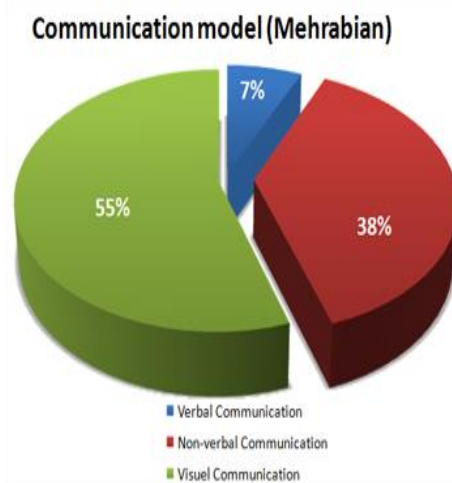


How To Handle Criticism & Critical People

It is very difficult for any person to deal with criticism or be around critical people. As pastors, you endeavor to help everyone and perhaps wish to please most people. But, in reality, there is no way to please everyone, especially if you are encouraging them to change things in their lives. Many of the criticisms found in the church do not line up with the mission of the church. How does a pastor deal with these and how can a pastor best discern whether criticism is legitimate.

- **Consider the Source.** One of the first realizations that I had to face is that many people like to complain. Some are merely comments that seem to be “off the cuff” and realized that they should not be given much attention. This may sound cold but there seems to be little or no merit to their complaint.
- **Consider the History of the Person.** Ask whether this person has a history of complaining. There are some people that complain about everything, especially change or something new. I have found that these people would complain no matter if I was there or not, they would still view things negatively and would distract you to get you off your present vision or goal.
- **Evaluate and Analyze Your Situation.** Effective communication is very important for every leader. Many of our disagreements may arise from not properly communicating to one another. We may cause a person to be confused, or say something in the wrong tone, (our non-verbals could be communicating a different message), or we have not furnished enough information for someone to process what we are saying. Below is a chart that represents that verbal skills is only a small part of effective communication.



People process things different from one another, whether it is in our speech, observing non-verbals, past experiences, phrases, noise, etc. These are all channels that go through filters that eventually brings about a thought or perception.

It is important to ask questions once you experience conflict or some type of negative comment. It may be a result of a simple breakdown in communication. It is imperative to fix it as soon as possible to restore a positive relationship. If left alone, many small disagreements turn into larger ones!

- **Embrace Positive Criticism.** There are times in all of our lives when others may disagree with us, but that may be a blessing in disguise. When we were children, we knew very quickly to whom we could turn when we wanted something. Many of those times were probably not the best for us and to continue that behavior would result in abnormal behavior.

Even the best laid plan may have flaws or perhaps there is a better way to achieve the end result. Objectively consider the merits of the criticism and seek a friendly solution that will result in a win-win situation. Many pastors feel threatened when someone disagrees with what they are doing portraying “My way or the highway” type of attitude. This is wrong. Remember that it is okay to disagree but it is wrong to be disagreeable! People can bring wisdom into our lives if we allow it and can communicate effectively to gain a positive solution.

- **Don't Get Derailed from Your Vision.** While criticism can be positive at times, most criticisms are designed to defeat your vision or plan. Don't get into the Like-Dislike mode that causes your emotions to guide your actions. You are called into a wonderful and marvelous ministry! It is not about emotions or popularity but a calling and direction for the church.

Your vision and calling are from above, not from a worldly view. But at the same time, it is very important for every pastor to communicate your message **in love**. Don't let people gain “worldly control” that is contrary to the mission and purpose of the church. Some people are just not comfortable with change. It may take some effort to explore better ways to make it easier for them to embrace change than by fighting one another. Remember, We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Ephesians 6:12. The critical person may be walking in a different spirit and can be easily influenced to shun change (Godly things) and seek things which with they are more comfortable. (Carnal desires).

- **Display the Right Spirit.** We are asking our members to embrace our teaching and guidance, etc. but are we actually living it ourselves? People should see Christ in action by our actions and how we deal with things. Jesus was approached by many who disagreed with his ministry. He answered and dealt with them in different ways, **mostly in love.**

Don't argue, show love. People can argue with the direction of the church or the way the music is being handled, and many other things but few can argue or get angry at someone who displays love. Successful pastors have a heart of love.

