

# HOW TO AVOID CRUSHING OTHERS SELF-CONFIDENCE

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**WE HAVE ENOUGH BARRIERS TO PERFORMING AT OUR BEST** in today’s high-stress work world. Why on earth would we add to the tension even more by unknowingly compromising our employee’s self-confidence?

We don’t mean to, but yet we do.

Research indicates that dismissing the importance of an employee's ideas or work can crush a sense of self-confidence and accordingly a sense of meaning for the employee. This can occur whether the work is overtly dismissed or even if there is simply a failure to recognize the importance of one's contributions.

The same is true of overly critical or punishing behavior such as unduly harsh feedback, overemotional reactions, a nothing-is-ever-good-enough mindset, or plain callousness--all of which can induce the question, “What's the point?”. Criticized employees start to wonder if they are truly valued and respected or if they will



ever match up to the overbearing bosses expectations. It's hard for our employees to find meaning and fulfillment at work when doubt continually creeps in for them and they start wondering whether they are even fulfilling our base expectations. Likewise, if you are quick to criticize and slow to praise, don't be surprised if your employee's work needs criticizing and isn't worth praise.

I can recommend six ways to help keep you from exhibiting overcritical and callous behavior at work, thus avoiding the potential to compromise an employee's sense of self-confidence:

**1) ASSUME THEY CARE ABOUT DOING GOOD WORK.** Criticism about someone else's work is often born out of frustration and assumptions that the other person lacks regard for doing the job right. Don't assume that, and plain and simple, stop being so critical. There is simply no substitute for giving the benefit of the doubt and building corrective comments on a foundational belief that others want to do their best. People generally want to shine, not shirk.

**2) DON'T CREATE THE NEED FOR NEUTRALIZATION.** When people get harshly criticized they tend to engage in a number of tactics to neutralize the sting. They will do things like seek out other people's opinions, withdraw and take recovery time, console themselves that their manager doesn't define them, or look for validation elsewhere. An ounce of prevention is required here. Imagine sending someone off forced to soothe the bite of brittle feedback and anticipate that you could cause this scenario if you aren't careful. This will remind you to apply a filter to avoid unduly harsh feedback.

**3) PLANT SEEDS OF GROWTH, NOT SEEDS OF DOUBT.** Related to the above but worthy of separate consideration is the thought that criticism should be given and framed in a way to actually encourage nurturing

and growth. The idea is to give constructive, not destructive, feedback and to avoid creating self-confidence setbacks.

**4) DON'T MANUFACTURE MISATTRIBUTION; SHARE CONTEXT.** There is a good chance that criticism poorly delivered from you will be rejected by the recipient and attributed to any unkind perceptions the recipient might have about you, thereby widening an existing rift or unintentionally causing a new one. Context can often be missing--context that, if you shared and clarified, would improve receptivity of the well-intended criticism. Instead, package criticisms with thoughtful explanations of why the criticism is being offered and how it could help the individual. By depersonalizing the criticism you will turn it from overbearing to overflowing with good intent.

**5) BETTER SELF-MANAGE ANXIETY/STRESS.** Criticism of others often comes from our insecurities or inability to manage our own anxieties and stress. Better managing these forces can make us better managers--ones that don't subconsciously project our own insecurities by defaulting to criticism of others (and thus causing insecurities to arise in others as well).

**6) WARM UP.** Yup, this means stop being an ice queen or king. This can create doubts in your employee's minds about how you are perceiving them. People can read a lack of compassion and warmth a mile away, and they will stay a mile away when they sense it.