Only Give Constructive Criticism

To begin to be able to use this tool we need to fully understand the definition of criticism. My dictionary states that the word critique is the art of evaluating or analyzing with knowledge and propriety, and the word criticize is to consider the merits and demerits of and judge accordingly. To me this means that in general criticism is primarily left to experts in a specific field who are paid to comment. It seems to me that in today’s world we have critics about any subject- food, sports, books, movies, political, restaurants, places to live, environment, and fashion. Also we hear it constantly. Frankly if it is not of the positive nature, it is certainly not constructive.

Most of our conversation with others is really not in the criticism arena. Half the time we are listening to another’s point of view. The other half is our expressing our own point a view. For a civil conversation, neither is criticizing the other’s view. One side is explained and then the other. Questions for further understanding are asked. We can acknowledge what we agree on and accept that there remain differences in our opinions.

There are instances when we do provide criticism. Some easy examples are parent/child, teacher/student, coach/player, and employer/employee. A person of knowledges is training one without. Unfortunately that is usually not our only relationship with the person and our emotions get involved. We can become angry frustrated, disappointed, and ashamed for example. All of which will interfere with providing constructive criticism. First it is necessary that you rid yourself of any of these complicating emotions as they are only disruptive to being constructive. Sometimes that means that you have to step away from the situation for a while. One coach after a player made a mistake on the field, had the player come out of the game and sit down. Then an assistant coach provided constructive criticism. It is knowledge that you are departing and not a personal opinion of the person.

A second situation is when you are asked by the person to provide criticism. This person values your opinion and wants to hear the truth from you. The easiest of these to respond to are when the subject is something that you have had knowledge on. Then you can provide the facts as you know them. Often the request is more of a subjective nature. Now there is more sensitivity involved and need to be more cautious. Here you need to be sensitive to the emotions of the person asking as well as your own tastes. A good example is a recent “Big Bang” episode. Amy was choosing her wedding dress. She had tried on several with one that was the most attractive on her. Then there was a dress that you could tell that she thought was the one. While you knew that you would never choose it, this was the dress that would make her wedding. Your truth is to tell her that you see this is the dress she wants and will make her the happiest.

A third situation is when you see that someone close to you is making a serious mistake and does not seem aware. You do not want them to get hurt. As this is the most difficult, you need to approach the subject carefully. I may be best to be clear about what they are doing that can be harmful to them. At the same time to remind yourself of all that you know about the person to not only better understand how they have gotten there, their thinking process, their strengths, the vulnerability, and the safest place to begin to discuss the situation in hopes that they can hear you. You may not always be successful the first time. Then you may have to back off and try again another time.

A final word. Others have a right to make choices and if they are aware of the possible results, let it be. They may come to you for help or may make another choice.

Use constructive criticism wisely.

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