# BEST PRACTICE
## Providing Constructive Criticism

In giving constructive criticism, you should incorporate the following tactics:

- **Do it Privately**
  Criticism should be given on a <u>one-on-one basis</u>. Only the individual being criticized should be aware that criticism is occurring. It is best done in a <u>private location</u>. Many times it is more effective if it is done in a neutral location, for example, in a conference room or while taking someone to lunch, rather than in the boss' office.

- **Have the Facts**
  General statements of undesired performance are not very helpful. For example, statements such as "That proposal is not clear, fix it" or "Your program does not make best use of the language or technology" leave people feeling confused and helpless.
  Before criticizing someone's performance, <u>have specific items that are causing the deficiency or undesirable performance</u>.

- **Be Prepared to Help the Worker Improve His Performance**
  It is not good enough to ask the worker to "fix it." You must be prepared to help fix it. <u>Be prepared to train the subordinate in the area of deficiency</u>. For example, in a proposal, indicate that a return-on-investment calculation was not made; or if a program failed to use the language properly, state specifically how it should and should not be used. You should not leave an individual feeling that they have performed poorly or unsure as to how to correct that performance.

- **Be Specific on Expectations**
  <u>Be sure your subordinate knows exactly what you expect from him</u> or her now and in the future. Your expectations should be as clear as possible so there can be no confusion. Again, in a proposal, indicate that you expect a return-on-investment calculation included in all proposals. Most people will try to do what they are expected to do—if they know what those expectations are.

- **Follow a Specific Process in Giving Criticism**
  The specific process that is recommended is:

  - **State the positive first**. Before criticizing indicate what you like about their performance. Again, be as specific as possible in the things you like.

  - **Indicate the deficiencies with products or services produced by the individual**. Never criticize the individual, only the work performed by the individual. For example, never indicate that an individual is disorganized; indicate that a report is disorganized. People can accept criticism of their products and services; they have great difficulty when you attack their personal work ethic.

  - **Get agreement that there is a problem**. The individual being criticized must agree there is a problem before proper corrective action can be taken. Avoid accepting agreement just because you are the boss; probe the need for improvement with the subordinate until you actually feel there is agreement that improvement can be achieved. For example, if you believe a report or program is disorganized, get agreement from the individual on specifically why it might be disorganized.

  - **Ask the subordinate for advice on how to improve their performance**. Always try to get the employee to propose what needs to be done. If the employee's suggestion is consistent with what you have decided is a realistic method of improvement, you have finished the process.

  - **If the subordinate is unable to solve the problem, suggest the course of action** that you had determined before performing the actual criticism.

  - **Make a specific "contract" regarding what will happen after the session**. Be very specific in what you expect, when and where you expect it. If the employee is uncertain how to do it, the "contract" should include your participation, as a vehicle to ensure what will happen.

- One last recommendation for criticism:
  - **Avoid making threats** about what will happen if the performance does not change. This will not cause any positive behavior change to occur and normally produces negative behavior. Leave the individual with the assumption that he or she has the capability for improvement, and that you know he or she will improve.

**References**

Guide – CSTE Common Body Of Knowledge, V6.1