PWOC LDP
Leadership Development Program

TOPIC: RESPONDING TO CRITICISM

The Bottom-Line Up Front: Responding well to criticism (positive or negative) is a challenging part of leadership. Criticism can be constructive or destructive, yet both types offer opportunities to grow and improve if the leader is willing to set aside her offense for the betterment of those she leads. *Note that you may want to allow extra time for this activity. It is typically enjoyable, memorable, impacting and worth the investment.*

1. Negative Criticism (5 minutes):

- Negative criticism can be a disheartening reality of leadership. After all, we are volunteers, working for free; why do people have to be so mean? Though this might be our initial reaction, it is worth pressing beyond our disappointment and discomfort to address what we can. *Break into groups of 2-4. Hold a 5-minute standing meeting to discuss the following quote by Timothy Keller and subsequent bullets.*
    - **Consider this quote:** *If someone is criticizing you and the criticism is mostly mistaken, identify the 20% of the indictment that is fair; without excuse, be willing to take it to heart. The strongest Christians are the ones most willing to repent.* —Timothy Keller
    - **Think about it:** This means that 80% of the criticism is unfair. Are you willing to consider the 20%?
    - **Keep in mind:** Those who are unjustly critical are almost certainly those who are wounded. The leader has to decide if she is going to stand in the long line of people who have rejected this individual because of her sharp tongue. *What if I considered the 20%?*
    - **Discuss:** *What if I actually heard her and made the changes I could?* Perhaps there are no changes to be made, but even just listening without dismissing her could be a game-changer for you both. *Speculate on the potential benefits.*

2. Positive Criticism (3 minutes)

- Positive criticism is meant for our good and is usually rooted in care for the leader and the health of the ministry, but it can still be difficult to receive. As with negative criticism, the leader still has to decide if she is willing to listen and to make adjustments as needed. Consider the following verses:
    - **Psalm 141:5** *Let a righteous man strike me—it is a kindness; let him rebuke me—it is oil on my head. My head will not refuse it.* —King David

- **Proverbs 27:6** *Wounds from a sincere friend are better than kisses from an enemy.*
- **Proverbs 27:17** *As iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens a friend.*

- **Gut check:** *Answer honestly. This is for your information only. You do not have to mark a box if you do not want others sitting near you to see your answer.*
  - Am I willing to receive positive criticism, knowing that it's meant for my good and the good of PWOC? ☐ Yes ☐ I hope so ☐ I want to be ☐ No
  - Am I willing to receive negative criticism, even if it wasn't shared with my good, or the good of PWOC, in mind? Am I willing to look for the 20% that may be true even if 80% is not? ☐ Yes ☐ I hope so ☐ I want to be ☐ No

3. "Speed Dating" Round 1—Negative Criticism (5 minutes):

1) *Board members sit or stand in two lines, facing each other, to practice receiving negative criticism in a low-risk way. Note that the two lines need to have the same number of people so that each person is facing a partner. Assign each Board member a negative statement (next page); she will use that same statement for all of Round 1.*
2) *Board members can use whatever tone they think is appropriate for their negative statement (edgy, sarcastic, harsh) but responses should be spoken as kindly and respectfully as possible.*
3) *Partners take turns reading their negative statement and waiting for a response. The negative statements are different for each person, but everyone will choose one of the following responses:*
   - Thank you for your honesty, I'll look into it.
   - I respectfully disagree, but I will consider your words.
   - That is something I am working on.
   - Thanks for your insight, I will be praying about it.
   - I am aware of the situation, thank you.
   - There's always room to grow, isn't there?
4) *Begin Round 1. Once partners have made their statements and received a response, everyone rotates clockwise in a "box" pattern, moving over one spot to face a new partner. This will move very quickly. You can keep going until everyone is back to their original spot, or you can use a timer to determine when the round ends.*

Round 1—Negative Criticism Statements:

