



## SEED'S TIP OF THE MONTH:

### BUSTING OUT OF THE HABIT OF CRITIQUE

It is so enticingly easy to critique what we are against. We can readily notice others' doing this, in every walk of life: politics, the arts, education, and even among community organizers whose expressed mission is to *improve* the life chances of more people. But do we notice it in ourselves?

When you think about it, we're not likely to improve much of anything by declaring complaints or rallying to oppose bad things. The Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. is best known for proclaiming "I have a dream," not "I have an issue." Right?

Critical analysis can be a pathway to vision. Getting clear about what is unsatisfactory can help us recognize what actually would be deeply satisfying.

Critique is essential in the face of injustice.

However, critique can become a severely limiting habit. When left unchecked, this habit can create more distance than ever between current inadequacies and revolutionary improvements. Leading with critique can be a real turn-off to potential co-leaders and prospective partners who might otherwise expand our view and help bring new possibilities to life.

The tricky thing about habits is that we rarely see ourselves doing them. Or rather, we do not see habits doing us.

So how do we disrupt "critique mode," even when we have no idea that we are doing it, again?

**STRETCH:** Our first quest is to recognize the habit.

To reveal potential signs that we are in critique mode, try asking these questions: Am I seeing the strengths in my team? Am I dwelling on what seems impossible for people to accomplish, or am I guiding people to do more of what they do best? Am I finding value in employee inputs? Am I inviting multiple perspectives and really listening for value in differing views? Do my conversations with my team tend to focus on what is missing or what we have?

Our ability to observe ourselves is such a powerful tool.



## BUSTING OUT OF THE HABIT OF CRITIQUE

**ENLIVEN:** One practice we have at our disposal every instant is to notice our mood. When we find ourselves critiquing inadequacies more than conceiving new possibilities, chances are good that our lens is being compromised due to a mood of resentment, guilt or sadness. These moods keep us rooted in things past.

Or perhaps we are betting on the future: worrying, dreading, predicting, or feeling resigned that things are hopeless?

Staying too much in the past or present limits our awareness of options available to us right here and now.

“What is the mood I wish to create?” This is a powerful question to enliven our present power! Or try this mantra: “I am open, I am learning, I have choices.” However you go about it, the goal is to see things with fresh eyes, since the only place we take action is NOW.

**ENNOBLE:** Let’s try a habit-breaking practice to ennoble others, too. This ancient Chinese proverb is instructive:

*“If you want one year of prosperity, grow grain.  
If you want ten years of prosperity, grow trees.  
If you want one hundred years of prosperity, grow people.”*

Consider a work relationship that is currently dissatisfying, one that you have critiqued but not improved. Make a list of three things lacking in the relationship, such as 1) he is not doing X; or 2) she does not Y. In other words, what are three things you are not getting?

Did you make a list? Good. Then you are ready to ask yourself this seemingly outrageous question:

“How might *I offer* these three attributes to the very people from whom I would like to receive them?”

This exercise is called “Give to Get.” Sounds strange, yes? Why not try it? Write down your plan for **giving** your colleague, partner, friend or team exactly what you wish to **get** from them.

**DISCOVER:** We’d love to hear how this works for you: [tips@seedimpact.org](mailto:tips@seedimpact.org)

