

Coaching Tip: On the Gift of Criticism

Welcome to my coaching tip of the week on what I learned from the School for The Work about the gift of criticism. This is such a perfect topic for those of you who will be spending time with family on Thanksgiving and find yourselves triggered by family or friends.

I'll admit it; I have a hard time when someone criticizes me. Okay, I may be underestimating this – I get pissed, defensive and sometimes depending on who it is, I want to punch that person in the face. “Who do they think they are,” I might say to myself or “how dare they give me advice when they’re the one projecting.” When you’re hurt by criticism, you probably also get defensive, get angry, want to attack and/or you might even find yourself justifying or explaining what they’re accusing you of. Does this resonate for you?

Uggh... Katie says that you get defensive because the “criticizer” has exposed your hidden secret... which is essentially the part or parts of you that you have worked so hard to keep from being discovered. Jung calls this the “shadow self”. In very simple terms, it’s the dark parts of ourselves that we reject, suppress, resist or deny. Everyone has a shadow self. When you make judgments of others, you are projecting your shadow self. And vice versa. Let me give you an example from my own life.

A few months ago, I was at a family dinner and my father announced to my kids who were sitting across from him that I am a “provocateur” (without provocation I might add) and proceeded to define that term to my kids. I sat there seething because all I heard was my dad criticizing me once again. I didn’t know what to say because honestly I was stunned, that comment came out of nowhere and I felt hurt. I will tell

you, however that I ruminated about that comment for days. I was angry and annoyed that he would say something like that about me when he was the provocative one. But then I realized that my 87-year-old Dad was never going to change. So, I was at a crossroads, I could continue to be upset and at war with him, at least in my head, about his behavior or I could investigate it and use it as an opportunity to go more deeply inside myself. Damn, it always comes back to me. This was another AFGO (another fucking growth opportunity).

So, this is what I learned from The School that I found so incredibly powerful. When people judge you, and you get upset, or defensive like I did, your own mind's attack is the culprit of that stress. In other words, we armor up to defend against our "dark shadow", the one we work so hard to keep from being exposed. Stress is an opportunity to forgive yourself for those flawed parts of you and ultimately to forgive the other person. Katie says forgiveness is when you realize that what you think happened didn't. Whoa! I take this to mean that we have beliefs that we need to address. And in my case, it meant discovering the truth of my father's criticism so I could end this war with myself, with him and take the stinger out of my own sting.

So, here's how I learned about how to accept the gift of criticism. And I've been using with my clients too and the results have been nothing short of freedom. It's so simple that it's astounding.

So, let's use my example. My dad calls me a provocateur – what he meant by that was simple, that I provoke people. I would then answer this question:

Why would he see me this way?

Here were my answers:

- I can see why my father sees me as provocative because I'm direct and very honest.
- I can see why my father sees me this way because I don't back down from getting what I want.
- I can see why my father sees me this way because I bring up subjects that people avoid discussing.

- I can see why my father sees me this way because I speak my mind.

Wow, I can see why he sees me as a provocateur. It makes so much sense to me. I can see the truth in his statement. In fact, I don't perceive it as a slight or a criticism. By getting this honest and humble with myself, that criticism just doesn't stick... it's like Teflon, it just slides off of me.

I'll be testing it this Thanksgiving by the way.

So, next time someone criticizes you, ask yourself **“why would this person/or these people see or experience me this way?”**

So rather than doing The Work on these judgments or criticisms with your client (or yourself), you're asking them to find the kernel of truth in those judgments – you're in effect, inviting them to acknowledge their dark shadow, those self-perceived negative qualities so that they can be kinder, more compassionate and more forgiving.

As usual, I'd love to hear your experience with this one simple question.

Have a great Thanksgiving everyone!

Jackie