1. I'm just wondering why your kids never seem to have their work done.
2. The PWOC Programs were way better at Ft. Benning/_____.
3. You know, it's a sign of disrespect when you consistently show up late; it highly offends me.
4. You might think about putting a little more effort into your appearance.
5. Maybe your unprofessionalism is due to your lack of experience.
6. There's no excuse for having a typo on a PowerPoint slide.
7. If the PWOC Board wasn't so lazy, we wouldn't need to waste all our time on SOS!
8. That is definitely not your color!
9. I've been talking with some of the others, and we think your issue is that you have too much on your plate.
10. I'll be praying for your marriage; obviously your husband is unhappy.
11. If we're not having an altar call every time we meet, then we're clearly not following God's will for PWOC.
12. I think so-and-so would do a lot better job at giving announcements. They are much more poised and professional.
13. Watchcare should not be our responsibility. We have to do it ourselves because the Chapel is mismanaging funds.
14. What you shared for your devotion was inappropriate.
15. It used to be so much better around here when so-and-so was in charge. She left before you got here.
16. Your daughter seems pretty insecure…don't you think you should do something about that?
17. I can't imagine why you think it would be OK to do that.
18. Maybe you'll do better next time. Sometimes people have to learn the hard way.
19. A marriage study should've been our number one priority. It's disappointing that we don't have one here.
20. Why is it that people ignore me when I come in the door? Isn't greeting the Board's job? Who's in charge anyway?

Possible Responses—Choose the best one for each statement spoken to you:

- ***Thank you for your honesty, I'll look into it.***
- ***I respectfully disagree, but I will consider your words.***
- ***That is something I am working on.***
- ***Thanks for your insight, I will be praying about it.***
- ***I am aware of the situation, thank you.***
- ***There's always room to grow, isn't there?***

Debrief Round 1: What was it like for you to receive critical comments? How did it make you feel? What was it like to give/receive a respectful response?

4. "Speed Dating" Round 2—Positive Criticism (5 minutes):

- *Use the same approach for Round 2. Assign a positive/constructive statement to each person. Note that the tone of voice for giving AND receiving positive/constructive criticism should be kind and respectful. This type of criticism is meant for the individual's good.*

Round 2—Positive/Constructive Criticism Statements:

1. I think you could take this project to the next level; I see greatness in you!
2. I think you may have too much on your plate and I'm concerned for you. Is there an activity you can eliminate?
3. You are my dear friend. If you are going to be late, would you please let me know? It hurts my feelings when you're not on time to be with me.
4. The PowerPoint slides are well done, with beautiful pictures and creative fonts. I've noticed a few typos though—they really should be proofed before going up on the screen.
5. You're doing a great job on announcements! Don't be afraid to go a little slower so we can digest the information.
6. Today's Program was good, but I sure wish we could've incorporated something to keep our kids engaged.
7. I noticed we don't have a marriage study going on right now. You might consider adding one for the Spring semester; I think our women would benefit from it.
8. Our activity in class was challenging and good, but it also made me a little uncomfortable. Perhaps you should make it optional next time.
9. Thank you for all the effort you put into being prepared. I know that can take time away from your family; I hope you'll be careful to put them first.
10. The next time you share, you might think of how you can keep it G-rated with the little ones in the room, but wow! What a testimony!
11. You tend to take things very personally. As leaders, we've got to be able to consider criticism without getting so defensive.
12. It means a lot to me when you stop what you are doing to look at me. When I'm trying to tell you something and you're busy with everything else, I don't feel very important to you.
13. Nothing is wasted. We learn more from our mistakes than our successes. Believe me, I've fallen on my face more times than I can count. God uses it all!
14. Our whole-group time and fellowship time are really important, but we're losing 15 minutes of class time each week. Do you think we could end fellowship at 10:40?

