

Deconstructing Criticism

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When Michelangelo saw a huge block of marble, he knew David was inside, and that all he had to do to reveal this divine figure was to chisel away all that was not David. We too, like Michelangelo, can look at others and see a potential masterpiece inside; if only we could chip away the excess. We do this with our children, friends, peers, spouses, and even strangers. Often our desire to bring out the full potential in others inspires us to take hits at those around us.

Yes, constructive criticism and useful feedback play an important role in the development of all of us. However we need to use caution. A block of marble looks and feels strong and hard, but there are weak veins running through it. One miss strike may tap on a person's insecurities and reduce all that potential into a pile of rubble.

As a masterpiece in the making yourself, it is important to be aware of your own veins of weakness. Knowing your vulnerable places can guide you in what parts of yourself to protect and where to place your boundaries.

Michelangelo was a skilled artist with an expert knowledge of how to sculpt a masterpiece with patience and care. Consider that perhaps you are not meant to actively sculpt another human being, but rather to stand as witness to their journey, observing and learning from their mistakes and progress.

Yet, if you feel absolutely sure that your insight will be of great use to another, take a moment before adding your input. Step back and really look at this block of potential in front of you. Notice the veins of weakness and take care as you proceed with a gentle, steady hand, ready to smooth away any rough edges that may appear as you begin to tap.

Putting it into Action

Criticism is often a deep-rooted habit in the way we think about the world around us. So, let's take some time to approach the subject on the level of thinking. Over the next few weeks, become aware of your critical thoughts. Notice when you are judging someone in your mind.

For example, "I can't believe she is wearing that!", "This guy is such a rich, pompous jerk!", "That woman is has no idea how to handle her kids."

As soon as you catch yourself thinking this way, take a moment to stop and forgive the other person for being less than perfect. Then, forgive yourself for having the critical thought in the first place. This act of forgiveness, even on the level of thought, will release negative energy that the criticism has created.

You may find yourself forgiving the same person for the same thing five times within ten minutes. That's perfectly okay. Each time you forgive, you will feel lighter and soon a smile will appear on your face.

Once you've released the sense of judgment from the situation, you will then be able to see if there is a useful action or statement that you can make to help promote progress rather than destruction. Or, if it's simple and easy to move on and put your attention elsewhere.

Now here's the real test, when you have a critical thought about yourself, can you forgive yourself for being less than perfect and again for have the critical thought in the first place? I dare you to give it a try.

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