

## Skills 360 - Dealing with Criticism (Part 2)

### Discussion Questions

1. When you criticize other people or their work, how do you do it?
2. Do you feel criticism is an opportunity to improve?
3. How do you deal with people who attack others personally rather than offering constructive criticism?

### Vocabulary

**Criticism:** comments or remarks about mistakes or what is wrong with something or someone; "A good manager knows how to deliver criticism to his employees without making them feel bad."

**Room to improve:** a need to get better at something; "Davis is a good engineer, but he has room to improve when it comes to presenting and writing."

**To point something out:** to tell someone something; "I like the design, but I'd just like to point out that the colors don't match those of our brand."

**Diplomatic:** able to deal with people in a way that doesn't upset or anger them; "Our mediator was very diplomatic and managed to get the two sides talking constructively about the problems."

**Harsh:** strict or serious; "If your methods of discipline are too harsh, you risk damaging employee morale and turning staff against you."

**Validity:** the quality of being true or logical; "To enhance the validity of your report, you should cite some recent research."

**Justified:** fair, or having good reason for something; "I don't think shutting down the plant is justified. It's not like it's operating at a loss."

**Numerous:** many; "Our business plan lays out numerous opportunities for expanding our product line."

**To watch:** if you “watch” something such as the way you speak or act, you are careful to do so in a way that doesn’t upset anyone; “It’s a good idea watch your manners and language when attending formal dinners in foreign countries.”

**Questionable:** possibly untrue, not reasonable, or dishonest; “Everyone’s excited by the recent economic forecast but I think it’s based on some pretty questionable evidence.”

**To pick up the pace:** to do something faster; “If we’re going to finish this project by May we’re really going to have to pick up the pace, even if that means working overtime.”

**Grumpy:** in a bad mood; “Why’s Taylor so grumpy today? Is he still upset about not getting a bonus?”

**To not play well with others:** if we say a person “doesn’t play well with others,” we mean that he or she doesn’t get along well or work well with other people; “I’m hoping we don’t have Brian on our project team. He doesn’t exactly play well with others if you know what I mean.”

**A second opinion:** an opinion or assessment by a second person, which may support or go against the first opinion or assessment; “One field engineer said my design was feasible, but I think I’m going to get a second opinion just to be sure.”

**To embrace something:** to accept and adopt something such as beliefs or methods completely; “We need every department to embrace this new drive to cut costs, or we won’t see profits rise.”

**To swallow your pride:** to accept or do something even though it is embarrassing or makes you feel weak; “I asked to work the Harris account on my own, but it was too tough and I had to swallow my pride and ask for help.”

**To acknowledge:** to accept and say that something is true or that it exists; “To be an effective manager, you must remember to acknowledge your employees successes, not just point out their weaknesses.”

**Exaggerated:** made to seem more of a certain quality than it really is; “The gloomy sales forecast turned out to be greatly exaggerated; the downturn wasn’t so bad after all.”

**Cantankerous:** always arguing or complaining; “Jones is getting even more cantankerous as he gets older, and few people can stand to be around him.”

**To fall apart at the seams:** to become totally ruined; “Our huge outdoor event fell apart at the seams because of poor planning and lousy weather.”

**Under scrutiny:** when examined carefully; “Under scrutiny by our accountant, the books were shown to have several mistakes and inconsistencies.”

**To clear something up:** to make things understood when there is confusion or misunderstanding; "We need a staff meeting to clear up all this confusion about changes to the pension plan."

**To make excuses:** to give reasons why you made mistakes; "Trevor, instead of just making excuses, why don't you try to fix the problem you created?"

**To scapegoat:** to blame someone else for your mistakes; "Listen, I don't want to scapegoat here, but I really think that Lorne is responsible for the server crashing."

**Underlying problem:** an "underlying problem" is an important and basic problem that may not be easy to notice but that causes other problems; "Our HR person says that the underlying problem with the staff is dissatisfaction with salaries."

**An open mind:** if you have an "open mind," you are willing to accept other people's ideas and ways; "In this fast-changing market, if you don't keep an open mind to new opportunities you will fail."

**To keep your chin up:** to keep feeling positive even in a difficult situation; "Keep your chin up Dave. I'm sure you'll find a new job soon."

## Transcript

Hello and welcome back to the Skills 360 podcast. I'm your host, Tim Simmons, and today I want to look at some more ways of dealing with [criticism](#).

Unless you're perfect, you have [room to improve](#). That doesn't sound like a difficult idea to accept, but what *is* difficult is when other people [point it out](#) to us. They might tell us that we've done something wrong, or done something poorly, or shouldn't have done something at all. Some people might tell us in a polite and professional manner, just as a wise and [diplomatic](#) boss might. But others might just sound [harsh](#) or rude. So, what should we do in the face of criticism?

Well, today I want to focus on [validity](#). That is, on whether the criticism is valid, [justified](#), or reasonable. If it is, then we should treat it as helpful and constructive. And if it's not, then we might need a different approach.

All right, but first how do we know if criticism is valid or not? How do we know it is correct and reasonable? Well, sometimes you know it's valid if you've heard it before. So, the first time you hear that you don't sound polite enough on the phone, you might just think it's one person's opinion. But if you hear it [numerous](#) times, then you'd better [watch](#) your language. Also, valid criticism is often tied to specifics. That is, the person says *exactly* what is wrong, not just generally that something is wrong. So, "you work too slowly" is [questionable](#). But "you need to [pick up the pace](#) because you've delivered the past three reports late" is specific.

