LEADERSHIP

Five Things I Know About Responding to Criticism: *Curious, Not Defensive*

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THE INFLUENCE GURU

Criticism is an opportunity to learn, not a punishment. Five ways to turn it to your benefit.

Criticism can be painful. We often treat it as if it were a form of punishment instead of an opportunity to learn. We may focus on the other's intentions rather than on how we could take advantage of the opportunity. Here are a few suggestions for using it well.

1 Choose to be curious rather than defensive.

Defensiveness creates a barrier to learning. Instead, use self-talk to encourage a "detective mindset." "Isn't that interesting. Hmmm. I wonder why he/she would say that?"

2 Use active listening.

Demonstrate your interest in and respect for the other's opinion by summarizing it in a neutral way. "So, from your point of view…" You're not agreeing, but letting the other know that you've heard what she or he had to say.

3 Assume good intentions.

Regardless of whether the statement was originally meant to be helpful, interpreting it that way can reframe the situation in a way that makes both parties look good. "I appreciate your pointing that out. I wasn't aware of the impact that it could have…"

4 Ask for more.

Invite the other person to give you examples – not to prove anything, but to help you understand the criticism. Enlist the other in helping you to improve. "What might work better in the future?"

5 **Express appreciation.**

Again, even if the other person wasn't intending to do you a favor, let him or her know that the criticism was helpful. If you take this attitude, the experience will, in fact, be valuable and you will have turned the situation to your benefit.

Choose to be curious rather than defensive.

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Founder of **The Influence Guru**, Kim Barnes is a coach, facilitator, and author with more than forty years of experience in leadership, influence, and organization development. She was a founder and, for many years, CEO of Barnes & Conti Associates, and developed or co-developed programs including *Exercising Influence*, *Inspirational Leadership*, *Intelligent Risk-Taking*, *Consulting on the Inside*, and *Managing Innovation*. She is the author of six books, including *Exercising Influence* (Wiley) and *Building Better Ideas* (Berrett-Koehler). She works with enterprise companies, government agencies, small businesses, and individuals from the San Francisco Bay Area.

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