Possible Responses—Choose the best one for each statement spoken to you:

- **That's a great idea! I may try that out.**
- **I value your input and I will carefully consider your suggestion.**
- **That is something I am working on. I'd appreciate your prayers.**
- **Would you be willing to help out the next time we do a project like this?**
- **Thank you for speaking the truth in love; I know that wasn't easy for you.**
- **Thank you for both challenging me and encouraging me.**

Positive/Constructive Criticism Statements, cont.

15. As a leader, you need to hold criticisms and compliments loosely—let neither define you. Your true worth is in Christ alone.
16. The next time you do public speaking, it'd be a good idea to do a practice run ahead of time, so you know your material a little better. You have good things to say, but I noticed you got lost in your notes quite a bit.
17. Don't be afraid to dress up a notch the next time you are in front of people. It can help you feel more confident. I'd be glad to help you pick out an outfit.
18. It's important for your kids to finish their work and to accept their own responsibility if they do not complete it; let them answer for themselves.
19. I see how you are stepping in strong for your daughter. Please remember that she is created in the image of God and is loved just as she is. You are doing your very best and that is enough. Keep looking to God. He will help you.
20. Make sure you're keeping first things first. It seems you're getting distracted with side-issues that probably don't matter in light of eternity.

Possible Responses—Choose the best one for each statement spoken to you:

- **That's a great idea! I may try that out.**
- **I value your input and I will carefully consider your suggestion.**
- **That is something I am working on. I'd appreciate your prayers.**
- **Would you be willing to help out the next time we do a project like this?**
- **Thank you for speaking the truth in love; I know that wasn't easy for you.**
- **Thank you for both challenging me and encouraging me.**

Debrief Round 2: What was it like for you to receive positive/constructive criticism? How did it make you feel? How was it different?

Note: *For time's sake, this can be a stopping point in the training, but if you have another 5 minutes, Speed Dating Round 3 is the best! Each board member chooses a verse to read to her partner; then her partner reads one to her. The response after hearing the verse is "thank you." After two rounds of criticism, the Word of God is such a breath of fresh air. It's good to speak words of life over each other! Note that Board members can choose a different verse for each partner if they wish. They may even want to insert their partner's name into the verse when appropriate.*

5. "Speed Dating" Round 3—Scripture (5 minutes):

- **Numbers 6:24-26** *May the LORD bless you and protect you. May the LORD smile on you and be gracious to you. May the LORD show you His favor and give you His peace.*
- **Lamentations 3:22-25** *The faithful love of the LORD never ends! His mercies never cease. Great is His faithfulness; His mercies begin afresh each morning. I say to myself, 'The LORD is my inheritance; therefore, I will hope in Him!' The LORD is good to those who depend on Him, to those who search for Him.*
- **Psalm 18:16-19** *He reached down from heaven and rescued me; He drew me out of deep waters. He rescued me from my powerful enemies, from those who hated me and were to strong for me. They attacked me at a moment when I was in distress, but the LORD supported me. He led me to a place of safety; He rescued me because He delights in me.*
- **Psalm 62:5-8** *Let all that I am wait quietly before God, for my hope is in Him. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress where I will not be shaken. My victory and honor come from God alone. He is my refuge, a rock where no enemy can reach me. O my people, trust in Him at all times. Pour out your heart to Him, for God is our refuge.*
- **Isaiah 41:9-10** *I have called you back from the ends of the earth, saying, 'You are my servant.' For I have chosen you and will not throw you away. Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand.*
- **Zephaniah 3:17** *For the LORD your God is living among you. He is a mighty Savior. He will take delight in you with gladness. With His love, He will calm all your fears. He will rejoice over you with joyful songs.*
- **Matthew 11:28-30** *Then Jesus said, 'Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and your will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.*
- **2 Thessalonians 2:16-17** *Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by His grace gave us eternal comfort and a wonderful hope, comfort you and strengthen you in every good thing you do and say.*
- **Ephesians 3:18-19** *And may you have the power to understand as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep His love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.*
- **Philippians 4:6-7** *Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank Him for all He has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.*