



CRITICAL FEEDBACK – HOW DO WE HANDLE IT?

Webster describes or define “Critical feedback” as “the act of criticizing unfavourably!”

One of the major reasons why we tend to resist Critical Feedback is that a good part of our self-image is based on how others view us. Feedback is in other words is based on Perception!

When we see that someone sees us in ‘Less than positive light’, we feel devastated!

It takes an open mind to be able to listen to an opposing view – more so if it is about us!

Most of the times our past experiences affect the way we handle a critical feedback. Much of our past is laden with messages we received from the environment as youngsters. Messages like “Don’t make Trouble”, “Finish what you start”, “Older people know better than you”, “What will Others think...” etc..

These messages have different ramifications as we grow. A message like “What will others think...” has the following ramifications:

- a) Need for others to approve our behaviour, so all criticism is taken personally.
- b) Wait for others to act first – a Reactive Stance
- c) Avoid Risk taking behaviour, as others may not approve it. Our actions may be criticized. Hence the best way is to avoid /guard ourselves from Critical feedback; is to take no decisions & make no mistakes!

I had read somewhere “What we are may be our parents’ fault; what we remain is our responsibility”

It is interesting to observe the responses to critical behaviour between men & women! Men tend to externalize the failure and women tend to internalize the failure. You would have heard women say, “I am not good at math or writing reports or solving problems”.

As for success men would state it was because of their talent and women say, “I was simply lucky!”

Therefore one way to address Self Critical message is to change how we think & what we believe about our situation & ourselves. Our beliefs have tremendous impact on the outcome of the situation!

“No one can make you feel inferior without your consent” – Eleanor Roosevelt

This is where the concept of practicing positive **self-talk** comes in!

In today’s rapidly changing environment, our ability to adapt, change and grow, as a result of feedback is increasingly important. Today “life long learning” is a norm and critical feedback is our key to learning & growth. If we can change our outlook towards this vehicle of learning, the outcome of the feedback will be less stressful. And of course we all have a freedom of choice - To Accept or Reject any feedback, which is given to us.

So, what is **Self Talk**?

It is a term we use for a “stream of conscious thoughts that reflect our attitude towards events in our lives”. It therefore is critical to control what we say to ourselves.

Some interesting facts about Self Talk are as follows:

- It is ON all the time
- It is often unconscious
- It impacts your behaviour
- It has a speed of 300 – 400 words per minute as opposed to spoken words that are 75-125 per minutes!

Let me share with you the **THREE** types of critical Feedback we experience

1. Valid Critical feedback – The most difficult to handle.
2. Unjustified Critical Feedback – Usually a result of our ‘not living up to’ someone else’s fantasy
3. Vague Critical Feedback – Usually the critic believes that his/her values and methods of doing things are better and more valid than yours.

To check ask a few questions to yourself. –

1. Do I hear the same feedback from more than one person?
2. Is the critic a Subject matter expert?
3. Are the standards of measurement reasonable & known?
4. Is it important for me to respond to this feedback?
5. Is the feedback really about ME? Or is it a response to something in the critic’s life like a “bad day” or being upset about something else.

Suggestions - dealing with feedback.

1. Seek feedback **before miscommunication** occurs and mistakes become crisis
2. Ask others for **positive feedback** – if non have been offered to you
3. Keep the **‘ME** file’ updated with the evidences of good work. For e.g.:
Appreciation letters, Congratulation Notes you have received etc. These help you to motivate yourself when you are feeling low because of a Critical feedback.
4. **LISTEN** carefully and ask for clarification if you don’t understand the feedback.
Also get specific examples of where you went wrong.
5. Use **positive** Self talk

A final thought on handling critical feedback. **This is as expressed by Theodore Roosevelt.**

“It is not the critic who counts. The credit actually belongs to the man in the arena whose face is marred with dust and sweat and blood – who at best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement and who at worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place will never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat!” So guess it is a risk worth taking – face a critical feedback!