

Church Leadership In Rural America Connecting to Criticism

All of us face criticism! It is an inevitable function of leading, not everyone will appreciate your style, your direction, your personality, and some won't even appreciate your presence! Most of us try very hard to never place ourselves in the line of criticism - but is that the best use of our energy? Connecting to criticism is something that I've attempted to learn over my ministry.

Here are the basics I've learned:

Some criticism is warranted - some is not.

Some criticism is from love - some is not.

Some criticism is constructive - some is not.

Some criticism is never said - and some should be shouted from the housetops.

CONNECTING TO CRITICISM

CONNECTION #1 - EXPECTATION. This is not the expectation of living negatively where there is no way to shield ourselves from criticism, just the knowledge that it will happen - we will be criticized.

- ☞ With expectation comes responsibility.
 - ☞ Concerned listening is a skill to be developed in connecting to criticism.
 - ☞ Possible acceptance is a result to be considered in connecting to criticism.
 - ☞ Refusing defensiveness is a purposeful decision in connecting to criticism.

CONNECTION #2 - LOGIC. Everyone's position of criticism comes from "their" position of logic. It is absolutely logical to them and that is the creative energy of their criticism.

- ☞ With logic comes the common sense battle.
 - ☞ Common sense is only common to the holder.
 - ☞ Common sense includes the bias of the holder.
 - ☞ Common sense includes the theological slant of the holder.

CONNECTION #3 - ACCEPTABLE BOUNDARIES. Every crowd has one or two who would criticize Jesus' handling of scripture.

- ☞ With acceptable boundaries come...
 - ☞ Acceptable - a decision about how you will accept criticism. For me I attempt to communicate that I will accept all criticism that comes with a solution as well.
 - ☞ Boundaries - a decision about when is important. For me I attempt to schedule an appointment to discuss the criticism and I also let the person know that I will be expecting a solution within the discussion.

* Inside every criticism and solution is the opportunity to develop a volunteer. The criticizer generally has a well developed idea of what should be happening, that is why they are criticizing what is happening. With the solution added to the discussion it may make it possible to actually train the criticizer to implement the solution!

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CONNECTION #4 - WHAT CAN I BUILD? Every critical thought should be turned into a building block if possible.

- ☞ With the idea of "building" you must teach a "life culture of building" into your people.
 - ☞ Channeling criticism into the brick factory for building must be an attitude that is embraced by leadership and laity alike. It is a long-term activity!
 - ☞ Seeing or determining the value of what's possible to build is a valuable exercise in church leadership.

* Without the planned consideration of building the criticism will be spread like poison within the church. No criticism handles itself - even if the criticizer leaves they will leave and liekly continue to spread the poison!

CONNECTION #5 - WHO IS BEING BUILT? Every criticism has a "personal" dynamic. Criticism can start in the possibility of right/wrong arguments; in individual likes and dislikes; in the competition of ownership and leadership.

- ☞ Being built means even if some "part" of the intended structure needs specific attention and repair, it is still a part of the whole building.
 - ☞ Just because you can't drive a straight nail does not mean we should stop building the building.

* Love is designed to cover a multitude of sin, therefore if your approach is to uncover a multitude of sin so you can express your love, you may not be much of a builder!

CONNECTION #6 - OUNCE OF GOLD PRINCIPLE. In mining it is generally accepted that you must dig a ton of dirt to uncover and ounce of gold. No one is looking for the dirt! The cost of the dirt is minor when compared to the value of the gold.

- ☞ The focus is the value of the gold!

CONNECTION #7 - JESUS IS THE STANDARD. Criticism can become the standard if Jesus is not kept in view.

- ☞ Not every issue requires table turning and a whip!
- ☞ Not every sinners house requires a visit, but some very definitely were visited by Jesus.
- ☞ Not every religiously twisted Pharisee is beyond the truth!
 - ☞ A clear "operational" conscience is necessary. You must leave you feeling at the door!
 - ☞ No revenge is allowed. Even if you are justly criticized you must not defend your pride!