

Discipline #3 – Cultivating Critical Feedback

What to Do [Injunction]:

1. Notice when those around you see things differently than you do. Especially notice when you are doing or seeing things differently than they expect or want you to.
2. Make sure you clearly understand how they see things differently, how they want you to see things, and how they want you to act. Summarize what you hear them saying and ask them to confirm that your understanding is accurate.
3. Thank them for giving you this valuable information.
4. Think about how you want this information to affect you.

Why do it [Rationale]:

We all have cognitive distortions. We cannot see our own cognitive distortions. We need critical feedback from others to be able to identify them. If we fail to identify them we will continue to act as though the world around us is different from the way it actually is and we will continue to fail to create what we need.

A cognitive distortion is a way of thinking about the world that doesn't match the way the world really is but which we cling to for reasons that may well not be consciously available to us. We are always working to make the way we think about the world match the way the world really is. And we adjust the "map" we have of the world around us as we get new information. Except that sometimes, in spite of the data we are getting, we cling to an old way of seeing things instead of updating the map.

We don't know that we are doing this. We are unconsciously disregarding some of the information that we are getting in order to cling to a particular way of seeing things. Since we don't know we are doing this, we can't fix it without some input from outside of the system we have created. For this reason, we need critical feedback from others.

What it will get you [Promises]:

There is a part of all of us that resists getting critical feedback from others. This discipline helps you become more aware of that impulse. That part thinks you already know what you need to know so critical feedback will only be confusing or harmful to your self-esteem.

You will discover that there are other perfectly reasonable ways of looking at the world, and at what events mean, that had not occurred to you. You will be surprised that you hadn't thought of these new ways of seeing things.

You will find that openness to other ways of looking at things doesn't actually diminish you, but, on the contrary, allows for appreciating a greater richness and depth in how you approach the world.

You may be being perceived differently than you are trying to project. They may also see things more objectively than you and offer it up as critical feedback. Both are potentially valuable to you.

Suggestions:

The key to this discipline is to know that just because you hear critical feedback from others doesn't mean that you have to accept or "own" that feedback. Some people will only be giving you their own cognitive distortions. You don't have to believe what they say to have their feedback be of benefit to you. They may be completely wrong, have terrible advice or give critical feedback in an effort to get you to change or forfeit your needs or boundaries. There is a difference between soliciting and accurately understanding their feedback and automatically taking it all to heart.

Listen to the way that you talk about the way the world is. Especially listen for the words *should*, *ought* and *supposed to*. These are indicators that the idea is a distortion because we already know that this is not the ways things actually are.

Be sure to thank others when they give you critical feedback. This will both increase your ability to take in and learn from the feedback and will increase the chances that they will continue to offer it.

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