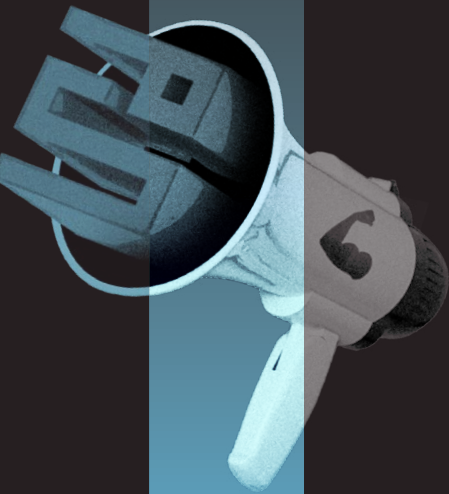


How to Handle Tough Feedback.

To create incubators of innovation where divergent thinking, creative abrasion, and constructive dissent thrive, we must learn not only to tolerate, but actually invite and welcome constructive feedback. This may feel like an unnatural act at first, but it's a skill you can develop. The key is to disable your defensive and dismissive tendencies and let go of your pride of authorship, so you can see the value of what's being offered.

- 1. Evaluate the source and intent.** If the source is credible and the intent is helpful, remind yourself that negative feedback is not a referendum on your value as a human being. Nor is it an attack on your identity or dignity. In fact, if the negative feedback comes from a quality source with genuine intent, you take a massive risk if you ignore or dismiss it.
- 2. Partially detach emotionally.** You can't effectively process otherwise. Learn to regulate your emotional response enough to remove your pride of authorship. Be proud of what you've brought to the table, then let others build on it (or even tear it down). You're human, so completely detaching emotionally is impossible, but there is value in learning to trade authorship for enhancement.
- 3. Find the merit to the argument.** Someone who takes the time to offer you specific, honest feedback wouldn't normally waste your time with throw-away comments of no value. Show them that you value their time and find their argument's reasoning and merit. Maybe they noticed something that you missed.
- 4. Ask questions to understand, not defend or deflect.** Good and thoughtful questions can make the difference between perceiving feedback as well-intentioned and constructive instead of as harsh criticism. Turn constructive criticism into a dialogue: identify the problems involved, ask for clarification, and brainstorm together so that you can find solutions.
- 5. Be your own loyal opposition.** Tell yourself your argument, then deconstruct it. What are its weaknesses? What doesn't make sense? What could go wrong? This exercise will help feedback become a crucial part of your process instead of a roadblock in the way of progress.
- 6. Interpret your defensiveness.** Is it emotional or intellectual? Is it built on feelings or strong evidence and logic? If your defensiveness is primarily emotional, take a step back and look at the whole picture. Choose to process constructive criticism with logic, not emotion.
- 7. Compare expectations.** Do others expect something different than you? If so, this will be reflected in their feedback. A lack of clear expectations does not mean failure or incompetence, but it does provide an opportunity to try again. Clarify expectations and iterate where necessary.



Note #27