

Young People and Criticism



Are young people becoming more averse to criticism? Some university teachers think so. One professor recently reported that, when he mildly criticized a student's report, tears seemed to well up in the student's eyes. The teacher backed off from the criticism, and started praising the report instead. In another example, a teacher criticized a student's presentation during a seminar meeting. The student became silent, and gave no response. A few days later he dropped out of the seminar without giving a reason.

These may be extreme cases, but for some instructors it does seem harder these days to provide tough criticism to students. At the very least, professors are having to take more care about what they say when they provide feedback on student's work.

What reasons might be behind an increased sensitivity to criticism? One suggestion from teachers is that some modern parents are failing to provide discipline in the home. Instead of firmly guiding, pushing and admonishing their children when necessary, parents are more eager to play the role of a friend. Criticism is rarely, if ever, given.

Another suggestion has been that, in many families these days, children and teenagers are not required to do chores. It is said that doing household chores provides a good situation for learning how to accept criticism. If the child makes a mistake or somehow does not do the chores satisfactorily, the parent will chide him or her, and ask for it to be done again. Youngsters thus learn that criticism is a normal part of carrying out a task.

One more point is that high school education now relies too much on students giving just right or wrong answers on tests. Students have fewer opportunities to write reports, give speeches or participate in debates. All of these educational activities have a performance aspect which is naturally followed by a critical style of feedback from the teacher, or even peer feedback from fellow participants. Lacking these experiences, some students may get a shock when criticized by a college teacher.

On the other hand, there may also be problems with criticism and the way it is given by teachers. If it is not constructive criticism, has a humiliating aspect or is not balanced with a positive message, then there is the risk that the recipient will be alienated.