

Tips On How To Effectively Give Critique

Avoiding hurting someone's feelings when giving criticism is important for reasons other than just being nice to a person. When criticism feels as a personal attack it is natural to become defensive and our thoughts turn to thinking about how we rebut the attack and we stop really listening to the message they are trying to say. Making it personal makes criticism not only hurtful but ineffective.

Some tips to make sure the critical comments are non-hurtful and effective:

Avoid "yes, but" and "yes, although" statements. A "yes, but" statement is one that start out on a positive note then flip-flops into negative comment completely eliminating any effect of the positive words. For example, "I like the way you composed the photo and your use of light and shadow is wonderful, but I think the bright object in the corner is distracting". We hear yes (the positive comments) and no (the critical comments) at the same time, we tend to focus on the second half, dismissing anything that comes before the "but." Of course, it's the second part that fuels conflict and blocks the message from being received as intended.

A "yes, although" statements is the brother or sister of "yes, but" statements where we say "although" instead "but". The effect is the same.

Use "yes, and" statements rather than "yes, but" and "yes, although". A "yes, and" statement builds on the positive comments and gives a sense of cooperation or helpfulness rather than conflict. It helps to avoid the message becoming lost by making the receiver less defensive. An example is: "I like the way you composed the photo and your use of light and shadow is wonderful, and I think we could keep the viewers' attention on the subject by toning down the bright object in the corner which may be distracting".

Avoid "you need to" statements. When you give criticism and say that the photographer "needs to" do this or that it comes across as a command based upon your superiority in expertise or rank neither of what actually exist. Photos are a personal creation and as such the photographer own full control of what the photo is and represents. You have no innate right to tell or command them what they should do. Making the comment as a demand can be a source of conflict. Framing the comment as a suggestion acknowledges that the photographer is the one in control and reduces the potential for unintended conflict.