



Group Decision Tip

E-mailed every two weeks to help groups make good decisions

Criticism private

In principle, the cause of most criticism is the critic's need to react to something painful, yet public reaction often causes more pain. When you think someone's action or statement deserves criticism, first consider why. Will criticizing make you feel better? Teach them a lesson? You can probably accomplish these by criticizing privately. You might even achieve the first one by talking with a friend, or yelling or crying; get it off your chest. If you want to criticize in order to start a fight or create conflict, then you might want to do it publicly (for instance, send an e-mail to more people than the person you are criticizing). Sometimes that is what is called for, but only sometimes, when more peaceful means of achieving the group mission are exhausted.

Practical Tip: When you have an adverse reaction to someone's words or actions, do not react right away. First try to understand the behavior or words better. Be thoughtful about the reason for your reaction; what purpose will it serve? Only when you think your group needs public conflict should you publicly criticize. Otherwise, talk privately with the person you have an issue with. Start with asking a question about what they said or did.

PS: Another reason we sometimes criticize is to make someone feel small. This is never a good reason for public or private criticism. Good group decisions result when people make each other feel big, valued, appreciated.

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