

How to Accept Criticism While at Work

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Receiving criticism as a working adult is never easy. It's hard not to take criticism personally, and it can be even harder if you get it a lot. However, with careful processing, a positive attitude, and regular self-evaluation, you can turn criticism at work into a source of empowerment and success.

Part 1

Part 1 of 3: Processing Criticism



1 Strive to avoid emotional reactions. Receiving criticism can be really upsetting, but try not to respond while you're upset. Take some time to understand the circumstances of the criticism and collect yourself before responding.

- If you are expected to respond immediately in an upsetting situation, try saying something like, "May I have some time to process what you've said? I promise to get back to you shortly."



2 Listen carefully to what's being said. Criticism of any kind can be hard to take, but it's important to listen to exactly what's being said, so that you understand the problems and can improve your work.

- If confrontation makes you nervous or upset, it's okay to ask for criticism to be sent to you in writing (as an email or revision request report) so that you can better process the information.
- Just make sure that you take the time to absorb what is being communicated to you.



3 Don't get defensive. Even if you disagree with what's being said, it's still important to consider other perspectives and opinions, especially if you're working in a subjective field, like art or politics.



4 Take notes. It can be hard to receive criticism, but it's even harder to receive the same criticism twice, so be sure to take careful notes of what's being said. Record any specific points of reference.

- For example, if you've just given a presentation and your project leader specifically criticizes the way you constructed your conclusion, be sure to write that down so you can avoid the same problem next time.



5 Ask questions. Make sure you understand what the criticism entails. You won't be able to improve if you don't understand what's wrong, so be sure to request clarifications or ask questions if you have any. Asking questions also shows that you want to improve and get the task right next time.

- Make sure to ask questions in a positive and specific way.
- For example, "When you mentioned that my data tables were too busy, would it be better to separate the information into sub-tables or do I just need to adjust the presentation style, in terms of font type and size?"
- Don't be afraid to ask for suggestions. You could ask "How can I do this better next time?"



6 Say “thank you” at the end of the conversation. As hard as it can be to accept criticism, it's still important to be gracious and thank people for the time they are taking to help improve your work. Even if you don't feel thankful in the moment, you'll be glad you said it when you see your skill level improve.^[1]



7 Begin revisions right away. Don't waste time being upset or down about criticism. Instead, get to work right away. Do your best to incorporate the criticism into your revised work, so that you don't forget what was advised.



8 Ask for an informal review of your attempt at improvement. Once your revisions are complete or you have done your best to incorporate feedback, ask your boss or manager to quickly look over your work to check that you properly addressed the criticism.

- Not only does this show respect and a desire to improve, but it is also gives you time to develop and refine your skills without the pressure of a formal performance or subsequent confrontation about it.

Part 2 of 3: Having the Right Attitude



- 1 Assume that people are trying to help you.** Criticism is easier to take when you assume that the people who are offering it to you are just trying to help you and make your work better.^[2]
 - If you assume that people are using their criticism to try to cut you down or make you feel bad, you will emit negative emotions and responses, which is not helpful to them or you.
 - Try to focus on the elements of the criticism that you can learn from and improve on. Don't worry about the way the person said it or other details that aren't important.



2 Yearn to improve. Learning and mastering an art or trade is a lifetime process. There is always something everyone can do to make their work even better, so try to embrace criticism. It's part of the path to success.^[3]



3 Be open to new ideas and ways of doing things. You may be correct in your result but wrong in the way you got there. Different people prefer different ways of doing things and there is usually more than one way to accomplish a task. Be open to alternative ways of achievement. It's the best way to learn!



4 Ask for criticism on a regular basis. This might seem counter-intuitive – especially if you hate criticism – but by asking for it, you are putting yourself in an empowerment position. Instead of people coming to you to tell you what's wrong, you can go to them first and ask, even if everyone seems happy with your work.

- Consider asking questions like, "How can I make this project even better?" "What can I do better next time?" "Is there anything I can do to improve my performance?"
- Asking for criticism helps you improve at a faster rate, which means you may be promoted, given a raise, or given more responsibility at a faster rate, too.

Part 3 of 3: Preventing Excess Criticism



- 1 Learn from your mistakes.** If you continually make the same mistake, criticism will never go away. It's better to make new mistakes with new improvement than have your personal growth stunted because you haven't fixed old mistakes.
- To avoid making the same mistakes, always tackle new tasks with old criticism in mind.



- 2 Check your work.** Everyone gets tired and loses focus, especially after a long day or at the end of the week. It's easy to make silly mistakes when you feel worn out, so be sure to double check your work at least twice before submitting it.
- If you're worried you might miss a mistake, ask a coworker to check your work for you.



3 Evaluate your own performance. Don't wait for others to tell you what's wrong. Take the time to regularly assess your own work. Being your own toughest critic can be a good thing. If you fix the problem before it becomes a habit, others won't need to criticize you for it.



4 Try to resolve conflicts yourself. If you find it increasingly hard to accept criticism from someone, politely talk to them about it. Explain your perspective and how their criticism makes you feel.

- For example, if your manager is constantly giving you extra work but complaining that you're late in turning it in, try saying something like, "I'm aware of my late submissions and I am sorry for them, but I have trouble meeting deadlines when I am assigned extra work I don't always have time to complete. Could we work together to sort this out?"



5 Report problems. If you've tried hard to be open and adaptable, yet the criticism keeps coming or feels unfair or uncalled for, you might need to report it to someone higher up. Avoid sounding like a "tattle-tail," however, and try to maintain a professional, objective, willing attitude.

- For example, you could request a meeting with your boss and say, "I've mentioned that the reason my work is late is because I am being given extra work on top of my normal assignments. I don't like disappointing my team, but I can't turn work in before the deadline if I am not given enough time to complete it. Do you have any suggestions for resolving this issue?"



Community Q&A

Question

What if your boss is a perfectionist and is highly critical of small mistakes, even on themselves?



Community Answer

Perfectionists are hard people to please. Try to realize they are likely to take on board more work than is their own, adding to their stress and causing their own mistakes and radiate irritation. They are projecting their feelings of inadequacy. First, recognize the problem lies with them; second, help this person to see that they are doing stellar work, that the team is doing terrifically and that no person is an island and that it needs all of you to make the work a success. If your pleas to let go of the tiny mistakes fall on deaf ears, it's time to go above this boss and alert their superior as to the effects of the perfectionism on the team.

Helpful 22 Not Helpful 1

Question

What can I do if I am given impossible work tasks from a boss?



Community Answer

Ask for a one on one chat with the boss after you have gone over and thought about what needs to be done. Also, get advice from others on how to complete it best, including how many others are needed to assist, so that you have factual solutions to tell your boss.

Helpful 27 Not Helpful 5

References

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About This Article



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