Of course, as I mentioned in the last lesson, you can ask questions to encourage the person criticizing you to be more specific. And that will help you figure out if the criticism is valid.

But sometimes criticism *isn't* valid. Sometimes it's unfair. Sometimes it's a [grumpy](#) colleague who thinks he will look better if you look bad. That kind of criticism is sometimes delivered emotionally, rather than calmly and reasonably. Sometimes invalid criticism lacks specifics. And sometimes it just comes naturally from people who [don't play well with others](#).

Again, asking questions can help you figure it out. If the person can't give you specifics, then maybe the criticism isn't so valid after all. And if you're really not sure, you can always try asking for [a second opinion](#). So when Mike tells you that you're a terrible negotiator, go ask Larry whether it's true or not.

So why think about whether criticism is valid? Well, first of all because valid criticism is an opportunity to improve. We all need good feedback to learn how we can change or adapt what we do in order to get better. Don't be afraid of that feedback. [Embrace](#) it. It will help you grow. In other words, you need to learn to say "you're right," even when it hurts. In fact, sometimes we get most upset when someone criticizes us for something that we know is perfectly true and that we already feel bad about! But if the criticism is valid, then take it. And if that means you need to [swallow your pride](#), then swallow it.

In some cases, criticism isn't *completely* valid, but only partly. Surely you know someone who adds "never" or "always" to every piece of criticism? As in, "you *never* pick up your stuff in the staff room" or "you *always* change my settings when you use my computer." Well, you should still **acknowledge** the valid part, even if it's not completely true or it's **exaggerated**. So you might say, "well, it's true that I changed some settings last week, and for that I'm sorry."

But what about that criticism that is *not* valid? What about the truly unfair comments that we have to put up with? You've got a few options. First, you can ignore it. And if the source is someone who everyone knows is **cantankerous**, it probably won't matter. You can also challenge the criticism. Once again, this can mean asking questions. Invalid criticism will **fall apart at the seams under scrutiny**.

Thirdly, if the criticism isn't fair because of a misunderstanding, then **clear it up** professionally, without **making excuses** or **scapegoating**. So if it wasn't you who changed the computer settings, then don't say "no way man, it was Rick!" Instead, try "I'm sorry but I think you're mistaken. I haven't used your computer. It may have been someone else." And finally, you can deal with the personal issue behind the criticism. I mean, if someone is criticizing you unfairly because they don't like you, or they're competing with you, then it may not be enough to deal with each point of criticism. You need to solve the **underlying problem**.

So remember, your approach to valid and invalid criticism may be different, but in any case you need to start out with **an open mind**. If you're confident in yourself and your efforts, then you shouldn't feel attacked when you're criticized. **Keep your chin up** and learn from what others have to say. After all, you're not perfect, right?

That's all for today. If you'd like to test yourself on what we've just covered, have a look at the **myBEonline.com** website. There you'll find a quiz about today's show as well as a complete transcript.

So long. And see you again soon.

## Review Quiz

1. How can you know that criticism is valid? [choose 2]
  - A It is very specific.
  - B It comes from a person in a position of authority.
  - C You have heard it several times.
  - D It is delivered with kindness.
  
2. If you're really not sure whether criticism is valid or not, you can...
  - A Ignore it.
  - B Get a second opinion.
  - C Seek advice online.
  - D Ask the person to stay calm.
  
3. How is invalid criticism sometimes given?
  - A Reasonably.
  - B Quickly.
  - C Secretly
  - D Emotionally.
  
4. Which of the following is a good attitude to take toward valid criticism?
  - A It is an opportunity to improve.
  - B It is a sign that you are respected.
  - C It is too general to be helpful.
  - D It is a sign of underlying problems.
  
5. What would be a good way to respond to someone who says to you "you never format your reports properly and I'm sick of it!"
  - A That's not true at all, and I resent you saying it.
  - B I'm sorry, but I believe it is Gordon who doesn't format properly.
  - C Well I did make some mistakes in my last report and I apologize.
  - D If you would calm down a bit I might listen to you.
  
6. Which of the following can be appropriate ways to respond to invalid criticism? [choose all that apply]
  - A Challenge it.
  - B Turn the same criticism on the other person.
  - C Make excuses.
  - D Clarify a misunderstanding.
  - E Ignore it.
  - F Point out who is truly at fault.
  - G Deal with the underlying personal problem.

## Answers

- How can you know that criticism is valid? [choose 2]  
**A It is very specific.**  
**C You have heard it several times.**
- If you're really not sure whether criticism is valid or not, you can...  
**B Get a second opinion.**
- How is invalid criticism sometimes given?  
**D Emotionally.**
- Which of the following is a good attitude to take toward valid criticism?  
**A It is an opportunity to improve..**
- What would be a good way to respond to someone who says to you "you never format your reports properly and I'm sick of it!"  
**C Well I did make some mistakes in my last report and I apologize.**
- Which of the following can be appropriate ways to respond to invalid criticism? [choose all that apply]  
**A Challenge it.**  
**D Clarify a misunderstanding.**  
**E Ignore it.**  
**G Deal with the underlying personal problem.**

## Online Practice

Click the "Launch" button to open the **online practice**:

[Launch Quiz](#)