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Responding to criticisms, accusations or complaints on the job

Rationale

The ability to respond well to criticism on the job can help you maintain your job. Responding with anger and rejecting all criticism makes it hard for others to get along with you and may lead employers to fire you.

Keep calm—it is okay to make a mistake

Stop and remind yourself to keep calm. Everyone makes mistakes. It is the process of correcting mistakes that allows us to learn. If you get mad, it makes others not want to interact with you and you could lose your job.

Decide what kind of criticism it is

There are three types of criticism: **true constructive** criticisms (what they are saying about you is true and they offer a way to improve), **false accusations** (what they are saying is false), or *insulting criticism* (they are name-calling with insulting words).

- **If it is true constructive criticism**, say, “You’re right. I am sorry. Let me try to fix that.” Then offer a plan or discuss making plans to improve. You may ask the employer what you can do to improve. If you are asked to correct work, it is often best to do it rather than argue because then you will sooner be able to put it behind you.
- **If it is a false accusation**, criticism or complaint, don’t get angry. Be open to the possibility that you may have done something wrong from another’s perspective. Calmly express your confusion about such an accusation and ask for them to explain what and why they think you did something wrong. You can say::
 - “I am confused. I did not . . .”
 - “I am confused, I thought I was supposed to . . .”
 - “Can you explain what was supposed to have been done?”
- **If it is insulting criticism**, using demeaning name calling, use an “I” statement to express your feelings and ask for them to stop talking to you that way. For example:

“I feel _____ (offended, upset)
 when you _____ (call me names or scream).
 I would like you to _____ (tell me what I did wrong without insulting me).”

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Activity Page: Responding to criticisms, accusations or complaints on the job

Teaching

1. **Explain** the rationale that how you respond to criticism from an employer can help you to keep or lose your job.
2. **Model and role-play** situations in which the student feels the criticism is accurate and when the student believes they have been falsely accused. Use actual situations that have occurred or the following suggested situations:
 - a. An employer says that the student did not file some papers according to the instructions they were given. If this is correct, then the student can agree, apologize and ask to correct the problem. The student may want to write down the instructions so that they will remember for next time.
 - b. A student is falsely accused of leaving a work space dirty, but the student was never in the work space. Show how the student can calmly express his/her confusion since he/she was not at the work space.
 - c. A student is being insulted by a coworker for working too slowly. The co-worker says the student is "stupid" or some other insulting remark. Show how the student can respond with an "I" statement.

Generalization

Priming

Prior to getting feedback from employers on scheduled evaluations or after the student has completed a project at work, students can be reminded about how to handle different kinds of criticism.

Facilitated practice

Anytime one has to provide feedback to students is an opportunity to practice. It may be best to preface feedback with reminders about why and how to accept constructive criticism. Then ask if they are ready for such feedback so they have time to prepare themselves.

Review

Redirect negative reactions to criticism. Ask them if they perceived it as a true criticism, false, or insulting and remind them how to deal with each kind of criticism.