

CRITICISM

Who needs it?

By Larissa Castelino

“To bear defect with dignity, to accept criticism with poise, to receive honours with humility – these are marks of maturity and graciousness”

There is a famous story told about Gautam Buddha. One day, while preaching, Buddha was interrupted by an angry man, who began showering him with abusive words. Buddha waited calmly for his critic to finish, and then asked him, “Tell me sir, if a man offered a gift to someone but the gift was declined, to whom would the gift then belong?” “To the one who offered it,” the man replied. “Well, then, Buddha declared, “I decline to accept your gift of abuse and request that you keep it for yourself.” This little story reflects in entirety, the message of this article. All of us are sure to have faced criticism in one form or another in our lives. When reacting to criticism about ourselves, each of us behaves differently:

Sometimes we feel bad about it, sometimes we cry, sometimes we are very angry, sometimes we try to hide, sometimes we feel like getting back, sometimes we brood and think. But there are a few who forget it in a blink! Buddha was one of the few who smiled and faced criticism boldly. If we take a look at the different religions of the world, we will notice that all prophets initially faced extremely harsh criticism about their work. This is also the case with many national leaders, business monarch, and the likes. In more ways than one, their ability to accept and deal with criticism is what shows their greatness.

So, what ‘the big deal about criticism? Do you resent, or dread, criticism?

Well, for many of us, criticism is an ego-deflator, a confidence-buster, something that eats away our belief in ourselves. When we face criticism frequently we begin to feel hurt, angry, dejected, depressed, guilty or just plainly helpless. Quite often, we come across people who fail to notice the good things we do, the good qualities we have, the talents we have. Yet, they are the first to ‘catch us’ when we make a mistake, or fail at a responsibility. Meeting many such people in life changes our view of the world, and makes us wonder.... “What do they have against us” “Will anything ever please them?” “Why can’t people accept us the way we are?” “Why don’t people appreciate us when we deserve it?”

Well there are no simple answers to these questions.

Sometimes, people who are overly critical of others are actually very insecure about themselves. Maybe they faced criticism all through their lives and do not even know how to pass on praise. Some others may feel that if they appreciate you, then you will “have your head in the skies” and will not

'need' them in your life any more. Still others may feel that if they praise you, it will help you improve and get better, and that you will move far ahead of them in life. Whatever the reason may be, criticism does affect each one of us, and we must be able to know when to accept it and learn from it, and when to reject it like Gautam Buddha did.

Let us look at few different forms in which criticism confronts us:

Cr = ***Caring Reminders***

It = ***Important Truths***

IC = ***Insightful Comments***

IS = ***Ideological Statements***

M = ***Misunderstandings***

Caring Reminders: Sometimes, the people we love or who love us make statements like, “Don’t forget to wash your clothes this weekend” or “Why is it that you seem to be partying more than studying?” or “You are always out late and never come home on time.” These kinds of statements, that often sound like criticism or nagging are actually “caring reminders” that come from a spirit of love, which may not sound very loving. We often hear them from parents, relatives, siblings, peers, teachers and so on. So, when you understand that they come from a spirit of love and concern for you, treat them lovingly and not with anger.

Important Truths: Very often, through criticism, people may tell us things about ourselves that we may not be aware of. For example, “Don’t ever call me out for a date again, coz you are always late and I have to wait around and waste my time” or “Do you notice that you always complain about anything and everything?” or “How do you expect others to value you when you keep taking them for granted?” these are the kinds of statements that may sound liked ‘criticism’ to you; however, looking at the other side of the coin, they are important revelations of what others think about us. When you hear statements like these, sit back and reflect on them. Ask yourself “Is this really true about me?” “Am I really late on most occasions? “Do I crib and gripe about my life frequently?” “Do I take people for granted and use them for my own gains?” Be truthful in these reflections – if you realize that they are true about you, be open to accept them and consciously try to make some constructive changes in your behavior. If, after reflecting, you feel that they are not true about you, put them aside and try to be more observant about your actions in the future.

Insightful Comments: Like Important Truths, people may make insightful comments about your behaviour. Like, for instance, “You know Reshma, I think your constant fear of speaking in front of an audience is because you just haven’t made the effort to practice regularly” or, “You are a real cry-

baby and extremely cranky, but maybe that comes from you taking everything too personally” or “Everything in the world doesn’t revolve only around you.” Sometimes, it is comments like these that give us an insight on some very basic facts about ourselves and the world. Some people may reveal their insights about us, to us, in very unassuming ways. It is important to be able to ‘catch’ these insights and dwell on them so that they act as learning tool for us to improve.

Ideological Statements: Quite often, we may hear statements like, “I wish you would be more organized in your work. You are the king of untidiness” or “You should really go and cut your hair before it begins to cover your face” or “You never seem to spend any time with your family, and they will soon forget who you are.” These are usually ‘extreme’ opinions or rather; they are put in a ‘hyperbolic’ (exaggerated) fashion just so that you pay more attention to them. Sometimes, the people who say them may sound sarcastic or mocking or ridiculing and it is up to you to try and make the best of the information they give you.

Misunderstandings: Sometimes, criticism comes from the simple fact that a person may have misunderstood you, what you said or what you did. If this is the case you can clarify the misunderstanding and approach the person with an attitude of forgiveness for the mistake.

Now that we have seen how criticism may not be what it seems to be let’s look at a few tips you could use to deal with it in your everyday life:

1 Most people criticize your ‘behaviour’ not ‘you. So don’t get defensive and try to justify yourself. Just take some time cool down go home think about what was said try to understand why the person said it reflect and see if it applies to you or your life and if so can you use it as a motivator to change a particular behaviour. If not let it go. Don’t think about it again.

2 Sometimes, it’s not about you. When people make insulting or vicious remarks, it’s a reflection of what’s going on inside of them. You are simply the target at the moment. So, if you know that it is coming from a feeling of jealousy, insecurity or just vindictiveness be wise and overlook it.

3 Give what you would like to receive. If you do not like being criticized, others also resent it. So before you criticize anyone think twice. The world runs on a principle of balance. What you give unto others is what will come back to you. When giving feedback to others, do it with a spirit of caring and politeness. On a lighter note here is a small story that will show you how it is important to be polite in whatever you say.

King Louis XIV once solicited Nicolas Boileau’s opinion of several poems which he had composed. Though hardly impressed with the king’s poetry, Boileau, a very honest man, was in a tight spot what

to say... “Sire, nothing is impossible for Your Majesty,” Boileau entered tactfully. “Your Majesty has set out to write bad verse – and has succeeded!”

4 Always bear in mind that each person is different and therefore each person looks at the world differently. So before being quick to judge others make sure you look into yourself. One little anecdote narrated to me recently will probably reflect what I am trying to say; A mother, annoyed by her son’s constant pestering invented a game for him to play. She cut up a map of the world and gave him the pieces to put back together again, thinking it would take him hours, if he ever managed it. Ten minutes later he returned with the completed map. When she asked him how he had done it so quickly he said “There is a picture of a woman on the back and when I put her together on its own.”

As a parting line I’d like to leave you all with this thought;

The world keeps putting pebbles in your shoes. As the pebbles increase, walking along becomes more and more uncomfortable. It is at these times that you wish you knew someone who could come along, and take a few pebbles out. In the lives of others, who will you be? The pebble-putter or the pebble- remover? The choice is yours!