manageris

Receiving criticism

The challenge

Who can say they've never taken a criticism made by a colleague personally, or been hurt by negative feedback? The temptation to reject it out of hand is often very strong. However, reacting defensively often means that you miss the opportunity to learn from it. On the other hand, being receptive to criticism does not necessarily mean accepting it word for word. It is not easy to receive criticism well. Learning to do so is an essential skill in increasing your ability to progress.

Three good reflexes

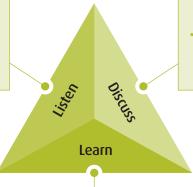
To take full advantage of a criticism, you need to repress your instinctive defensive reaction and consider it as an opportunity to learn.

Be open-minded and prepared to listen

- Accept criticism as being legitimate and normal: it is a typical way of initiating changes likely to improve work performance or relationships.
- Don't take criticism personally.
 Even if it is not always easy, try to "go beyond" what hurts you to be able to hear what could be a source of enrichment.
- However, know how to recognize when criticism goes beyond what is acceptable: bad faith, an insult or even lies do not make for constructive relationships.

Discuss criticism constructively

- Avoid replying in the heat of the moment: don't interrupt your correspondent (e.g.: taking notes may help you to step back), suggest discussing it later when emotions have died down, etc.
- Re-formulate the criticism to check that you have understood its meaning correctly.
 E.g.: "So, you think that... Is that right?"
- Don't hesitate exploring some points in more depth. E.g.: "Could you specify when I didn't seem very cooperative?"
- Always remember to thank your correspondent. By doing so you will show that you appreciate receiving sincere feedback and that you are open to such exchanges.



Keep your free will

Don't accept criticism at face value: it's up to you to decide what to do about it.

- Start by **validating the relevance** of the criticism. E.g.: Have you ever heard this kind of feedback before? Is the critic in a situation to be able to make an objective and qualified judgment? Does the criticism really concern your behavior, or are you the target of a bad mood brought on by difficulties for which you are not responsible? Don't hesitate to ask for another person's opinion.
- Learn to **ignore** aspects of the criticism that seem to you to be unfounded or of little importance, and **concentrate** on the points on which you think you should act.
- Don't content yourself with identifying the symptoms of a problem: look for the **causes** to find the appropriate solution. E.g.: You are criticized for not coaching your employees enough. Is it a problem of skills or lack of time due to an organizational problem?
- Depending on the quality of your relations with your correspondent, discuss the possible **solutions** together or ask the advice of a trusted colleague.