

A book review and recommendation by Dan Beaulieu

## *The Truth Doesn't Have to Hurt: How to Use Criticism to Strengthen Relationships, Improve Performance and Promote Change*

by Deb Bright

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Reading this book was a very pleasant surprise. I have to acknowledge that I approached reading it with some trepidation. I mean, the topic is criticism, for crying out loud! Who wants to read about criticism? But what it is really about is communication — not plain old communicating, but the hard stuff. It's the stuff you have to work through when you're telling people they're not doing a good job. For instance, you have to deal with things like back talk or arguments or even crying by the person you are criticizing. The book discusses difficult conversations we all have to have as managers. The things we can learn here apply to all facets of our lives.

This book is about delivering that tough message in the best way at the best time. It is about effective talking — something we can all learn more about. It is also about the right way to do things. I particularly liked the last chapter that deals with handling difficult situations. We have all had them. If you're like me, things have not always gone that well.

Here are a couple of tidbits of advice from that chapter on handling difficult situations:

- If the receiver has low vocabulary skills: Ask the receiver to repeat back to you what corrective action he or she is expected to take.
- If the heat of the conversation is escalating: Stop talking, and politely ask if it's possible to "hit the reset button" or postpone the discussion.

All good stuff, right? Now that I've read it, I realize that this is, in fact, one of the most important books I have ever read. Now that I think about my initial reaction, I guess what I was thinking was, "Why do I need a book about this? I already know what I'm doing. What's next? A book on walking?"

But now this is not how I feel at all. The book demonstrates how to correctly convey the difficult message while also making certain there is nothing personal in your discussion and that the message is heard. The author takes you through a complete and comprehensive plan for doing it right. Here are some recommendations to get you started:

- Think before you speak.
- Consider levels of mutual respect.
- Know how to approach the receiver.
- Clarify what actions the receiver needs to take.
- Show empathy when giving criticism.
- Show value when giving criticism.
- Keep your purpose front and center.
- Be timely in delivering your criticism.
- Make the level of criticism match the occasion.
- Provide specifics.

These are the top 10 suggestions to come out of this book. I would recommend that you keep this list on hand because we all need to be reminded of these simple guidelines.

One thing I can guarantee is that there will still be plenty of difficult discussions in your future, whether it be firing one of your salespeople or having to talk to your son about the way he is handling money. You will be facing tough discussions with the people you work with and the people you love. Do yourself a favor, and make sure you have these suggestions to rely on before having those discussions. It will help make that difficult conversation go so much easier. I promise you.

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