Dealing with Criticism

1. Offering Constructive Criticism

Consider the Content

- **Limit the criticism to one topic** – your respondent may be able to handle a single problem, but he/she could grow understandably defensive if you pile on one gripe after another

- **Make sure the criticism is accurate** – be absolutely sure you get the facts straight before speaking out because if even a small detail is out of line, the other person can argue about that

- **Define the problem clearly** – just list the facts, in enough detail so that the recipient knows exactly what you are talking about; don’t overwhelm the other person with an avalanche of complaints

- **Show how your criticism can benefit the recipient** – whenever possible describe the payoff for responding to your remarks

Consider the Sender

- **Choose the most credible critic** – make sure the message comes from whomever can deliver it most effectively

- **Make sure the criticism is appropriate to the critic’s role** – even accurate criticism is likely to be rejected if you have no business delivering it; for example, most comments about

Adler, R.B., & Elmhurst, J.M. (1996) *Communication at Work*
UNCG University Speaking Center (336)256-1346, speakingcenter.uncg.edu
someone’s personal life are out of place unless they affect a working relationship

Consider the Context

че Deliver remarks as a part of a positive relationship – let the other person know that your specific criticism doesn’t diminish your respect or appreciation for the person in other areas

че Accept partial responsibility for the problem – if possible, show that you may have contributed in some degree to the issue

че Accompany your criticism with an offer to help – offer to play a role in solving the problem at hand

Consider the Delivery

че Deliver criticism in a face-saving manner – make sure your remarks are delivered privately because criticizing someone in front of others is likely to trigger resentment and embarrassment

че Avoid sounding judgmental – don’t call names or use inflammatory labels, and don’t attribute motives to the other person; try to use “I” language instead of defense-arousing “you” statements

2. Responding Nondefensively to Criticism

че When people are faced with criticism, the two most common responses are “fight” and “flight”
Fighters react by counterattacking or blaming others

Flighters physically or mentally avoid critics by refusing to listen thoughtfully to the criticism, but it is seldom a satisfying way to deal with a relationship.

Alternative Methods

Seek More Information

Ask for examples for clarification – “You’ve said I’m not presenting a good attitude to customers; can you describe exactly what I’m doing?”

Guess about details of the criticism – even if the critic isn’t willing or able to offer specifics, you can guess: “Was it the way I handled Mr. Tyson when the bank sent back his check for insufficient funds?”

Paraphrase the critic – “When you say I have a bad attitude toward customers, it sounds like you think I’m not giving them the service they deserve.”

Ask what the critic wants – “How could I behave in a better way around customers?”

Agree with Criticism

Agree with the facts – sometimes you are confronted with facts that can’t be disputed and in these cases your best approach is probably to face up to the truth.

“Yes, I’m late; I have been late three times this week.”

Agreeing with the facts doesn’t mean that you are accepting responsibility for every imaginable fault.

UNCG University Speaking Center (336)256-1346, speakingcenter.uncg.edu
o **Agree with the critic’s perception** – after asking more information to find out the basis of the criticism, you can acknowledge how the other person might view you as being at fault

> “I understand why it might seem that<”

Agreeing with the perception doesn’t require you to accept your critic’s evaluation as accurate. Instead, it allows you to acknowledge the other person’s right to view the issue in a way that may differ from yours.