

Overcoming Defensive Reactions

It's natural to want to react defensively to criticism. You may desire to make a nasty comment, give an excuse, or blame someone else. You may become so upset or embarrassed that you mentally pull away or sulk.

These reactions keep you from learning how to improve. To climb the career ladder, you must control your defensiveness:

- Try not to tense up. Keep your hands, stomach, shoulders, and face relaxed.
- Suspend judgment. Don't jump to conclusions about whether the criticism was right or wrong.

Feedback and criticism

At work, you will get plenty of feedback. If you're the defensive type, you may wrongly think all feedback is criticism. Feedback typically comes in these forms:

- Mistakes that are pointed out
- Requests for changes or corrections
- Warnings about future behavior

If you become defensive when you receive feedback, you're headed for a life of stress and frustration. You may also damage your health, as tension from stress can lead to stomach problems, high blood pressure, and other ailments.



Ego and Self-Esteem

Your ego is the part of your mind that takes pride in yourself and gives you a sense of self-esteem. It's your ego that hurts when someone criticizes you. You need to make a conscious effort to set aside your ego and accept criticism.

Here's how you can put ego aside:

- Don't assume that feedback means criticism.
- Realize criticism is about the work result, not about you personally.
- Think of criticism as feedback that can help you improve.

Action: Analyze yourself. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the lowest, how defensive are you? What actions can you take to overcome your defensiveness?

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