

11-11-2015

Criticism – The Thing We Hate the Most Makes Us the Strongest

Michael Preston
University of Central Florida



Part of the [Communication Commons](#), and the [Education Commons](#)

Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/ucf-forum>

Information presented on this website is considered public information (unless otherwise noted) and may be distributed or copied. Use of appropriate byline/photo/image credit is requested. We recommend that UCF data be acquired directly from a UCF server and not through other sources that may change the data in some way. While UCF makes every effort to provide accurate and complete information, various data such as names, telephone numbers, etc. may change prior to updating.

STARS Citation

Preston, Michael (2015). Criticism – the thing we hate the most makes us the strongest. UCF Today, 2015-11-11. Retrieved from <https://today.ucf.edu/criticism-the-thing-we-hate-the-most-makes-us-the-strongest/>

This Opinion column is brought to you for free and open access by STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in UCF Forum by an authorized administrator of STARS. For more information, please contact STARS@ucf.edu.



Criticism – The Thing We Hate the Most Makes Us the Strongest

By Michael Preston
UCF Forum columnist

Wednesday, November 11, 2015

I'm not much of a crier, but when a colleague critiqued a draft of my dissertation years ago, I cried like a baby.

I was progressing through my dissertation process when I asked a friend to read it over and tell me what he thought.

While I was in the market for a nice review with a few edits, my friend gave me what felt like pages of corrections and criticisms from grammar issues, to organizational concerns, to a flawed research premise.

I was devastated and I did not take the review well. I even questioned if I was cut out to ever earn my doctorate.

However, after I got some tissue, downed a big bowl of ice cream, and took a night off, I returned to his notes. I quickly found that his recommendations helped me improve my dissertation in leaps and bounds. After incorporating his suggestions, the paper flowed better, I was able to refine my study to be an appropriate measure of my research questions, and I became Dr. Preston, after all.

Quite frankly that moment, no matter how painful, changed my life.

The truth is, we don't really take criticism well. Usually when someone gives us a critique, even if we know it to be true, we tend to meet that critique with anger or fear. We not only don't like hearing criticism, it has a profound effect on our psyche.

Researcher John Cacioppo of the University of Chicago found, unsurprisingly, that the brain reacts much stronger to negative stimuli, be it a negative picture or a criticism. And as much as we would like to take Taylor Swift's advice, it is hard to just "Shake It

Off.” We tend to hold onto those negative images and they affect our confidence and personality.

To make matters worse, according to researcher Tiffany Ito of the University of Colorado, we then tend to fixate on these negative thoughts to the point they often dictate our work product for some time after the negative critique.

But it doesn't have to be that way. Learning to take and use a solid critique is an important skill all professionals need to learn and utilize.

Chances are if you are human, you are flawed. And while many of us are aware of some of our more overt flaws there are many times we may be operating in a flawed environment and never know. Criticism brings to life these shortcomings in a much more efficient way. When we try to be overly positive, even when giving criticism, we can give misleading or inaccurate criticism.

No one likes to hurt another person's feelings, but in many ways when criticism is done well it can be more effective than praise. Because in the end, praise is the confirmation to continue down the same path; criticism is usually paired with an invitation to modify your path in a positive way.

But like all other workplace competencies there is a skill to be mastered.

Taking criticism is likely always going to be a challenge, but a Forbes management series outlines some steps you can take to combat your natural rejection of criticism.

First, check your initial reaction because it is likely to meet negative information with either poor body language or defending yourself. The best route is to remain calm and give yourself time to process.

Second, ask for feedback in the form of how to perform better or improve. Likely the critic has an idea of how he or she would advise fixing it.

Third, make sure you understand the “why” of the criticism. That requires a good set of ears to listen for key words and advice you can use.

Fourth, ask questions and follow up. If you truly want to address the criticism it will be important that you get positive acknowledgement that you have addressed the issue in question.

To be honest, taking criticism is never easy, but if you master the art of taking criticism you can improve your performance and be seen as a positive influence in the office or any other organization.

Michael Preston is executive director of the Florida Consortium of Metropolitan Research Universities based at UCF. He can be reached at michael.preston@ucf.edu.