthly accounts. He is never on time with them and you have to keep chasing him up. Your aim is to get him to change his behaviour and to bring you the accounts on time.

2. Rights

You have some rights in this situation. You have the right to expect people to perform their work adequately. He has rights too. He has the right to your respect. This means you should behave in a way which doesn't put him down, attack him or make him look small. His mistakes do not give you the right to behave aggressively.

3. Be aware of time and place

Raise the problem at the time. Try not to let it build up. Choose a suitable time and place away from other colleagues: *"Ted, I'd like to talk to you about the accounts"*

4. Talk about behaviour you can see and describe

Express your criticism in a factual form: *"I notice your accounts are three or four days late each month"*. Don't make personal statements which could be seen as an attack such as *"you're so sloppy"* or *"your attitude is too laid back .."*

5. Get a response to your criticism

This is about getting agreement. Ted might not agree. *"Do you agree? Have you noticed this? Is that the way you see it? Why is this happening?"*

6. Ask for suggestions to bring about the change you want.

"How can we improve this situation? What changes can you/we make?"

7. Summarize the suggestions to be carried out:

"So, we're agreed that in future you'll....."

Following these steps means you're more likely to get the change you want. You have been assertive and it's more likely that you'll get a response which isn't aggressive or passive from your colleague.

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Receiving criticism

The first step

Work out whether the criticism is justified. It might be justified, unjustified or just a put-down. You may need to think for a minute before you reply.

If it's justified

For instance, you have arrived late too often. Whatever it is, you know it's true and it does apply to you. It helps to use negative assertion. Negative assertion means acknowledging the truth in what your critic is saying "*Yes, I have been late quite a few times recently*". In doing this, you'll feel less defensive and more accepting of yourself.

If it's unjustified

You've received some criticism which is completely untrue. You could say "*That's really not true*", or "*I don't accept that at all*". But say it with conviction, without apologising. Make sure your body language expresses certainty, not doubt.

If you're not sure

There might be some truth in it, but it's an exaggeration. You could ask for more information: "*You say I'm always late. When exactly have I been late?*" If the person is vague or incorrect, you might say "*Well, I have been late twice this month (acknowledging the truth), but it's not true to say I'm always late.*"

Put-downs

If you're feeling put-down by a remark, the assertive way to deal with it is to say that you feel put down, and what your reaction to it is, for example, you've been told in a jokey way that you have no sense of humour. You might say: "*Look, I think you're trying to put me down. I find what you say hurtful.*" You might add "*and I'd like you to stop.*"

Sometimes you only realise afterwards that something was a put-down. It's assertive to confront the person later in the same way as above.