

Communication and Giving Feedback

Criticism

Criticism can be described as highlighting one's faults or shortcomings. The style is often blaming and judging and can come across as an attack on one's character. This is largely due to the way in which it's expressed. Frequently; it starts with pointing the finger by using **'You'** and includes generalisations such as **'always'** and **'never'** A good example of using criticism would be **'You're so selfish, it's always the same with you, you will never learn'**

Equally important in defining a critical approach are **non-verbal** messages. These include; **Body language, facial expressions and tone of voice**. Examples of critical body language are; a look of disgust/disdain, rolling eyes, shrugging, deliberately ignoring. Although; tone of voice is typically abrupt or disrespectful, it can also be expressed in a nice as pie, I am only saying this for your own good kind of way!

Effects of Criticism

Have a think for a moment about how you feel and what you experience when someone speaks to you in that way. Do you feel closer to, or further away from the person criticising you? chances are that those whom you criticise will have a similar reaction!

Although, there may be some truth in the criticism and you may be justified in your point, the message is often lost. This is as a largely due to the fact that the way in which the feedback is delivered will result in the recipient feeling disrespected, attacked or undermined. The natural response to this is to retaliate, by attacking back or withdrawing, causing further damage to the relationship.

Constructive Feedback

Constructive Feedback is in stark contrast to criticism, in that it's expression is respectful and it separates the behaviour from the person, as opposed to attacking their entire being. It focuses on specific instances, rather than exaggerating, by using generalisations such as **'Always'** and **'Never'** **'You're so selfish'** is replaced with: **'I feel you are only thinking of your own needs here'** or **'I don't think that you are considering me at all in this'**.

Sounds quite different doesn't it? Ask yourself which style is more likely to get someone's back up?

As well as choice of words, it's equally important to have respectful body language, facial expressions and tone of voice. Chances are the one you giving feedback to will still feel offended if you glare at them, roll your eyes or shout at them when expressing your feelings. To steer away from criticism and move towards corrective feedback, ask yourself:

How can I give feedback in a Direct, Open, Respectful and confident way?

If I were receiving feedback how would I like it said to me?

To demonstrate the differences between these approaches, let's use an example.

Criticism Vs Constructive feedback Example:

Your colleague Mary has been 15 minutes late for the last 3 meetings. You're frustrated, because it disrupts the meeting and means you have to repeat information already given. You also feel it is disrespectful.

Critical Approach

A critical approach would go something like:

"Mary. I can't believe you're late again! I am so sick and tired of this, you're never on time. You are unprofessional, disrespectful and rude. If you continue to be late I will report this to your manager!"

This approach will most likely result in Mary feeling judged, attacked, or even threatened. Mary may attack back or withdraw and carry anger and resentment. Thus leading to further conflict and damage to the working relationship.

Constructive Feedback Approach

This approach is always respectful and focuses on expressing the effects of Mary's behaviour. The following is a framework that can help to implement this style:

- **Situation**
- **Effect**
- **Goal/Desired outcome**
- **Consequence**

Situation: *Mary, I have noticed you have been late for the last 3 meetings.*

Effect: *I find this frustrating, as I have to repeat information that we have already gone through, I also feel disrespected.*

Goal: *Going forward, I really need you to be on time for meetings.*

Consequence: *If you continue to be late, I will inform your supervisor'*

Using this approach helps to move away from attacking or Judging Mary, towards expressing how Mary's behaviour affects you and what you want her to change. This is an Assertive way of communicating as it is **Direct, open, respectful and confident**.

Source: [www. http://aspirecounselling.com](http://aspirecounselling.com)

ABACUS Counselling Training & Supervision Ltd **NZQA reg** | **Phone** 09 360 6957

Email office@acts.co.nz **Web** www.acts.co.nz | **Mail** PO Box 90710 Victoria Street West, Auckland 1142