

LEAD

The CEO of J.Crew Just Showed How Emotionally Intelligent People Respond to Criticism

Rather than rely solely on his own instincts, Jim Brett used the input he received to help shape the direction of J.Crew.

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J.Crew may finally have turned a corner.

The iconic retailer, which has posted losses for 15 consecutive quarters, [finally posted a one percent rise](#)—its first in almost four years.

CEO Jim Brett, who took over the position last summer, [recently spoke to the CBS This Morning crew](#) about how he and his team have turned things around. Throughout the interview, one story stuck out to me.

Brett says that on the day it was announced that he had accepted the job as CEO, he received over 300 emails on LinkedIn--mostly from customers--telling him exactly what they wanted.

How would you respond to a bunch of critical emails that arrived in your inbox, before your first official day on the job?

Brett took those emails to heart. When asked what he thought about hearing from all those angry customers, Brett had this to say:

"Well first of all, it means that they care. They're not writing about the brands that they don't care about."

It would have been easy for Brett to ignore these messages. A successful business executive, Brett has been widely credited with drastically increasing revenue for the companies he's worked with in the past, including retailers Anthropologie and West Elm.

But rather than rely solely on his own instincts, Brett used input he received to help shape the direction of J.Crew moving forward. For example, Brett explained how the company has strived to diversify by offering more sizes, more aesthetics, and more fits--along with cheaper prices for gateway products like t-shirts.

This ability to benefit from negative feedback is invaluable--but it's also not easy to develop.

Diamonds in the rough

In my new book, *EQ Applied: The Real-World Guide to Emotional Intelligence*, I compare the feedback you receive to an unpolished diamond.

To the untrained eye, a freshly mined gem may not look valuable, or even attractive. But after the long and complex process of sorting, cutting, and polishing, its true value becomes obvious. In a similar way, learning to extract the benefits of criticism can prove to be an invaluable skill.

Unfortunately, much of the criticism we receive is delivered in a way that's less than ideal. Sometimes it's downright brutal--even wrong, in many ways. But even if it's not delivered constructively, criticism should still be considered a gift--because most criticism is rooted in truth, meaning there's something you can take away from it, some insight you can use to improve yourself.

And even if criticism is completely off base, it's still extremely valuable because it helps you understand the perspective of those who see the world differently than you. Learning from another person's views and rationale can even help you focus your own thinking and refine your beliefs and values.

By viewing negative feedback as a learning opportunity, you can do the following:

- Confirm the validity of your ideas and prepare yourself for similar criticism in the future.
- Better craft your message in a way that reaches those with varying perspectives.
- Better identify your target audience.
- Change and adapt when appropriate.

Of course, I'm not excusing criticism that's hurtful or thoughtless. If you need to deliver negative feedback, doing so with respect and tact is not only the kind thing to do, it will get you better results.

But if you're on the receiving end of criticism, you don't have that luxury. Remember that feedback is like a freshly mined diamond: it may not look pretty, but it has great potential for value. Now it's time to cut and polish, learn, and grow.

So, the next time you receive negative feedback, try to view it not as an attack, but rather as a learning exercise.

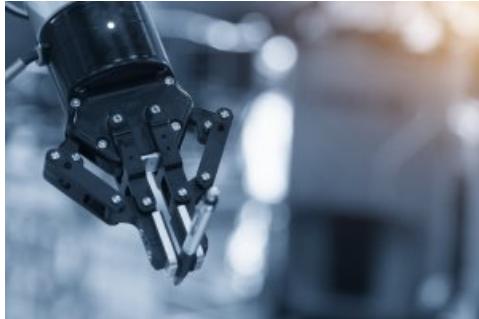
Ask yourself:

- Putting my personal feelings aside, what can I learn from this alternate perspective?
- How can I use this feedback to help me improve?

By considering these questions, you shift your time and energy to a productive exercise. In effect, you turn what could be a negative situation into a positive experience--a chance to learn and get better.

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