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Handling Criticism

By: Karen B. Ford

It is my belief that there is no such thing as constructive criticism there is only criticism. I prefer to think that giving someone direction is far more effective than a critical analysis of performance or action. Many times an opinion is based on a personal perspective of what is “right” and of course “perception is a person’s reality”. As leaders if we are more concerned with giving someone direction rather than proving that we are right we will empower them and help them discover for themselves the proper course of action or performance.

“a wide door for effective service has opened to me, and there are many adversaries” (1 Corinthians 16:9)

Effective leadership and opposition go hand in hand. Sometimes opposition from others accompanies meaningful work for God. As leaders if we evaluate our own reaction to criticism, we can learn to be more effective with our people when handling a difficult situation. If we are continually working to create and maintain an environment of MUTUAL RESPECT we can be effective when confronting a difficult issue. It is my practice to confront the issue and not the person. When we have an attitude of respect for our people, then it is the ISSUE not the PERSON that we are dealing with in any given situation.

Effectively modeling in this area for our people means understanding and dealing with criticism on a very personal level. When we are faced with criticism we need to understand the four flaws of *constructive criticism*.

Four Flaws of Constructive Criticism

1. First, criticism always comes when we least need it.

Criticism never seems to come when we're on top, but generally when we are a bit low. After we've "blown it" or "failed" at something, some well-meaning soul comes along and offers us some "constructive criticism" in regards to the situation. Typically in "love" of course.

2. Second, criticism seems to come when we least deserve it.

Often after an honest mistake or an off-the-cuff comment, said without malice, some dear soul (with the gift of criticism) blasts us with a shot of stinging words. Never FAILS!

3. Third, criticism generally comes from people who are least qualified to give it.

Then, we ask ourselves "who's qualified to give *constructive criticism*?" It is the people who know us the best—that love us the most, who are the most qualified to give us direction and feedback. Not strangers. Not people who have no personal relationship or vested interest in our success. Generally it is those who don't know us well, or do not have a healthy relationship with us that offer the MOST and are the QUICKEST to criticize. People who truly love us and understand us usually don't criticize inappropriately.

4. Fourth, criticism frequently comes in a form that is least helpful to us.

Sometimes the critical words sting with anger, jealousy, and envious rage. Seldom is criticism offered lovingly and graciously. More often than not, the words are delivered anonymously, like an unsigned letter bomb that appears harmless, but when detonated does unbelievable damage.

Hurting people hurt people. –Dr. John Maxwell-

If you plan on surviving and remaining effective in leadership long term, it is important that you understand John Maxwell's quote, and cultivate a healthy attitude when handling personal criticism as well as giving direction to others. Face your critics with unusual grace and develop characteristic grit.

When asked why there were no great statesmen left, Napoleon replied, "in order to get power you have to display great pettiness, in order to exercise power you need to show true greatness, such pettiness and greatness rarely reside in one person."

As a leader you have great power and influence with others. Which person are you? A person of *GREATNESS* expecting and anticipating the *greatness* in

others, or a person that is hurting and petty, and expecting those qualities in others?

Recognizing pettiness and rising above it with greatness is not easy when we are not continually growing and developing ourselves first. Having clarity in regards to our motives comes with continual personal growth. When we are clear that our motives and our actions are pure, then we can accept responsibility for the mistakes that we make along the way. And we WILL make mistakes, for the only ones that don't make mistakes are those that are not doing anything.

As a leader, when you handle criticism correctly, and when you determine that it is the *issue* not the *person* at the heart of any confrontation, and you model the behavior that you desire to see in those you lead, you can develop an environment of **mutual respect** in your organization. There is absolutely no greater team, than a team that can respect each other, work together, and understand that they do not have to agree with or understand another's style, yet have respect for the person and the person's accomplishments, that is the team that *will accomplish great things together*.

You will only develop an environment of mutual respect, when you lead by example and show great respect and love for your people. If you model this and maintain trust with your people your victories will be many and the heights will be GREAT!

Isn't this what the **GOLDEN RULE** is all about?

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