



UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS

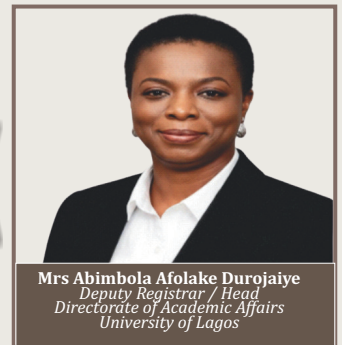


UNLEASHING HUMAN POTENTIALS

A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS STAFF TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT UNIT
Vol. 3 No.5 – May 2026



HANDLING CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM AND FEEDBACK



Mrs Abimbola Afolake Durojaiye
Deputy Registrar / Head
Directorate of Academic Affairs
University of Lagos

INTRODUCTION

In our previous edition, we focused on building core administrative competencies for excellence. However, developing these competencies is only the starting point; continuous improvement is what sustains excellence. This edition focuses on handling constructive criticism and feedback as a vital tool for refining skills, enhancing performance, and fostering continuous professional development.

Criticism is the act of evaluating, analysing, or judging something such as a work of art, literature, behaviour, ideas, or actions, by pointing out its strengths and weaknesses.

actions or deliverables. Its primary objective is to reinforce successful results while offering actionable guidance for improvement.

Although the words “criticism” and “feedback” are often used interchangeably, they differ in tone and purpose. Criticism typically highlights what is wrong while feedback aims to guide improvement in a supportive manner. When used effectively, both can encourage professional and personal development. Both can also be delivered by impromptu comments or written reports.

Types of Constructive Criticism and Feedback
There are two main types of criticism and feedback: Constructive and Destructive

- 1. Constructive Criticism and Feedback**
Positive evaluation or comments that aim to help the receiver improve by providing specific suggestions for change. It is helpful, specific and focused on improving performance or behaviour. It points out problems and offers solutions. It is also delivered respectfully.

Example: “Your report was good, but you should work on your tenses”.



Feedback is a strategic communication tool designed to provide objective insights into an individual's performance, behaviour, work,

2. Destructive Criticism and Feedback

Negative evaluation or comments that focus on faults. It is usually vague and offers no advice on improvement. It is often delivered with the intent to undermine or embarrass the recipient.

Example: "You are incompetent."

HANDLING CRITICISM AND FEEDBACK PROFESSIONALLY



The ability to accept and respond to criticism and feedback professionally is an important skill. It involves the following practical steps:

i. ***Listen Attentively and maintain self-control***

Listen without interrupting and maintain eye contact. Focus on understanding the speaker's perspective. Taking time to understand the core message prevents misinterpretation and allows the receiver to extract the most helpful suggestions for improvement.

ii. ***Do not react emotionally***

The immediate response to criticism especially when it is harsh or unexpected is to be defensive. Stay composed and resist the urge to react emotionally. Professional composure demonstrates maturity. Take a moment to breathe. Pausing before responding allows you to respond with clarity and intention.

iii. ***Focus on the message and not the mode of delivery***

The focus should be on the message. Sometimes criticism and feedback are delivered bluntly or in harsh tones. Concentrate on the content that can help you improve rather than the manner or tone of delivery.

iv. ***Ask for further explanation***

It also helps to ask follow-up questions. Paraphrase or summarise your understanding of the speaker's comments to ensure comprehension. Asking for concrete examples, advice, or further details shows sincere interest in improving your performance.

v. ***Express Appreciation***

Regardless of the nature of the criticism / feedback, thank the person giving it. Appreciation helps maintain positive relationships and encourages further communication.

vi. ***Take time to reflect on the feedback***

You do not have to respond immediately. Give yourself time to process the feedback objectively and identify the possible areas of growth and improvement that will enhance your productivity.

vii. ***Apply the feedback***

Implement necessary changes. This shows maturity and a commitment to self-improvement.

HOW TO GIVE CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK TO OTHERS

i. ***Communicate clearly and precisely***

Clear and precise feedback ensures that the receiver fully understands what is being addressed and how to improve. When feedback is vague, it can leave the receiver confused, defensive or unsure of what actions to take next.

For example, comments like "Your report is not good enough. You have to do better" is too broad and not helpful. In contrast, specific statements such as, "The report contains typographical errors and incorrect verb tenses", gives concrete information that is easy to understand and correct.

ii. ***Address actions, not character***

Constructive feedback should focus on specific actions rather than a person's character or personality. When feedback centers on actions, it becomes practical, objective and easier for the receiver to act upon. For instance, saying "The report had several errors" is a factual observation that

the individual can correct. In contrast, a statement like “*You are careless*” attacks the person’s character and can be demotivating.

iii. ***Balance positive and critical points while suggesting improvements***

Begin by highlighting strengths before suggesting improvements. People respond better to feedback when they also hear what they are doing well. An example of a balanced positive and critical feedback is as follows:

“You produce high-quality work. Improving your time management a little could help you meet deadlines promptly.”

iv. ***Choose the right place and time***

Giving feedback at the right place and time is a core component of effective communication and professional growth.

The place of delivery sets the tone for the entire conversation. A private setting such as an office, a meeting room, or a calm virtual meeting encourages openness and reduces pressure, especially when the feedback involves sensitive or critical points. Public criticism can damage trust and make the receiver feel exposed or undermined. Feedback is most effective when given privately and respectfully.

Timing is also important. Providing feedback immediately after an event can be useful while details are still fresh, but only if emotions have settled. Addressing issues when the receiver is stressed, upset, or overwhelmed can cause defensiveness and make it difficult for him/her to process the message. Similarly, giving feedback when irritated or frustrated can lead to unclear communication or harsh tone.

MAKING CRITICISM A GROWTH TOOL

Making criticism a growth tool involves changing the way we view and respond to criticism. Growth begins with developing an open and positive mindset. When approached positively, criticism builds self-awareness, encourages continuous learning, and ultimately helps individuals develop confidence and competence.

Common mistakes made while receiving or after receiving feedback include the following:

- i. Becoming defensive
- ii. Reacting emotionally
- iii. Taking feedback personally
- iv. Focusing on the tone rather than the message
- v. Failing to ask for clarification
- vi. Not applying the feedback received.

By avoiding the mistakes listed above, the receiver can get greater value from the feedback.

SUSTAINING A POSITIVE ATTITUDE TOWARD FEEDBACK

To maintain a positive attitude toward feedback the receiver should approach comments, suggestions, or evaluations with an open and constructive mindset. When receiving feedback, especially negative feedback, it is important to stay calm and avoid reacting impulsively. Instead of feeling threatened or discouraged, one can focus on understanding the specific points and the reasoning behind them.

Emotional intelligence and self-awareness make it easier to separate criticism from personal identity and use it as a learning opportunity.

Conclusion

Criticism and feedback are powerful influences on development. For the person(s) evaluating or giving the feedback it is important to adopt constructive feedback and criticism to create environments where people feel supported, confident and motivated to grow.

On the other hand, recipients of feedback and criticism should receive the same with an open mind and positive attitude. By listening carefully, reflecting, and applying suggestions, recipients can improve their skills, build resilience, and foster continuous personal and professional development.

When we see criticism as an opportunity to learn rather than a threat, we become better equipped to improve and build stronger relationships.