

positive ways TO ACCEPT CRITICISM

Do you hate being criticized even when you know you've made a mistake? If so, it's no wonder — criticism can make people feel incompetent, angry, and just plain awful.

How do you, personally, respond to criticism? Do you make excuses or lash back with criticism?

"This fight-or-flight response is natural and common, but it isn't very productive. It cuts off communication, often just when it's needed most," says Jean Lebedun, Ph.D., author of the video program "The Art of Criticism: Giving and Taking."

Many supervisors don't give criticism in a tactful manner. Nevertheless, you should accept criticism so you can learn from your mistakes. But don't fret; it'll be easier when you use Dr. Lebedun's "4-A Formula: **A**nticipate, **A**sk questions, **A**gree with something and **A**nalyze."

ANTICIPATE

Accept the fact that everyone makes mistakes and that you'll probably be criticized for yours. That way, criticism won't come as a surprise.

"You anticipate criticism by asking yourself, 'What can I learn from this criticism?' Then, whenever you feel yourself growing defensive or getting angry, you repeat the question, 'What can I learn?'" advises Dr. Lebedun.

Here's another way to anticipate: Take the wind out of the sails of criticism by admitting your mistake first, before your supervisor has an opportunity to say



anything to you. This makes your supervisor's job easier and makes you appear more professional.

ASK QUESTIONS

Sometimes, people who criticize may be frustrated and are letting off steam. This is especially true when the criticism contains the words "always" and "never." Therefore, it's important to pinpoint the criticism by asking questions like these: "What part of the report didn't you like?" "What aspect of my attitude makes life at work difficult for you?" "Could you give me an example?"

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ACCEPTING CRITICISM

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Asking questions accomplishes two things: It gives you specific information on how you can improve, and it teaches people they need to be specific when they criticize to help inspire change.

AGREE WITH SOMETHING

When faced with criticism, most people focus on the part of the negative feedback that may not be true and ignore the rest. This doesn't solve any problems, and you don't learn anything.

When you agree with one part of the criticism, you become open to learning. An easy way to agree is to say something like this: "You might be right; my report doesn't have all the details."

"You don't have to agree with everything; even agreeing with one small aspect of the criticism will create an atmosphere of teamwork," says Dr. Lebedun. "The focus then can become how you'll work together to solve a problem, which will lessen your feeling of being attacked."

ANALYZE

Finally, take a break and evaluate what you've heard.

You need time to process the information, determine if it's a valid criticism, and decide what you'll do to solve the problem or correct the mistake. If this is a complaint you've heard repeatedly, you should think about what you can learn from the situation so it doesn't happen again.

The benefits of the 4-A Formula are that you'll look for solutions rather than excuses and you'll be in control of your emotions, Dr. Lebedun says. "You'll also appear more professional."

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How hobbies help your health

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Most hobbies involve at least some level of mental activity, Dr. Lichtenberg says. Because we enjoy most things more when we share them, hobbies offer a reason to stay connected to other people with similar interests.

What kind of hobby is best? Hobbies that require expertise are more satisfying, Dr. Lichtenberg says. That's because developing an expertise in something like photography or astronomy requires commitment, and commitment results in a higher level of engagement. Of course, hobbies that involve physical fitness, such as hiking, "provide a physical benefit as well," he says.

Psychologist Michael Brickey, Ph.D., is the author of the book “Defy Aging” and president of the Ageless Lifestyle Institute in Columbus, Ohio. His focus is on helping people stay physically and mentally active so they can enjoy their later years. Dr. Brickey says hobbies help by reducing stress and providing a sense of accomplishment.

“Hobbies can be thought of on three levels,” Dr. Brickey says. “The first is as a diversion. Hobbies help us pass the time. The second is as a passion. When a hobby becomes a passion, we become truly engaged in doing something we love. It not only helps us pass time, it makes us unaware that time is passing. The third level is as something that creates a sense of purpose. We all need that.” The ideal hobby, he says, combines all three levels.

