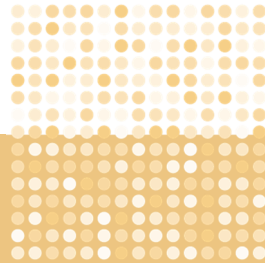




GLION SELF-HELP SERIES

Social Wellbeing



Using constructive criticism to improve performance

Read about this topic & understand
what you are experiencing, as well
as tips on how to manage it.



Expert feedback on performance, focused practice using the feedback to improve, followed again by further feedback is an extremely effective way to improve skills and gain new knowledge. The feedback has to be of the right type however- whether you are a student seeking help from a faculty member or a manager hoping to improve the performance of a team – the skill of giving and receiving “constructive criticism” is a vital one.

●●●● WHAT IS CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM? ●●●●

The meaning of “constructive” should be fairly transparent: it is something which is designed to build, to make stronger, better for the future. The word has clear positive connotations. It is a term which is used in a slightly different way in the theory of learning named constructivism which posits that people build learning on knowledge that they already have, and that they also learn through acting in the real world, through experience. The idea of learning from experience has an evident link to constructive criticism.

should be understood in the sense of “analysis and evaluation” – taking something apart and judging the worth, good or bad, of the various components. An example of this meaning would be the work of a music or film critic.

Constructive criticism – an expert’s analysis and judgment of a performance aimed at improving the future of performance of the person receiving the feedback.

The word “criticism” is more problematic. It may have negative connotations such as in the phrase “He was very critical of the team’s performance”. The person receiving the criticism may become defensive if they perceive too much negativity. A person on the defensive may stop listening, may become resistant to change which is the exact opposite of what the constructive criticism is designed to achieve, which is change. The term “criticism” in “constructive criticism”





TIPS & TECHNIQUES



How to receive constructive criticism

1. Make sure you are in the right mindset, the right mentality to receive the feedback. Be open minded and avoid a defensive reaction. Appreciate the value of the feedback in improving your future performance.
2. Constructive criticism usually comes in two parts – what you have done well and what you need to improve. While it is nice to hear what you have done well and this part is valuable in confirming to you that you are on the right track, focus on the advice about what you need to do to improve. It can be difficult to do this, because you can feel vulnerable and lose confidence, but this vulnerability is important because it is the moment when you recognize you have to do something differently.
3. Use the “need to improve” feedback to imagine how a better performance would look. Ask yourself questions like “How would my presentation be different if I followed this advice?” , “If I follow this guidance, how will my next written report look?”
4. If something is not clear, ask for clarification. Ask for concrete examples. Ask the expert giving the feedback exactly what would they have done differently.

How to give constructive criticism

1. Respect the feelings of the person or team you are giving feedback to. They are in the “weaker” position. To avoid defensiveness and resistance to change, make sure you reassure and encourage them as they receive the feedback.
2. To reduce possible feelings of vulnerability, start your constructive criticism with the positives of the performance. Make the person or team feel good about aspects of the performance. This will increase their confidence and ability to listen to your advice about the areas to improve.
3. Avoid the term “weaknesses”. Identifying a weakness gives no guidance about how to improve. Constructive criticism should be forward looking (feedforward rather than feedback). It should encourage the person or team to plan actions to become better in the future, not to dwell on the past.



TIPS & TECHNIQUES



4. Structure your feedback. The most common form is the two part “strengths, areas to improve” structure. Another common practice is the three part sandwich method “strengths, areas to improve, praise” . This method has been criticized for being too positive, leading to complacency. Perhaps it could be better framed as “strengths, areas to improve, encouragement to change”.
5. Be specific. Avoid generalizations, particularly in the areas to improve section. Refer to relevant, concrete examples. Give detailed advice on clearly defined areas.
6. Listen carefully to the reactions of the people you are giving feedback to. Pay attention to their concerns, objections, anxieties.
7. Encourage reflection. Use questions or suggestions to attempt to elicit ideas from the person or team you are giving feedback to. People are more likely to adhere to ideas they themselves have come up with, even if you have planted the seed. Encouraging reflection will also lead to people to imagining improvements even before you have to point them out, increasing autonomy, initiative and satisfaction.
8. Focus on behaviour or performance, not personality. Avoid making judgements about personality or character which will be seen as threatening to a person’s sense of self worth and will not lead to change.

Final thought

By seeking out constructive criticism from fellow team members, from your line manager, from your faculty, you will gain valuable insights into how to improve your performance. Asking for constructive criticism can make you feel vulnerable, but as long as you remember that it is about behaviour, not you as a person, the risk you take will be worth it.

Further resources

Constructive criticism that works

<https://www.apa.org/monitor/2021/10/career-constructive-criticism>

How to give (and take) constructive criticism

<https://asana.com/resources/constructive-criticism>

Reference

Fong, C., Schallert, D., Williams, K., Williamson, Z., Warner, J., Lin, S., & Kim, Y. (2018). When feedback signals failure but offers hope for improvement: A process model of constructive criticism. *Thinking-Skills-and-Creativity*, 30, 42-53. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2018.02.014>



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