

## HOW TO DEAL WITH CRITICISM WHEN YOU HAVE THIN SKIN

*It can be uncomfortable, but criticism can help you grow and develop your skills. Here's how to learn from negative feedback instead of taking it personally.*

How to deal with criticism when you have thin skin

Nobody likes being criticized, but learning to accept criticism is a critical skill for success. If received appropriately, criticism can help you grow and develop your skills and abilities. Fear of the sting of negative feedback can hold you back from reaching your potential. But while some people seem to let criticism roll off their back, others have thinner skin and seem to crumble at negative feedback.

Here's how to develop thicker skin so you can learn to use criticism to your advantage.  
Understand what your reaction means

When you receive negative feedback, does your heart start racing, your palms sweat and your muscles tense up? For some individuals, negative feedback can trigger a fight-or-flight response; this is the biological response that our brains have to a threat in our environment. It's what happened to our ancestors when they spotted a bear, for example.

"The problem is sometimes our fight-or-flight is activated because we evaluate a situation as dangerous, but there is not any actual danger associated with it," says Dr. Brooke Wachtler, a psychologist and president/founder of BEW Consulting and Training. Receiving criticism may not pose a real physical threat to our safety, but your emotional brain can certainly perceive it that way. You may think that negative feedback from your boss means that your job is at stake and worry about how you're going to pay your bills if you get fired. Understanding what's happening in your brain can help you to process your reaction and cope effectively.

Change the way you think about it

"We feel how we think" says Wachtler. Negative criticism, she argues, is not what causes the emotional reaction, but rather, it's how we think about the criticism that causes the reaction. This explains why different people have different reactions to criticism; why some seem able to let criticism roll off their backs while others feel like their world is ending. Our brains react differently to the feedback based on how we each interpret it. Changing how you think about receiving feedback starts with your inner dialogue.

Do you jump to feeding yourself negative thoughts after receiving criticism such as "I'm not cut out for this job" or "I'm such a loser"? This kind of catastrophic thinking is what triggers that fight-or-flight response. Instead, telling yourself repeatedly that you are capable will help you to stop going to that extreme place the next time you receive negative feedback.

Develop a growth mindset

Someone with a fixed mindset might view criticism more as the end of time, or even avoid situations in which they could receive negative feedback. They are more likely to dismiss the criticism or agree with it but not do anything to change because they believe they are who they are and they aren't capable of changing.

By contrast, someone with a growth mindset is more likely to view any feedback, whether positive or negative, as part of learning and growing. “Someone who values growth and learning may still have a negative reaction to receiving criticism, however, they may be better able to bounce back and cope effectively,” says Wachtler.

Don’t equate your value as a person with the feedback

People with thin skin tend to define themselves by other people’s opinions of them. Receiving negative feedback can lead them to think they’re a complete failure. “Separating who you are as a person from feedback that you receive is helpful in remaining calm and thinking through your response to negative feedback, as well as finding utility in it,” says Wachtler.

Look for situations to receive feedback

Part of overcoming the fear of receiving criticism is to continually expose yourself to situations in which you may receive negative feedback. Take a course in something that is outside your professional field or participate in a professional development program such as Toastmasters where you will be continually evaluated. Repeatedly exposing yourself to the possibility of criticism can help you to realize that you are capable of receiving feedback, even if it’s negative, and can learn from the experience.

Credit: <https://www.fastcompany.com>