

Career Advice

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Improve your ability to give, receive criticism



Responding to criticism without becoming defensive can greatly enhance personal and career growth. The best initial steps are to breathe first, then, honestly reflect. When you listen to others, then thoughtfully decide how to react, an opportunity can be created to think and behave differently. This can lead to growth. Discerning whether there is value in the feedback also will provide you with a sense of control.

Q. My supervisor gave me a bad annual review. What can I do?

A. If you feel that a review is unfair or outdated, talk to your supervisor. Explain what you have done to make corrections or why you feel that context may be missing. Ask whether there is an opportunity for the supervisor's comments to be removed from your record if you take corrective actions. A union contract, rules or policies may apply to your workplace, but generally ask yourself whether there is merit to the criticism. Do you want to make changes and adapt? If the answer is yes, remember this is a choice you made. Seek resources to assist you in making changes to your approach, such as considering working with a mentor.

Q. Can I ask my supervisor what he or she thinks before my annual review?

A. Some supervisors believe that they are good communicators when, in actuality, they aren't. If that is the case at your workplace, seek opportunities to promote more conversation. Ask for feedback or request time to discuss your work performance before a formal review with adequate time to address any concerns. You may not be able to control your supervisor's communication skills, but you can continue to work on developing your own.

Q. How can I avoid feeling emotional when I receive criticism?

A. Try to detach from the criticism and conduct an inner conversation that starts with asking yourself, "What do I think about this comment?" Then, ask clarifying questions such as, "Can you explain that to me?" or "Will there be an opportunity for me to think about this before I respond?" Finally, take notes and always consider that there may be some useful information in even the most poorly delivered critique.