

Co-operantics

People skills for co-operatives

STEPS TO GIVING CRITICISM

Talking to a colleague about his/her 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 the criticism

It is not just an end in itself. The aim is to change some aspect of the way s/he carries out his/her 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. The 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 have you 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 specific about the change you want. Raise the problem at the time. Try not to let it build up. Choose a suitable time & place away from other colleagues: *"Ted, I'd like to talk to you about the accounts"*

4. Talk about the behaviour you can see 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 could you 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 its 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.

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BODY LANGUAGE

It's important to be aware of what messages your body is conveying. This awareness is an important part of being assertive.

POSTURE:

Stand upright, don't slouch. Do not stand too near or too far away from the other person. Make sure you are at the same level (ie. both standing or both sitting).

EYES:

Keep your gaze relaxed. Maintain eye contact.

MOUTH:

Relax your jaw. Only smile if it is appropriate to do so.

VOICE:

Watch the tone, inflection and volume of your voice. Do not whine or shout. Do not convey sarcasm through the tone of your voice. Do not mumble. Speak clearly and slowly so you can be heard.

GESTURES:

Do not cover your mouth with your hand. Do not clutch at your hair or play with jewellery. Do not put your hands on your hips or fold your arms. Do not shift from one foot to the other.

BREATHING:

Deepen your breathing and calm yourself prior to a confrontation. Being aware of your breathing and learning how to relax your body reduces your anxiety and helps you to feel poised and centred, even in a difficult situation.

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MY RIGHTS

I have the right to state my own needs and set my own priorities as a person independent of any roles that I may assume in life

I have the right to be treated with respect as an intelligent, capable and equal human being

I have the right to express my feelings

I have the right to express my opinions and values

I have the right to say "yes" or "no" for myself

I have the right to make mistakes

I have the right to change my mind

I have the right to say I don't understand

I have the right to ask for what I want

I have the right to decline responsibility for other people's problems

And I know that other people have these rights too!