

# How Effective Leaders Handle Criticism

5 Tips to Help You Master  
Receiving Feedback

OUR MISSION IS TO HELP WOMEN  
THRIVE AT WORK, AT HOME AND IN  
THEIR RELATIONSHIPS

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# Criticism is everywhere.

We can't escape it. Social Media, at work, with your spouse, children, parents, extended family; It's impossible to walk through life without being the recipient of "negative" feedback.

So many women currently feel stressed about what employees, co-workers, or even supervisors are saying about their leadership. They feel judged by their team and their family. It's a hard struggle!

Since criticism is a part of life and there isn't a way to escape it, I want to give you the top 5 TIPS to handle criticism effectively. It's actually possible to not only *endure* it but actually *use* it to catapult their relationships and turn it into a positive experience!

## #1 Understand The Psychology

First, when people criticize, it says way more about *them* than about you. There is a well-known saying, "hurt people hurt people." The same is true for those who judge and criticize others. Those who are the most critical of others are usually highly critical of themselves first. Have empathy and try to re-frame it and see it as a gift!

Secondly, how *you* respond to the criticism says way more about you than it does about the person criticizing or the situation.

If you respond with defensiveness or end up taking it personally, that's a huge red flag signaling that their feedback is something that you're either insecure about or struggling with in some way. It's much easier to respond (not react) when the feedback is about something not so close to us emotionally.

## #2 Do NOT Get Defensive

Obviously, this is easier said than done. And if you can learn to hear criticism and feedback without getting defensive, you will have a superpower that will take you far.

Defensiveness is a reaction, so in order to change it, it's important to replace it with something more helpful. The replacement - embrace a posture of curiosity!

The best way to be curious and not defensive: Train yourself to use the words, *"Tell me more about that"* as your first response!

This serves a couple of purposes: first and most important, it buys you time. Receiving tough feedback can be shocking to our brain and nervous system. When you use "tell me more", you are literally buying time for your nervous system to regulate before having to respond, while also helping to lower the defenses of the person sharing the feedback. "Tell me more," says you're open to what they have to say, which helps them relax into the conversation as well.

Personal Story: I was processing a feedback moment I had with a client in a group setting regarding a tool I presented. I asked what it was like for them to disagree with me. They said, "Well, you made it very safe - you did the thing you always do and just said, "Oh, tell me more about that!" It's my default response now!

"DEFENSIVE BEHAVIOR IS A BARRIER TO COMMUNICATION"

- GARY CHAPMAN

### #3 *Seek first to understand, then be understood*

This is the 5th Habit in Steven Covey's "7 Habits of Highly Effective People," a classic read with timeless principles.

When you can make it a habit to actually listen to people and make an effort to understand their perspectives, it will accelerate and deepen your relationships and take you much further into being an effective leader, wherever you are.

Receiving feedback is a gift - you're getting a glimpse into how others see you, which is powerful. Unless there is a difficult history with the person, you can usually assume that the person sharing it is doing it because they believe it's important for some reason (whether you agree or not is a different topic!).

They are sharing their perspective, so take the time to really listen and understand them. The truth is most people will only be truly interested in your perspective AFTER they feel that you have truly understood them and earned the right to share.

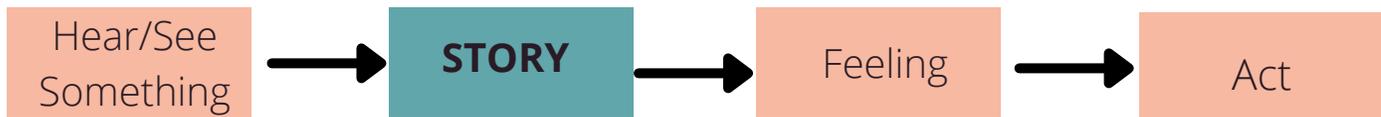
And, if you know you are not a great listener YET, take heart. Learning to really listen for understanding, and not just to respond, is a skill, just like learning new technology, riding a bike, etc. If you know this is an area of growth for you, don't wait - start working on it! Your people at work and at home will thank you for it. This is one of our favorite things to help clients work on in our coaching!

## #4 Assume Positive Intent

When we hear something, we can have a tendency to assume that the process goes like this:



However, this is missing the KEY ingredient: The **STORY** we tell ourselves.



The story we tell makes the entire difference. Unfortunately, many of us aren't aware of our stories and how they impact what we feel in response to the feedback.

If the story we tell ourselves assumes a negative motivation or intent from the other person, then our feelings towards the feedback will be much more negative than if we assume positive intent.

Silly personal example: Early on in my marriage, my husband paid me a compliment. Something along the lines of, "You look cute in sweaters"

You know what my response was ... "You think my arms are fat?!?" Clearly, I did NOT assume positive intent, and the story I told myself was along the lines of, "he's just looking to criticize me" completely the opposite of his intentions.

At work, our stories can often be centered around not being good enough. We might get feedback that one part of the presentation could have been stronger and without becoming aware of your story, you might spiral into feeling like all your work is bad, or the person is out to get you, or a million other things. Instead, take it at face value and look for whatever might be true in that statement.

## #5 Know Your Worth

Taking things personally usually happens when we are not solid on our identity or what we bring to the table. When we base our value on what other people think of us or the quality of our performance, our identity is on a rocky foundation. The words of people automatically hold more weight.

However, when you are solid in who you are and the value you hold as a human being, then the words of others are important, but not foundational to your being. Your sense of worth is not endangered by what someone might say about your OR your work. Your core value is unchangeable.

For me and many women of faith, my identity is found in who I am in Jesus. It's the only thing I've found that is truly solid. If that's not true for you, I invite you to explore if it could be, or where else you might be able to find that unshakable sense of love and belonging!

*Let's keep the conversation going!*

I hope you learned some helpful tips on how effective leaders handle tough feedback! I'd love to hear from you after you try them out.

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I love supporting women in their leadership!

Much Love!

Pamela

