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Why should we embrace criticism? After all, who likes to be criticized? Don't we already have enough on our plates without having to make room for nitpickers?

Ultimately, we all need criticism, no matter how successful we become. Criticism makes us pay closer attention to important aspects of our jobs and lives. It can be a valuable learning tool that teaches us some hard lessons.

Criticism isn't always negative. In many instances or in designated forums, it is a positive, necessary part of growth. As a leader, you have to be capable of constructively criticizing others as well as being open to receiving criticism.

When providing criticism of others, try not to be narrow-minded. For criticism to be effective, be more flexible and less judgmental when looking at others and their actions. Just because we wouldn't have done it the same way doesn't mean another's approach doesn't have merit--and perhaps more merit than our own approach.

When receiving criticism, it is healthy to pay attention to it. Always listen with the intent to understand why the criticism is being leveled at you and why the critic may want you to know his or her feelings.

David Cottrell, CEO of Cornerstone Leadership Institute, has written that the biggest room we have is room for improvement. He claims there's always something we can do better, more often,

or with a different intensity. Appropriate criticism helps us focus our attention on what we need to do to become more successful.

Responding to criticism in a positive manner is very difficult. Why? Because criticism, even when it can be helpful, often stings the person receiving it. This stinging effect occurs because either the criticism is taken as a personal attack or because the person thinks his or her idea is the best (or only) idea that will work.

When you receive criticism from a single person, don't overreact because that person may be alone in their criticism.

There's a story about an old farmer who advertised his “frog farm” for sale. The farm, he claimed, had a pond filled to the brim with fine bullfrogs.

When a prospective buyer appeared, the old farmer asked him to return that evening so he might hear the frogs in full voice. When the buyer returned, he was favorably impressed by the symphony of magical melodies emanating from the pond, and he signed the bill of sale on the spot.

A few weeks later, the new owner decided to drain the pond so he could catch and market the plentiful supply of frogs--but to his amazement, when the water was drained from the pond, he found that all the noise had been made by one old bullfrog.

The same may also be said about criticism in an organization. Usually, the most noise is made by only one old bullfrog.

So what's the best way to handle criticism from your colleagues, your boss, your friends, or your partner? Here are some suggestions from David Cottrell:

- Acknowledge that criticism is a form of feedback, and we all need feedback.

- Ask yourself these questions: Who's offering the criticism, and are they qualified? Are they trying to hurt you, or help? Objectively, is there any truth to what they're saying?

- Constructive criticism is a gift. Thank the giver.

- Stay positive no matter what. Don't put yourself at the mercy of others. Liking who you are makes it easier to evaluate the criticism of others.

- Attempt to transform criticism that seems directed at you personally to specific behavioral issues. Personal criticism may weaken one's resolve. Focus the criticism on your actions, not your person. Pay particularly close attention to criticism that addresses behaviors in a timely and/or specific manner.

- After you have had a chance to review the criticism, communicate clearly how you feel and think about it. Then take appropriate action to improve.

- If you want constructive criticism from others (and you should), be willing to return the favor if they are interested.

So embrace criticism. No matter how nasty it may be, it could provide you that morsel of truth you can use.

~ The End ~