

# Dealing With A **CRITICAL JERK**



A 5-Part Method For Holding Difficult Conversations

Conversations – especially those dealing with emotional issues – rarely follow a logical pattern or system.

As you probably realize, *every conversation is a little bit different.*

You can't shoehorn a conversation into an absolute pattern or system.

You can, however, develop a method for getting the other person's feedback and moving toward a desired result.

Let's look at a five-part conversation method that's worked for many managers when they're seeking a change in behavior or performance.

This step-by-step example deals with someone who's always negative and critical of others' ideas –

## The Critical Jerk

1) "When... I feel..."

You can use this to set up the problem:

*"When you say, 'That's a dumb idea,' I feel as if you're being disrespectful to the person who offered the idea, and you discourage others from speaking up."*

## 2) Wait For Their Input

This is one of those points when your silence can be golden and when you can put into practice one of the most important "don'ts" in having a difficult conversation...

*Don't feel as if you have to fill every silence.*

Let your "When you" sentence hang and wait for a response. And here's where it gets a little tricky, because you can't be certain of the response.

The person may deny it, in which case you'll have to give examples:

*"I can describe at least three times in the last week..."*

Or the person may say, sincerely:

*"I didn't realize I was doing that."*

Sometimes, too, the person will offer an excuse – valid or invalid. For instance, the response may be:

*"I've been losing a lot of sleep because of migraine headaches, so that may account for some of it."*

If you believe the excuse is valid, take steps to help or accommodate the employee.

That's what supervisors are supposed to do. Even if you do that, you still can move on to the next step.

### 3) "I Would Like..."

Here's where you describe, specifically, the change in behavior you'd like to see:

*"I would like you to come to the next meeting with at least three ideas of your own on how we can improve."*

That sets the standard and results in positive terms:

*"This is what I want you to do."*

Instead of:

*"This is what I want you to stop doing."*

Consider how that works in any number of conversations involving performance or behavior. For instance, the person who's always coming in late:

***Negative: "I would like you to stop coming in late."***

***Positive: "I would like you to be on time every day."***

4) "Because.."

In almost any situation, you have to provide a reason for requesting change.

***"Because I said so" is not an acceptable reason.***

Again, try to stay positive:

***"Because I know you have a lot of good ideas, and I think we'd all benefit from hearing them."***

That beats the negative attack mode:

***"Because we're tired of hearing your criticisms."***

## 5) "What Do You Think?"

You're asking straight-out for feedback here, and you're doing so with more than one purpose:

*You don't want the person to walk away with the feeling that he or she has been given some ironfisted orders.*

*You can move toward a commitment from the person to change.*

*You'll get a real feel about whether the conversation worked and you're headed toward a desired goal.*

As we said, there is no template for having a difficult conversation. But this framework is a great starting point.

The next time you're in a difficult conversation, give it a try and see how it helps to get you where you want to go.

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