

Teaching Students to Accept Criticism

The purpose of this article is to teach our students how to accept criticism and learn from the experience. Most teens get defensive and shut down but learning from criticism can be a positive experience.

When helping students to enter the workplace, one of the items on their evaluations is often a question about accepting criticism. Accepting criticism from an employer means listening without becoming defensive, listening without giving excuses, listening to find out what they needed to do differently, and then making changes based on the boss's suggestions.

Often students take criticism as a personal attack and sometimes they need to learn to step back from the words and look at the big picture. They need to stop thinking that criticism means they are bad people and look for the behaviors that this criticism is addressing. It is alright to admit that criticism hurts our feelings because that is normal, but we need to move past the hurt feelings in order to learn from them.

Five steps to follow if you are criticized:

1. Listen without interrupting. Keep an open mind and really listen without thinking about why you did what you did. Do not take what they are saying as a personal attack, but as a way to make you better.
2. Restate the behavior that the person is addressing. Sometimes you might think they mean one thing, but they really mean something else.
3. Ask the person what you could do differently.
4. Restate what they said you should do differently, so you are sure that you understand.
5. Try this different way because it might be better.

Role-play different situations so students can practice these steps. Practice enables the student to be better prepared when the actual situation occurs. Use flash cards with criticisms on them. One student plays the boss and reads the card. The other student plays the employee and follows the steps. Then they switch roles.