

Patricia Fripp®

CRITICISM: How to Turn Gripes into Growth

Frippicism®: Nobody sees how you feel. Only how you act.

Criticism: How to Turn Gripes into Growth

Criticism, also known as feedback, can help us improve our presentation skills.

No one enjoys being criticized, but if you want to succeed, you must overcome your natural instincts and actively seek out feedback, good and bad.

After years as a professional speaker, I understand. Sometimes I face my critics, also known as my audiences, every week. Not only do they rate me with their applause and laughter (or lack thereof), but frequently they're also asked to complete written evaluations for the meeting planners. Naturally, all speakers want their meeting planners to look like heroes, so we do everything possible to keep in top form.

For me, this means that I embrace and value feedback. Therefore, I studied those evals and listened to comments, no matter how off the mark they seemed. Even though I've been an executive speech coach and a professional speaker for decades, I still ask professional peers to be my toughest critics and give their feedback.

If you want to improve, you must develop a positive, flexible, and creative attitude toward feedback. Here are eight practical ways to make criticism a plus and harness the power of feedback for success.

1. Diffuse attacks.

To give yourself breathing room, turn critical attacks into information exchanges. The natural human reaction is to become defensive and list reasons why the comment is untrue. This quickly locks both sides into fixed adversarial positions, and it is hard to retreat. Break the cycle. As difficult as it may be, respond to negative criticism by agreeing that it may be correct. Then ask for specific details, enlisting the critic as your ally to improve the situation. You'll get useful feedback, both negative and positive.

2. Use the Olympic scoring rule.

Throughout your life, you'll get a range of commentary on how you're doing. Discard your highest and

lowest ratings. Bill Gove, the first president of the National Speakers Association, told speakers, "In any audience, ignore the ten percent who think you walk on water and the ten percent who think you are no good at all. Then, listen to the middle eighty percent."

3. Consider the source.

Do your critics have the right background and experience to judge your work accurately? Are they in a position to give you valuable input? You can't change to satisfy everyone. In my career, I've been given really good advice and really bad advice. The key is to know which is which and act accordingly.

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4. Separate intent from content.

Negative comments about our actions, appearance, or attitudes automatically seem like a personal attack, but the commenter may have good intentions. Recognize that different people have different personality styles and communication skills. They may mean to help, but they deliver negative comments in a way that is hard to process and accept. On the other hand, a harsh critic often provides valuable insights. Decide that it is never productive to take comments personally.

5. Seek out criticism.

Some jobs offer regular job performance evaluations to give employees feedback. If you don't have such a program, still ask for personal feedback, from both your manager and those you manage. One successful executive I worked with sits down on a regular basis with his staff and asks, "As your manager, what am I doing well? What would you like for me to do more of? What should I do less of or stop doing?"

Recruit your customers, partners, manager, and coworkers as allies by asking them to be your critics. Don't be defensive. Keep your clients happy by being as eager to please them as your competitors are. You are still selling after the sale. It won't be long before a rival asks them, "What do you want that your current supplier isn't providing?" Ask that question first. Seek out the criticism before your competitor does!

"When a customer offers a criticism," strategy consultant Bob Treadway advises, "invite them to be specific." If they say, "This delivery should have come sooner," ask them in a genuinely friendly tone, "How much sooner, specifically, would you like it?" If they say, "You could have done a better follow-up," say, "Tell me exactly how you'd like us to follow up in the future."

Treadway recommends asking open-ended questions that can't be answered with yes or no. "How could we help you with that?" Or, "What improvements would you like to see?" Then summarize what they have said: "It sounds like we could do a better job if . . ."

6. Feed back your feedback.

Paraphrasing what you've just been told helps to eliminate misunderstandings, honors and acknowledges the criticism, and compels you to really listen. "Nothing," Treadway says, "demonstrates better to a client, boss, or spouse

that you have heard them than paraphrasing their statements." It also helps you filter out and focus on useful information.

7. Protect yourself.

We're not always in shape to cope with negative comments. It's appropriate to give people feedback on the best time and way to offer you feedback.

People learn to treat you the way you teach them to treat you. "Dear Abby" once ran a letter from a slender, attractive woman whose mother never failed to remind her of how fat and unattractive she had been as a teenager. Dear Abby suggested that she say, "Mother, let's not discuss that anymore." So simple, yet so hard to withdraw permission after years of negativity.

It's your job to communicate that you will respond better if you can receive the criticism in a different way, time, or place.

8. Don't expect everyone to love you.

Praise and approval are wonderful. We all thrive on it, but we need a dose of reality now and then. Just because people notice imperfections and point them out doesn't make them your enemies. If you've armed yourself with a positive attitude toward criticism, they are going to be your best friends.

Patricia Fripp®, CSP, CPAE is a Hall of Fame keynote speaker, executive speech coach, sales presentation skills consultant, and online learning expert. In Ms. Fripp's career, she has delivered over 3,500 presentations, as well as hundreds of virtual presentations. Companies hire Patricia to help them drive more business by polishing their sales conversations and presentations and to help leaders inspire action and build commitment through their words. Clients of her speech coaching include corporate leaders, technical and sales professionals, and seasoned professional speakers. Her innovative online learning platform—*FrippVT® Powerful, Persuasive Presentations*—has users worldwide.

Meetings and Conventions magazine named her "One of the 10 most electrifying speakers in North America." *Kiplinger's Personal Finance* wrote, "Learning presentation skills from Patricia Fripp is one of the best ways to invest in you." Patricia's latest books are *How's That Presentation Coming Along?* and *Deliver Unforgettable Presentations*. She is a two-time Cicero Speechwriting Award winner.



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