

Instead of Seeking Praise, Seek Criticism

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

Several years ago, I had a girlfriend who would fly off the handle at the slightest criticism. It didn't matter who was criticizing her. She would call people ugly, smelly, short--whatever attack she could muster in response to what she perceived as criticism.

She would also do everything within her power to avoid being criticized. In school, for example, many mornings she would work until 4 a.m. to ensure she got a perfect grade in her class. In her personal life, she made sure to only associate with people she knew would never criticize her.

Her father was the one who'd influenced her to be such a perfectionist. As a student, when he took the SATs and missed one question, he retook it so he could get a perfect score.

Understandably, people generally try to avoid criticism. Yet most of us realize it is a part of life and have found a way to deal with it, rather than run away from it.

When I first got to [law school](#), I was amazed at how critical [law professors](#) were. Every single piece of logic students offered was criticized--publicly. As a result, in the first few weeks of school, one man got so upset he dropped out of school. However, almost all of the other students ended up gaining a better understanding of what they needed to do to be ready when they were giving answers in class--the same way lawyers are expected to be on their toes in court.



Getting approval is very easy. If you ask enough people for approval, someone will give it to you. You can always find at least one person who will tell you exactly what you want to hear. In fact, many people do everything in their power to find and surround themselves with people who will always say positive things about them and give them approval.

A few months ago I was working with several writers in our company to assist them with improving their writing. I would review their work publicly on a screen and show them what they needed to do to improve their work and be more focused on the needs of job seekers. At the time, we were writing articles about how to [find jobs](#). Incredibly, within three months of starting this process, seven out of nine writers ended up quitting.

Their manager told me the writers quit because they did not want to be criticized. Apparently, many of the writers felt they were not getting paid enough to be criticized, and if I had wanted to criticize them, they should have been paid more money. I never knew that not wanting to improve in your job had anything to do with how much you were paid.

I felt these writers were an interesting example of American competitiveness. One of the reasons I was so impassioned about the writers' improving their work, and why I spent so much time working with them, was that many of the articles they were writing could have been written elsewhere more cheaply. I wanted the skills of our writers to be known and for their work to be strong. Instead, some of them simply refused to rise to the occasion.

Much of the work our companies do is accomplished overseas in places like Romania and India. In high school, I spent some time in Asia. There I saw a work ethic that's much different from what we're accustomed to in the United States. In order to really thrive in this world, you need to work very hard. The people we are competing with can be much hungrier than we are, both literally and figuratively. With access to the Internet, there really are no borders in business anymore. People in other countries can produce information-based products as efficiently as we can.

In order to improve, you need to ask yourself what you can do to grow, evolve, and excel. Your competitors are asking themselves this. You also need to ask the people around you what you should be doing differently.

Unfortunately, many people are reluctant to offer criticism when you ask for advice about ways to improve. However, when you do receive constructive criticism, you need to make absolutely sure you listen to it and apply it to your skills, methods, and understanding of your job.

I want to offer a few pieces of career advice to you for your job search that may seem outrageous but that can really change how you go about [looking for a job](#).

First, if you go into an interview and end up not getting the job, you have nothing to lose by calling the company and asking them why you did not get the job and what you could do to improve. Tell human resources directors their comments are off the record. They may answer you and they may not. If you get an answer, incorporate it into how you interview in the future.

Second, ask people around you if they believe you have any personal weaknesses you need to work on regarding interviewing. Ask them if they believe you have any grooming patterns you should reconsider. Make sure people are not shy about being completely honest with you. Get information you can use.

Third, think back to every criticism you have ever received from an employer and think about what you can do differently

going forward. You need to learn from past criticisms in order to improve.

Most people fail to learn from criticism and therefore cannot adapt in response to it. You need to make sure you incorporate criticism into what you do, to ensure you become a better person. People who listen to criticism improve. Even the best athletes have coaches. CEOs of major corporations have coaches. People need to learn from others in order to get better.

Praise may make you feel good, but you need criticism to make yourself stronger and better.

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