

Handling Workplace Criticism

by **Steven D Huff**

According to a story that appeared in the St. Louis Post Dispatch, umpire Bill Guthrie was working an afternoon baseball game. The visiting team catcher made it his business to protest every call made by the umpire. Guthrie endured the heckling for three innings before it got the best of him. In the fourth inning, when the catcher started to complain, Guthrie promptly stopped him. "Son," he said gently, "you've been a big help to me calling balls and strikes, and I appreciate it. But I think I've got the hang of it now. So I'm going to ask you to go to the clubhouse and show them how to take a shower."

Often people in the workplace try to be the expert at everything and find it necessary to criticize the work of others. Learning to deal with critical or difficult people is one of the most important skills needed for success in business. So, here are several important lessons to be learned when receiving criticism:

- **Realize You Can't Please Everyone** - Almost everyone has had a co-worker who loved to blurt out criticism to others. They are like Lucy, of the Peanuts cartoon, who is renowned for her critical spirit. In defense of it, she once said, "I just think I have a knack for seeing other people's faults." Remember, in the words of Zig Ziglar, "Some people find fault like there was a reward for it!"
- **Learn Humility** - Never forget the importance of humility when facing harsh criticism. Pride often inhibits our ability to learn and respond properly when we face criticism. Someone said it this way, "The trouble with most of us is that we would rather be ruined by praise than saved by criticism."
- **Give A Fair hearing To Criticism** - Recognize that it is possible to listen to criticism when it comes from someone who is hostile to you, without necessarily agreeing with them. Winston Churchill approached it this way. He said, "I do not resent criticism even when, for the sake of emphasis, it parts for the time with reality." If you don't give a fair hearing to all criticism, you'll miss the opportunity to learn when the criticism is valid.
- **Never Retaliate** - One of Dale Carnegie's famous sayings is: "Any fool can criticize, condemn and complain--and most fools do." Recognize critics for what they often are: fools. Just don't join their ranks by making the mistake of retaliation. Whether the criticism is true or not, don't lower yourself to their level by "getting back" at them.
- **Ask The Right Questions** - We not only learn by asking: "What is the worst that could happen to me?" You also learn by asking: "What is the best that can redeem this situation?" How can you learn and improve from the criticism? Newsman David Brinkley spoke about learning from our critics when he said, "A successful man is one who can lay a firm foundation with the bricks that others throw at him."