



# THE 8 STAGES OF USING NEGATIVE FEEDBACK TO BETTER YOUR BUSINESS

While none of us like to be criticized, we must recognize that negative feedback, like failure, presents unique and valuable opportunities to better ourselves and our businesses. This is your guide for dealing with critiques in a way that benefits your business, your life, and your relationships.



## ONE: CURB THE KNEEJERK REACTIONS

First things first: acknowledge and control your emotional response. No one likes being criticized or called out, particularly for something as important as your business leadership. Here's the first step: do not listen to your instincts. They will tell you to ignore what is being said or to shoot the proverbial messenger. Not only does this rob you of the ability to make something productive out of an unfortunate turn, but it can actively damage your reputation.

Hold off on a response until you can think through the feedback with a clear head and greater objectivity.

## TWO: FILTER FEEDBACK

Not every critique you receive will be constructive or valid. On one level, you must be able to recognize when someone has a real point or when they're just blowing smoke. Unfortunately, that happens. Accept criticism from actual clients, employees, and customers. Not naysayers who have no stake in your business. There are people who will complain just to complain and recognizing who has an axe

to grind or a genuine concern can be tough. With that said, be careful of outright dismissing negative comments.

## THREE: READ BETWEEN THE LINES

With that said, not every rude, mean, or offensive critique is unconstructive. After you've controlled your initial reaction, revisit what has been said. Even if the message was badly delivered, there still may be kernels of truth to it. Your goal is not to teach anyone the finer points of etiquette – it is to be a responsible and accountable business owner. Avoid the impulse to fight fire with fire. Instead, put the fire out!

## FOUR: CONTEMPLATE AND PLAN

Once you've successfully received feedback and moved beyond your initial, emotional response, it's time to deal with things. Introspection is the leader's most valuable tool for forward progress. Allow critiques to be the catalyst for self-discovery and improvement. Once you've identified where you or your business is flawed or has failed the client/employee/customer, you can develop a game plan for rectifying the problem.

## FIVE: CHOOSE YOUR RESPONSE

You don't always have to verbally respond to criticism. The bigger you get, the more exhausting and time-consuming the task will be. However, you still must choose how you will respond. Invalid criticism can simply be ignored while legitimate negative feedback can be responded to by word, deed, or both.

The key is to already have your plan in place for developing solutions and improvements. Apologies are empty if you don't intend to make changes.



## SIX: KEEP YOUR WORD

Once you've outlined and explained what you're going to do in response to negative feedback, actually do it. Explore different options, experiment with potential solutions, and strive to do and be better as a person, a leader, and a company. Your word – your integrity – is everything.

## SEVEN: MAINTAIN A DIALOGUE

Beware of stopping with stage six. It can be tough to hear the feedback and make changes and tougher still to ask for more feedback at the risk of starting the cycle all over again. But we must. If you really want to use negative feedback to your advantage, it must become an ongoing conversation. This is a process, not a one-and-done affair. Ask for continued feedback, continued accountability, and accept it with grace.

## EIGHT: STAY FOCUSED ON GROWTH

With that said, some people are determined to be unhappy. We live in a culture that is quick to cancel people and brands – though “cancelling” often just means holding people accountable. There will be people who refuse to allow you to grow beyond your mistakes. Don’t let them hold you back. Be happy with demonstrated, provable change that makes you a better business owner and your business more successful.

Don’t fall into the never-ending trap of people pleasing – focus on serving your customers, clients, and employees in the present without trying to rewrite the past or fear for the future.