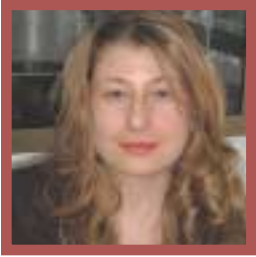


# The Unexpected Advantage of Criticism



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*Knowing what  
people think about  
you is power if  
you use it to  
your advantage.*

**D**o you know what people say about you? Should you even care?

For the sake of safeguarding and building our self-esteem, we often hear people say that we shouldn't care about what others think – that what matters is what we think of ourselves. In effect, when we look to others for our self-evaluation, we are indeed relinquishing our esteem, and allowing them to determine our worth in the world.

However sensible this reflection may be, it is still very difficult not to care about what others think. We want people to like us, or at the very least to accept us as we are. We seek their approval, their love, or just some recognition of our value. Whether we are at home or in the office, to pretend otherwise could be a serious mistake. Our lives are intermingled with our coworkers, our loved-ones, our families, and friends, all of whom contribute to the quality and richness of our lives.

**Knowing is not enough,  
understanding is key**

What people say about you is not necessarily who you are, but a reflection of something you port r a y , m i x e d

with their perception of you. Certainly, no one knows us more than ourselves. After all, no one spends more time with us than we do. But what we think we know about ourselves and what we understand on a deeper level are not always aligned. For example, a woman may know that she keeps falling in love with the wrong man, but may not know why her destructive pattern keeps repeating itself. A man could feel that he is a good worker, but may not understand why he never gets the promotion he thinks he deserves.

Since self-discovery is partly based on the feedback we receive from the world, one way of attaining a greater understanding of ourselves is through the eyes of others.

**The World is trying to tell you something important. Listen to the message, not the criticism.**

People talk about people. There is no getting around that. And, *even though we may grasp the idea that no one is perfect, many of us still fear our own imperfections.* We become afraid that people will see in us something we'd rather not see in ourselves – something we have been trying to hide, but know deep down could be true. Our greatest fear, after all, is the one we have regarding our own shortcomings.

And so, we do not always welcome other people's feedback. Rather than listen to the lesson inherent in feedback, we hear



criticism and reproaches, and take comments that may be there to serve us, or warn us of a behavior that is causing us more harm than good, very personally. We tend to shut feedback out, or linger at the pain it has caused. Either way, we may not be listening to the meaning or solutions that feedback can bring. *The wounding feeling of being criticized prevents us from paying objective attention to what may be priceless information* – information that could possibly answer many of our long-awaited questions, and prevent us from saying in the future, “I wish I knew then what I know now, and saved myself a lot of heartache”.

### When is criticism profitable learning?

Knowing what people think about you is power if you use it to your advantage. It can indicate what you need to change about yourself to live a more fulfilling life. There are several variables which can help you determine whether the comments you hear about yourself may be useful to you or not.

#### 1. Who is delivering the feedback?

When receiving feedback, know whose opinion you are listening to. Is this person someone you know well, or barely? Is this person looking out for

your best interest, or theirs? Do you trust this person to tell you the truth?

**2. Timing.** When was the feedback given? Was it during the middle of a blowout argument, or did the person chose a private moment to share with you what was on his or her mind?

#### 3. The tone of the

**delivery.** Was the feedback delivered with care and sensitivity, or with malice and distaste? Even good feedback can be rejected if the message is delivered malevolently. This is what could be referred as “lost in translation”.

**4. Pay attention to the truth.** Even if you feel wronged, the truth is often tickling in the pit of your stomach. Deep down, we seem to know what is true. Out of the truth, though, we can sometimes react very negatively because it can hurt. Try not to let your emotions get the best of you. It is better to face a hardening truth now, learn and move on, then to live with it without making any changes at all, and continue to pay the price of your limiting behaviors.

**5. How are you interpreting the information?** Are you feeling overwhelmed by the feedback, or are you truly paying attention to what is being said? Remember, feedback is not criticism. It is important to listen carefully to people’s feedback if we are to make some necessary change occur. We need to listen without self-recrimination or judgment. Keep your mind tuned in to the message in the comments you receive. Our life lessons often come in the form of feedback, advice or opinions that are meant to help guide us toward greater

understanding, and possible growth – so long as these are well interpreted. Remember, we learn more about ourselves through the eyes of others.

**6. What will you do with the information?** Of all the variables, this is the one that matters most. It is basically the one that will determine whether you embrace feedback constructively, or miss the chance of getting to better yourself a little. After all, change happens when we accept the opportunity to learn and allow ourselves to be somehow different.

You cannot stop people from talking about you, so might as well use what they have to say to your advantage. In fact, people have the right to talk about you. Good or bad, they have the right to speak their mind. It may not always be pleasant, and of course hearing upsetting comments about our behavior can be disheartening, and sometimes quite painful. In moments such as these, however, bear in mind that everyone has had to face negative criticism at some point in their lives. *Everyone you have ever admired has been criticized by those who thought little of them.* Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela were imprisoned for what millions of people consider admirable causes. Martin Luther King, Jr., had some people hate him enough to kill him. And all the great prophets likely experienced more censure from the masses than love from their people.

So the next time your boss is giving you feedback on a presentation, or your spouse is expressing a need, remember not to take it too personally, so that you can profit from what could be a wonderful learning experience.

So how about it: Do you know what people say about you?