



Career Solutions Publishing Group Toll free: (888) 299 - 2784 Fax: (610) 993 - 8249
careersolutionsgroup.com

Is it a Critique or is it Criticism?

CTAE-FS-4 Communications: Learners use various communication skills in expressing and interpreting information.

Understanding and Goals

Unit Understandings, Themes, and Concepts:

Enduring Understandings:

Students will learn the difference between a critique and criticism and how each affects people.

Primary Learning Goals:

Essential Questions:

- How does constructive criticism impact the workplace?
- What is the proper way to give constructive criticism?
- How do the differences between critiques and criticisms affect how people interpret suggestions?

Objectives:

- Students will be able to define constructive criticism
- Students will be able to list differences between critique and criticism.

Students with disabilities:

For students with disabilities, each instructor should refer to the student's IEP to be sure that the accommodations specified in the IEP are being provided within the classroom setting. Instructors should also familiarize themselves with the provisions of Behavior Intervention Plans that may be part of a student's IEP. Frequent consultation with a student's special education instructor will be beneficial in providing appropriate differentiation within any given instructional activity or requirement.

used with permission of Career Solutions Publishing

CSP Mini-Lesson 5, Spring 2008

Mini-Lesson Standards: (1) Demonstrate analysis skills, (2) Ask questions for clarification, (3) Use strategies appropriate to a given situation to prevent and resolve conflicts.

Mini-Lesson Correlations: Conflict resolution, relationship building, communication

Is it a critique or is it criticism?

No one likes to be criticized, and many of us avoid situations where we might be criticized. However, on the job you can't become better unless you know what's wrong. And becoming better at what you do leads to promotions, salary increases, higher self-esteem, and respect among your co-workers and from your boss. What you perceive as criticism may actually be a critique, or evaluation, of your work. If you can learn from it, you should see that as a good thing.

When someone criticizes your work, it's natural to become defensive. You may snap back with a nasty comment, make excuses, or blame other people. You may become so upset or embarrassed that you pull away from the discussion, sulking because you think you were insulted. This makes your job harder and keeps you from learning (and from earning a higher salary).

Is it a critique or is it criticism? (Continued)

Here are some guidelines for looking at others' remarks as critiques, not criticisms. Explain in a few words what you think each suggestion means:

1. Suspend judgment about what was meant. _____

2. Put your ego aside. _____

3. Control your emotions. _____

4. Stay focused on the message. _____

Is it a critique or is it criticism? (Continued)

Ask clarifying questions

When you believe you are being criticized, ask questions to determine the speaker's real meaning. Maybe you aren't being criticized after all.

A comment by Enrique's co-worker, Susan, is repeated below. Two questions Enrique could ask to better understand what Susan meant are given. Write two other questions that Enrique could ask.

Susan's comment: "Enrique, the sales figures are out of date in your report. I e-mailed you about using current figures."

Enrique's questions:

1. What was the date of your e-mail? I thought I used the figures from your most recent e-mail.

2. I'm sorry if you think I ignored your e-mail. What did I miss?

3. _____

4. _____

Is it a critique or is it criticism? (Continued)

Giving criticism

What you call "helping" may be considered as "insulting" by the recipient of your remarks. Constructive criticism is good; but when it is too harsh, it can become destructive. To make sure your criticisms are constructive, try these helpful behaviors:

- Focus on the problem, not the person

Person-focused: "You made a big mistake when you told that customer that we're out of red sweaters."

Problem-focused: "There is a box of red sweaters in the storage room, in case another customer asks about them."

Susan's comment: "Enrique, the sales figures are out of date in your report. I e-mailed you about using current figures."

Read Susan's comment to Enrique, again. Although Susan probably meant no harm, her words could be misinterpreted as destructive criticism. Rewrite her comments so they focus on the problem, not the person.

Instructor's Guide

Ego is the part of the mind that helps people take pride in themselves and gives them a feeling of self-esteem. When individuals take pride in their work, their ego is satisfied. Yet, ego can be a powerful enemy when it doesn't allow a person to look at criticism as a learning tool.

You can help your students discover that constructive criticism is good. To expand today's lesson, make these suggestions:

- Criticism is about the *results* of your work. It is not about you personally.
- Don't assume that the speaker is *disrespecting* you by the critical comments.
- Ask questions to understand the speaker's *real* meaning.

To further expand the lesson, ask students to discuss how they feel when they think they have been criticized. Then ask volunteers to describe a time when one of their "helpful" comments was misinterpreted as criticism by another individual. Follow through by asking how the person reacted, whether the situation escalated, and the final result.

To continue, work with the class to develop scenarios that could be considered criticism. Place students in pairs and ask them to role play the criticizer and the person being criticized. Instruct the criticized person to ask questions to attain the real meaning of the criticizer's comments.

Related Web site

The following Web site provides information about criticism in general: assumptions about constructive criticism, guidelines for the critic, and guidelines for the criticized. You may want to have your students read the Web page, which has 27 bulleted points on the issue.

<http://oregonstate.edu/instruct/comm440-540/criticism.htm>

Solutions to Activities

1. Suspend judgment about what was meant. Don't jump to conclusions about what the speaker meant or whether the speaker's comments are right or wrong.
2. Put your ego aside. Don't assume that the person is "disrespecting" you. Your defensiveness may not be appropriate.
3. Control your emotions. Don't allow yourself to be hurt or angry. You may be overreacting.
4. Stay focused on the message. Don't let old resentments creep in. They have nothing to do with the current situation.

Ask clarifying questions

1. Do you have the most current figures? I'll be happy to compare them with the ones I used.
2. Will you give me a minute to check my e-mail? Maybe I picked up the wrong information.

Solutions to Activities (Continued)

Giving criticism

Enrique, these sales figures don't look like the most current ones. Did you get my e-mail with the new figures?

Related Materials

Activities in this week's Mini-Lesson cover some of the important topics found in *Top 10 Tips for Work Readiness* and *Job Ready Career Skills*, each containing 200 employability and work readiness lessons. Please visit our Web site, www.careersolutionspublishing.com, where you can request free sample products to be mailed to your office.