Give Constructive Criticism

If we review the first seven tools, we have focused on having an agreeable conversation with another person. By paying attention, listening, being inclusive, being agreeable, showing respect we are working hard to hear the other person and considering thoughtfully what is said. Further we do not gossip about something negative or private about them and we make amends by apologizing when we have in some way misacted. Yet we know that no matter how well we practice using these tools, we are going to have conversations where we disagree, where we are not pleased with an action by another person, where we are concerned about another person’s welfare, where we are see one is not performing as necessary, and where we are not able to respond as the person would want.

Civility does not mean that we are to then avoid these conversations and stick to the pleasant. It is crucial that we be true to ourselves. While following the first seven tools we are allowing ourselves to fully expand to see the largest picture that we can. Still that includes our experiences, our views, our values, our culture, and our knowledge. Therefore it is just as important that we allow ourselves to be heard by another who also has the same tools as ourselves. We owe to them and ourselves to be honest and express an opposing point of view. Our intention would be the same as theirs in expressing a view is to help.

With all these things in mind we truly need to look at “give constructive criticism” from both points of view- we will be giving feedback to another person in some of our conversations, but will also be the recipient of the same from others. For us to continue communicating in a civil manner, we need to be able listen civilly to what the person is trying to tell us about ourselves.

The critical ingredient is intend. We have to answer the Question why do I want to have this conversation or why does this person want to have this conversation with me. The only acceptable answer is that you want to be of help to the other person. This may mean that you believe that you want to expand the person’s view of an issue by sharing the opposing side, you are seeing that the person is having a problem and you want to provide feedback, suggestions, or be solution oriented, or you have an opportunity to be a change agent. Often times these situations arouse your emotions such as anger, hurt, disappointment, frustration, irritation, etc. It is crucial that you work through your emotions. First you have to be sure that your real intent is to help not hurt in some way because of your emotions. Secondly when you have this conversation not only your words must say that you care and when to help, but also your body language. If your words and body do not match, you will not be heard, the person will key in on the body and become defensive. If you are clear that you want to help and can be calm and caring, you are ready to have this conversation.

You need to choose a good time and place. This is to be a private conversation, no one else needs to hear it, and you want enough time to say what you want and allow the person to respond. It is best to approach this conversation in a positive manner. You want to acknowledge positives to begin with. Next you will then bring up the specific problem or concern in an objective manner. While there sometimes may be a number of these, address one specific issue in this one conversation. Remember: how you handle this conversation can lead to further good conversations in the future. You will offer some specific solutions. Here there may be some discussion. Finally end the conversation on a positive note.

When you are a receiver, you need to first hear, doing that by using those civility tools. Note that the body language says that this person cares about me and what they say may be credible. You may need to clarify. It is best not to counter, but to be sure that you understand what is being said. Finally give yourself a break. You are human and not perfect. There are always ways to improve and grow. This person wants to help me do just that.

These conversations will be a struggle at first, but the more you do, the sooner we will be a civil society.

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