



It pays to give your colleagues, or staff, constructive feedback they need, and want. **By BARTON Goldsmith**

**F**irst, let me say, that, with all the criticism I have received, rarely has it ever been constructive. So, when someone comes up to me after a presentation, and says, "Would you like some con-

structive criticism?" I always say, "No, thank you."

The problem with most people who give criticism is that they almost always feel they could do it better. This brings to mind the obvious question, which is — if they

could do it better, why aren't they doing it?

As leaders, we are always targets for criticism, and so be it; I think it's part of the deal. Where we fail is that we don't help our team members by training them how to

# Critic's CHOICE



deliver criticism or feedback in the best manner possible.

Here are 10 tips to help you give your team members the feedback they need, and want:

**1** Take an honest look at where you're coming from. If there's some anger or resentment towards a team member, you're probably not the best person to offer them advice

**2** Start and end with a compliment. Find something good to say about your team member; this will help him or her take your advice. At the end of the conversation, it will help your team member to feel that they aren't a failure, or that you're not angry

**3** Listen to your own voice. The tone of your voice can communicate as much [if not more] than the words you choose. If there is an edge to your voice it will be harder for your team member to take your request

**4** Eye contact is important. It helps both of you stay focused and it communicates sincerity. It will also help you stay on topic. If you're working on the computer or busy with something, stop what you're doing and look at the person you're speaking to

**5** Choose the best time and place. Never give criticism in public; in front of another person, or when you or your team member may be too tired or hungry to deal with it appropriately. If you're physically uncomfortable you may not be in the best frame of mind to talk about a difficult subject

**6** Do your best to avoid hurting anyone's feelings. Use a softened start-up followed by a gentle suggestion. For example, you could

## Accepting Criticism

**M**any companies have some sort of appraisal system in place. If your workplace doesn't have one you may want to ask for feedback — it always helps to know how we're doing. If you work in a busy, pressured environment a reminder may be necessary. Above all:

- ❖ Try to take constructive feedback in the spirit it is intended. It's not a criticism of your personality — just some thoughts on how things might be better approached and a look at where you've scope for improvement
- ❖ Don't be afraid to ask for clarification and to say if you feel the criticism is unreasonable or unjustified
- ❖ Don't compare yourself and your achievements with others as a barometer of your own self-worth
- ❖ If you have to give someone feedback don't criticise them in front of others. Balance negative points with compliments, and be clear about suggesting alternative ways of doing things
- ❖ Don't forget to praise yourself occasionally.

— Team CW

say, "I really like the way you talk to your supervisor; you would get a better response from your team members if you spoke to them in the same way"

**7** Talk about behaviour, not the person. Feedback is not about insulting someone's behaviour; it's about telling him or her how to be better. For example, you would never say to a child, "You are a mistake." Instead, you would say, "You made a mistake"

**8** Use gentle humour, if possible. If you can deliver criticism in a light-hearted manner, it will be received in a much more positive way. Humour doesn't diminish the seriousness of the feedback you are giving. It actually helps the person receiving the direction to open up and take it in

**9** Work with your team member to improve the situation. This will help him or her to make the appropriate adjustments sooner rather than later. It will also strengthen your bond as a team. Making changes is easier if you have someone supporting you

**10** Don't harp. Once you have asked for what you need from your team member, let it go. If you have to ask someone to do something four times, I can promise you that the person, in question, has heard what you have to say. If you've reached an agreement or agreed to disagree, let it go and move on. Holding a grudge is a waste of time.

These are just the right tools the best of the best use to make their teams strong.

Learning how to give feedback and criticism in a way that the person you are talking to will take it in, and learn from it, may be a leader's greatest tool for building an effective team.

So, the next time you offer a team member constructive criticism, they won't go running for cover, or say, "No, thank you." Instead, they will see it as an opportunity to grow. Result: your organisation will grow along with them.

*Stay Well*

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