



worldoutreach
SCHOOL OF LEADERSHIP

SERIES TWO

MODULE SIX: MANAGING CRITICISM



Outline Session 1 - 2

1. Managing criticism (Part 1)
2. Managing criticism (Part 2)

SESSION ONE: MANAGING CRITICISM (PART ONE)

Sadly, sometimes *critical* words are spoken about or to a leader. How, then, can a leader develop a capacity for handling the inevitability of criticism?

1. Distinguish between positive and negative criticism

Positive criticism comes from rightly motivated and appropriate sources – people who have a right or a responsibility to say things to us. The motive of positive criticism is love, correction, instruction or restoration.

Here are some examples of people who have a right or responsibility to make positive criticism:

- Parents (Ephesians 6:4; Proverbs 6:20)
- Leaders (2 Timothy 3:16; 1 Corinthians 4:14; 2 Timothy 2:14; Titus 3:10)
- Faithful friends (Proverbs 27:6)
- Mature and wise believers (Colossians 3:16; cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:14; 2 Thessalonians 3:15)

Scripture is very clear on the virtues of listening and responding to positive criticism (Psalm 141:5; Proverbs 15:31; 12:1).

Negative criticism comes from malicious, ignorant, unwarranted or unjustified sources. The root of negative criticism is not love but often ignorance, hypocrisy, jealousy, cynicism or mistrust. Leaders need to be particularly aware of listening to people with a critical spirit.

2. Deal with it internally

A second way to deal with criticism is to process it internally. As well as being initially hurtful, criticism can have a lasting and damaging effect within our lives unless we process it by following these steps:

A. By checking our motive

By searching our heart in this way, we're more likely to discover our motive.

B. By extracting any elements of truth

Some criticism levelled at us may be legitimate, valid and accurate. 'It is not *who* is right, but *what* is right.'

C. By keeping a right spirit toward those who initiate the criticism

Here are some practical suggestions for how to do this:

- Pray until the effect of the critic's words lifts, then pray for the critic (remember Matthew 5:43-48)



- Don't let their words germinate (take root) in your heart, otherwise they will fester and affect your thinking, relationships and judgment
- Carefully censor your words and thoughts about the person who instituted the criticism, otherwise we're in danger of judging



SESSION TWO: MANAGING CRITICISM (PART TWO)

2. Deal with it internally (continued)

D. By forgiving the person

Leaders need to maintain a forgiving spirit because it is the very spirit of Christ. Jesus warned of the dangers of not forgiving (Matthew 6:14-15). Paul encouraged the Ephesian and Colossian believers to forgive others on the basis of God's unconditional forgiveness of all our sins in Christ (Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13). Forgiveness is relinquishing our right to hurt others for hurting us. Leaders must not take revenge or retaliate (Romans 12:17-21; cf. 1 Peter 3:9).

E. By staying on top of our emotional and spiritual state

When criticised or hurt by people, stay strong in the Lord. Endure, persevere and stand firm. Pray and ask God for inner strength (Ephesians 3:16).

3. Discern and deal with the true source

A third way to handle criticism is for leaders to discern and deal with its *true* source and motivation. Essentially, there are two *sources* of criticism: human and demonic.

Due to the spiritual nature of a leader's work in Christian ministry, there may be a satanic origin in some criticism. If we discern this is the case, we must not initially react to the person, but resist the devil. For this principle, remember Peter taking Jesus aside and rebuking him for mentioning his death. Jesus, however, '*...turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me Satan! You are a stumbling block to me..."*' (Matthew 16:23).

Importantly, most criticism is not from the devil. Frequently, criticism stems from misunderstanding, misinterpretation or misinformation. In this case, it would be wise to address the issues (in a measured way) and not react.

4. Respond don't react

A fourth way to handle criticism is to *respond*, but not *react* to the critic. There is a fundamental difference between responding and reacting. Responding is measured, thoughtful and demonstrates maturity, whereas reacting is emotional, erratic and reveals immaturity. Responding brings the possibility of resolution and reconciliation, whereas reacting often produces deeper resistance and distance.

Wherever possible and practical, it is always wise to speak face to face, person to person through a phone call or personal visit. Responses via social media, mail or email are not as effective because they often don't reveal the heart, facial expressions, or the tone of voice, and can be open to misinterpretation. Seek to be motivated by love in all you do and say to the person. Endeavour to maintain or restore relationships throughout the whole process of working through the criticism. Always be respectful, patient and courteous in your dealings



with them. Listen patiently. Respond thoughtfully. If there is an impasse, 'agree to disagree'. Always pray together at the end of the discussion.

By way of summary, leadership has both highs and lows. One of the lows is handling the negativities of leadership, in which criticism features prominently. Criticism can be hurtful, so it needs to be internally processed so it has no lasting effect. Keeping a right spirit and a forgiving heart are keys to handling criticism. A measured and thoughtful response to criticism, rather than an erratic and emotional reaction produces a much better result.