“Hobbies can become so important, especially if they are a way to connect with others, that they become part of who we are,” Dr. Brickey adds.

Needy causes. Janet Langlois directs Elder Craftsmen, a New York group that sponsors creative projects for seniors. In some of the most rewarding activities, she says, people build or make things and donate them to needy causes. For instance, participants in a quilting program donated their products to a homeless shelter.

“People get satisfaction on multiple levels,” she says. They get satisfaction from being creative and making something. They get the satisfaction of being connected to other people involved in the project. Finally, they get the satisfaction of giving something back to the community.

Community organizations often sponsor such programs, she says. If no such project exists where you live, contact a charity group, such as a shelter, and volunteer to help set one up.

If you’re just starting a hobby, remember that it takes time to realize the benefits. “You don’t start exercising one day and feel great the next,” Dr. Brickey says. “The same is true of a hobby. If you work at it regularly, you become more engaged. Over time, you find yourself getting more and more involved. If you stay with it, and make an effort to meet others who do the same thing, you’ll eventually develop a passion for it.”

Get started now. If you’re looking for a hobby, plenty of folks can help.

Community colleges and senior centers offer classes in activities that range from ballroom dancing to learning a new language. Ask for a list or look online for activities you think you’ll enjoy. An introductory class on watercolor painting or cooking can help you get started. It’s also a great way to meet others who are interested in the same hobby you are.

Here are a few suggestions:

- **Bird watching.** Bird watchers get excited when they tell each other what they’ve seen, whether at their backyard feeders or on their vacations. Local groups often have outings to catch sight of rare birds during migration. Check the nature programs at your local parks or Audubon chapter to get connected.
- **Scrapbooking.** This fun hobby results in a historical record of what’s important to you and your family. Ask your local librarian to help you find articles about getting started or check to see if your local craft store offers classes.
- **Book club.** Indulge your love of reading with others. Books can be outlets to new worlds, and by participating in a club with fellow book-lovers you open the door to meeting new people, new authors and even new genres of literature.

Additional hobbies to consider:

- Genealogy
- Volunteering
- Creative writing
- Needlework
- Gardening
- Coin and stamp collecting
- Acting
- Pottery
- Jewelry making
- Playing an instrument
- Woodworking

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WAYS TO ENHANCE YOUR SELF-ESTEEM



Feeling good about yourself is an essential element to living a healthy, happy life. Unfortunately, we are often our own worst enemy. Whether we are insecure about certain parts of our lives or we set unrealistic expectations for ourselves, how we feel about who we are and how we live our lives can greatly impact our quality of life. The good news is self-esteem is something you can work on and change for the better.

Read on to find out how you can increase your self-esteem and enhance your life.

REPLACING NEGATIVE SELF-TALK WITH POSITIVE SELF-TALK

What happens when you make a mistake? Listen to your internal monologue and find out what you're saying to yourself and about yourself. By tuning into how you treat yourself internally, you can make your internal monologue more positive. When you don't verbally beat yourself up, you can bring more positive feelings into your life.

PRAISE YOURSELF

Take some time to reflect. What have you accomplished? It doesn't matter if it is a big thing or a small thing, if it means something

to you and makes you feel good, it's important. Write each success down on a piece of paper or take time to think about them. By noting them, you can realize that what you've done is significant.

SPEAK UP WHEN NECESSARY

Don't be a doormat. Think before you speak, but speak up when it is necessary to do so. Respect the opinions of others, and also respect that you have an opinion, too. Teaching yourself to be assertive and to communicate effectively can help your relationship with others and your relationship with yourself.

BE UNDERSTANDING

If you make a mistake or blunder, don't take it too seriously. Mistakes happen all the time, so forgive yourself and others when they happen. Don't criticize or dwell on what's happened, move forward and use it as a learning opportunity.

NURTURE GOOD RELATIONSHIPS

Who do you spend time with? The friendships and relationships you choose say a lot about how you feel about yourself. It is important for the people who are close to you to be supportive and kind to you. If they aren't, reconsider those relationships. Finding people who support you will help you support yourself.

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