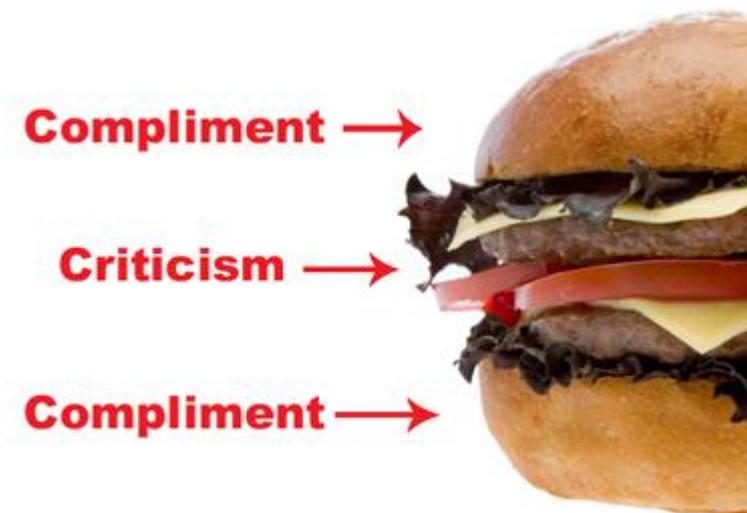


The Hamburger method of constructive criticism

Written by Nate Just

It's funny what things stick with you in life. Back when I was in college, one of my professors somehow got onto the subject of constructive criticism and decided to teach the class the method he uses for offering "critical" advice to people.



It's called the hamburger method, and here's how it works:

When offering a critique, you begin with a constructive compliment on something the person does well (Otherwise known as the fluffy bun part). You then get to the meat of the matter, which of course is the constructive criticism part. Finally, you end with another constructive compliment (i.e. the other half of the fluffy bun).

Basically, you're sandwiching the constructive criticism between two constructive compliments. In my experience, it's been an extremely effective technique, largely due to its disarming effective. It helps people let down their guard, and receive the criticism without being as defensive.

Here's an example:

"Hey Defensive Dave, I noticed you went out of your way to submit your expense report on time every month for the last three months – that's great! I do, however, think it's a bad idea to call Jane in accounting an "ignorant slut". She may not be familiar with that old 1970's Saturday Night Live Television skit and may be offended by your comment. But overall, your interaction with the team has been great – thanks for making the effort."

I once suggested the hamburger method to a client who quickly dismissed the technique as "candy coating." Maybe it is, but if it gets a better result, isn't that the whole point? Medicine manufactures candy coat medicine all the time for two reasons:

- 1) So people will take it, and
- 2) because it tastes like crap if they don't.

If given the choice between cherry or crap flavored medicine, which would you chose?

Also, I think a 2 to 1 ration of constructive compliments to constructive criticism makes sense because it affirms the desired behavior or practice.

So here are a few things to consider before offering criticism:

- 1. Is the criticism truly constructive?** Here are some synonyms for "constructive": Positive, helpful, productive, useful, beneficial, and practical. Antonym: Destructive.
 - 2. Why am I offering this criticism in the first place?** Is it because I'm trying to be helpful or just because I'm an a**hole?
 - 3. Is the criticism necessary and appropriate?** Does it have a great impact on the "grander scheme of things", or am I just being nitpicky. Will focusing on this issue be worth the time and effort in the long run?
 - 4. Do I have the right, or better yet - have I earned the right to speak into this person's life?** The difference between "management" and "leadership" has a lot to do with the relationship you have with your team. "Managers" tend to focus on control, whereas real leaders take people to the next level.
 - 5. Finally, have I noticed at least two things to compliment before commencing with the criticism?**
- If you've run through the list and are satisfied that the criterion is met, then give the hamburger method a try. I think you'll find it's a great tool for offering truly "constructive" criticism.

Mp3 can be found here: <http://n8tip.com/wp-content/uploads/QT11.mp3>

About the author: [Nate Just](#) is a corporate trainer, productivity coach, speaker, and founder of [Competitive Edge LLC](#).