

Accepting Negative Feedback in the Workplace

Accepting negative feedback gracefully and gratefully is an admirable skill. Think of it as an uncomfortable way to learn more about yourself and your impact on others. It takes both practice and patience to avoid a defensive response to criticism. To accept feedback graciously:



- Listen without interrupting. Look directly at the person. If you hear something you don't agree with, indicate, "That's interesting," but wait to discuss it. Breathing deeply may help keep you focused.
 - Be willing to hear what is being said without suggesting your supervisor is to blame for the issues.
 - Ask questions to clarify exactly what you did incorrectly, but don't make excuses or dispute the statements at this time. If your supervisor says you have "a bad attitude" ask for specific examples.
- Recognize the courage it took your supervisor to give you the feedback. Thank him or her sincerely with words such as, "You have really given me something to think about" or "Thanks for taking the time to talk with me."
 - If asked, summarize your understanding of the issues and how your supervisor wants you to change your actions.
 - If you feel emotionally able to discuss the issues calmly, state your thoughts in a non-accusatory manner. It may help to admit that, "It's not easy to hear this criticism." If you find some truth to the criticism, take ownership of your behavior. If you feel the criticism is unfair due to timing or expectations, indicate that, but avoid disputing the criticism itself. Ask for specific suggestions to change your behavior.
 - If you feel the issues are especially volatile, ask if you can continue the discussion in a day or so. Write down all you remember of the feedback, using your supervisor's exact words when possible. After a day, re-read your notes. Ignore any inflammatory phrases and focus on the basic message when you meet again. Ask what changes your supervisor recommends to improve your performance.
 - Your ability to accept and learn from negative feedback without becoming antagonistic will be critical to showing your supervisor that you can transform yourself. If you spend your time being defensive, you are doing yourself a disservice. You want, instead, to be viewed as a responsible employee who is willing and able to modify your behavior to benefit the organization.

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