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Publisher's Note: This is the eighth in an ongoing series featuring excerpts from Umberto P. Fedeli's forthcoming book, "A Legacy of Love," published by Smart Business Books®.

Constructive criticism

Be direct, but remember to be respectful

BY UMBERTO P. FEDELI | UFEDELI@THEFEDELIGROUP.COM

We all learn from others. We learn by watching the way others lead, the way they conduct business. We learn from their successes — what worked. We learn from their mistakes, or at least we should. Along those lines, I'm always asking the questions: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?



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These are simple questions, but the answers are not always so straightforward. *Who* is your role model? *What* response did that business owner have when a customer expressed disappointment? *When* should I respond in *what* way? *Why* is this important? *How* did these events unfold? *How* can I make a positive impact?

In many circumstances, there is not a right or wrong way. There are different approaches to reach an end goal, whether that's expanding into a new market in business or developing a closer relationship with a family member at home.

Beyond learning by watching, we also learn and improve by taking criticism from others. Constructive criticism is important to give and receive.

If you are in a position of leadership — whether managing a department or overseeing a corporate headquarters, running a family or organizing a volunteer group — then you have been given a gift. You are in a unique position to lead by example. You can provide constructive feedback that can help others. And, *how* you offer that insight is nearly as important as *what* you say.

I've found in my career, you can actually say almost anything to give valuable direction as long as you begin with a softening statement so the recipient of your feedback understands that your insight is coming from a good place. "I mean this with no disrespect ..." "You

know I care about you ..." "You know how much I respect you ..."

Direct, offensive language that insults the person you are talking to will get you nowhere. They will not understand your position, and certainly will not agree with it. If you attack them with a demeaning phrase, you'll spark defense. "Why would you do something so stupid?" or, "Don't you know better than do to this?"

Sometimes when I want to help, I begin to offer advice and then I realize that the person who is sharing a circumstance or hashing over a problem with me actually just wants me to listen. I may begin with a softening phrase — but my feedback is not what the other is seeking. My intentions are good, but I mess up. We all do. Then I back up, reflect on the situation and, again, ask: *How* could I have done that better? Determine if your advice or your open mind and listening ear is what a confidant truly wants.

And, if you are in the position to provide insight, be constructive in the way you offer advice. Set an example by doing ordinary things in an extraordinary way. Watch others you admire and ask the simple questions — *why* did they react that way, *how* did others respond?

We learn by watching others. And we take advice when it is respectfully offered to us as a way to improve. These are lessons about constructive criticism that we can all improve upon in business and life. ●