Treat everyone with **dignity and respect.** Act as if they are very important to you. In fact their soul should be very important to you. Do we focus more on what is being said or are we concerned about their health and well being? So many pastors "dismiss" those who bring disagreement. I think this is wrong. Remember, you can disagree with any person and still show them honor and respect.

Understand that **people who are causing problems or inflicting hurt (criticism) is hurting.** They are often communicating a message but we are so often focused on the behavior that we never see what is behind the scenes. Ask God for discernment, show them love and respect, understand that they are hurting. It is like a small child not knowing how to communicate what is wrong. They are yelling, crying, or displaying anger. Usually there is a message behind angry or critical people if we are patient enough to see what it is.

- **Set a Meeting with the Critical Person if No Other Efforts Work.** The Bible clearly describes the way to deal with people who trespass or have disagreements against one another. Matthew 18: 15-17. It is a time for leadership to not set personal gain or leverage.

If you are working with a difficult board member, start out with the difference in spirit. Do not allow personal attacks, only focus on restoration and cooperative spirit. Stress it is okay to disagree but is not okay to have a disagreeable spirit. It does not represent the church well or the things of God.

If it is a church member, your church board can serve as witnesses to try to restore a member back into the fold. Again, this is an education and leadership time for the individual. The things of God, such as a critical spirit, cannot be compromised. Again, we can stress that everyone can have an opinion but to be vocal and visibly critical does not bring unity to any church.

- **Don't Get Upset About Others Leaving the Church who Are Critical.** Every pastor may have a brief thought or wish that all critical people would leave the church, but there may be times when we might contribute to the problems ourselves. If we do the very best to communicate, display love, dignity and respect for others, try to work out disagreements, and stay focused on the mission of the church. There may be times when others still will disagree and leave.

I have seen pastors who chased after members who threaten to leave or have left. Why? Why chase after those who try to bring a spirit that is contrary to the mission of the church and causes dissention within the body? Again, your position as pastor is to bring a message of Salvation. Encourage them to live by the Word of God and challenge them to walk daily in the fruits of the Spirit while you display all the characteristics of Christ, and being a Shepherd to your flock. I am not saying to ignore that one and stay with the 99, but there comes a point in time when efforts becomes useless. Don't waste your time.

- **Stress the Importance of the Church and its Mission.** Be prayerful, seek the wisdom and direction from God, display humility and love to everyone with whom you come in contact, and keep the church moving forward. **Be what God wants you to be!** Be consistent in your testimony.

Finally, most senior pastors understand that criticism comes with the territory. They have discovered that most criticisms are not warranted. They are past trying to be people-pleasers, and their focus is in pleasing God and being the type of shepherd that God desires. Younger ministers usually fall into the trap of seeing these as personal attacks. If you are a young minister, let me assure you that criticisms are usually **directed to your role, not you as a person.**

Other points of interests may include:

- Try your best to avoid any discussions or complaints before starting the service. It is so common that people will complain about something or someone, quit their position in the church, or share something negative about a member of the church right before the pastor takes the platform. It is hard for you as a pastor to focus on the things of God when you have just been dropped a "bombshell"!

Don't read emails or read your texts in detail the night before or right before the service. Again this could be a time to drop negative information that can cause you to miss the will of God in the service. The enemy (the devil) can use anyone or anything that can get you **derailed** from the message that He desires His people to hear. Use wisdom and set guidelines in these areas. Use leaders as shields for you

until the service is over or until sometime next week. Remember, it is the little foxes that spoil the vine. (Songs of Solomon 2:15)

- **Be Careful of Anonymous Letters.** Again these types of letters try to derail a minister from doing what God wants for the church. People who lay in secret are usually not worth losing any sleep over. I know that some ministers bring these issues in front of the church and comment on them. We usually do not suggest this method but we have seen times when it has worked to bring instruction to the whole flock.
- **Surround Yourself with a Good Team.** Every pastor need armor bearers and those who support the vision and mission of the church. Recruit them to pray in agreement for difficult situations or direction for the church. The stronger the leadership team a pastor develops, the more criticisms take a back seat or disappears.

This is a simple outline to deal with most criticisms of the church. Our goal is for you to maintain an active prayer life, seek a personal time for yourself and family, get rest and seek outside interests, don't allow the small things to become mountains, maintain a Godly testimony, display humility and love to everyone, and if you need to talk to someone, get the help you need. Pastoral Care, Inc. has mentors and counselors available when needed.

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