

HEARING A COMPLAINT*

Sometimes in a difficult conversation, the conversation comes around to the other person's views of you. She may have concerns or criticisms of actions you have taken. How do you respond? First, you listen. Consider what she is saying – give yourself time to mull it over. If you decide, after giving yourself a reasonable amount of time and energy considering her point of view, that the criticism is unwarranted, you may say so. If, on the other hand, you recognize that the criticism is fair, acknowledge it. Apologize, commit to improving and even say “thank you” for giving you feedback that you needed.

Have the courage to hear a complaint. Begin by opening your thinking:

- Take a deep breath and remind yourself there may be something to learn here.
- Turn your back on win-lose thinking.
- View criticism as an opportunity for growth.
- Hear out the criticism without interrupting.
- Resist the temptation to launch a counterattack.
- Let the person know you understood by restating the criticism in your own words. (This is *not* agreeing with the criticism but, rather, acknowledging what you heard.)
- Pay attention to both feelings and content.

Then, clarify what you have heard:

- Clarify what are facts and what may be perceptions.
- Clarify for yourself what harm was done and the emotional impact of your actions.
- Ask (with sincerity) what you could have done differently, and how it would have been better.

Most important, avoid:

- Shifting the blame for your actions to someone else.
- Justifying your actions.
- Making light of the situation.
- Attributing negative motives to the critic's actions.
- Distorting the complaint so you can dismiss it.

Listening takes energy, effort, and attention. There are no shortcuts. Learning to listen and to listen well takes practice over time. With patience, your skills will improve and your ability to resolve conflicts more easily will be remarkable. The rewards will be well worth the investment.



*From – [Conflict 101: A Manager's Guide to Resolving Problems So Everyone Can Get Back to Work](#), Susan H. Shearouse, pp.232-233 ([American Management Association](#), New York – 2011)

(This excerpt from the book reproduced here with the kind permission of the AMA)