

# How Not to Take Comments Too Personally

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IN CASE YOU HAVE NOT  
BEEN ADEQUATELY  
INFORMED,  
PLEASE CONSIDER THIS  
OFFICIAL NOTIFICATION  
THAT YOU ARE AWESOME.

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Having self-esteem is fundamental to being mentally healthy. Being self-assured is at the core of success at work and home. Self-esteem and self-assurance, like self-confidence, are good qualities. However, don't confuse them with arrogance or feeling superior to others. When you have a healthy self-esteem, you feel good about yourself. You don't require external validation. You don't feel the need to boast. You believe in yourself and your abilities, but not that you are better than others. You are comfortable living with yourself. Unlike being insecure which fosters arrogance, you are secure. You are humble rather than haughty because you are comfortable with who you are.

In the case of children, self-assured children don't feel the need to be validated by others, like joining a gang as an extreme example, because they have their own identify. Self-assured employees don't constantly need praise and affirmation because they are self-encouraged. Self-assured bosses don't feel the need to take credit for the work done by their teams because they are confident in their own abilities.

How self-assured are you? Perhaps the best test of self-assurance is when people correct you or disagree with you. How do you react? If someone suggests that you try an alternative approach to something, do you take it personally? Or if someone doesn't like your idea, do you feel attacked? Or do you stay calm?

If you are self-assured, hopefully you see others' differing perspectives as opportunities to learn and improve. In contrast, if you are not self-assured, you probably feel the need to defend yourself or go on the counter attack, especially when receiving corrective feedback. Rather than seek to learn and understand others' perspectives, you assert your own opinion.

People who lack self-confidence and self-assurance ruminate on others' corrective feedback for hours, if not days and weeks. A little reflection is good as it facilitates understanding and learning, but when it goes unabated, it becomes destructive. In extreme cases of rumination, people quit their jobs and leave relationships because they get so upset about what someone said, even when their own words, actions, or results deserved correction by most objective standards.

People who are self-assured accept themselves. They don't react harshly to criticism because they accept they aren't perfect. Counterintuitively, neither do they settle into their comfort zone. If they value learning, they don't become complacent with who they are. While they accept who they are at the moment, they strive to improve and broaden their thinking. Therefore, they value differing opinions and seek corrective feedback.

Self-assured people don't take themselves too seriously. They don't try to be what they think others want them to be. They are comfortable being themselves. They don't think others are constantly judging or evaluating them. Neither do they care. They aren't anxious about how they are perceived. They appreciate compliments and positive feedback, but don't depend on them. They don't require others' validation or approval. They don't need to be right. They care about what others say, but not overly so. They care enough to find the kernel of truth and learn from it rather than feel judged by it.

In summary, people who are self-assured and know there is more to learn don't feel the need to be right. They welcome feedback and opportunities to improve.

## How Not to Take Comments Too Personally

If you or others in your circle of influence generally feel the need to be right, or take corrective feedback negatively, or see differing opinions as personal attacks, consider which of the principles below deserve attention:

1. **Differing opinions lead to new perspectives and better ideas.** View different opinions as opportunities to learn new and possibly better ways of thinking rather than attacks that need to be defended. No matter how smart or experienced you are, you don't have all the best ideas.
2. **You can care too much.** Caring about matters and being conscientious is generally a good trait, but some things, like how others think about you or how good they are, don't deserve so much concern and energy. Respect people's comments and abilities, but without thinking less of yourself. Set your own standard and compare yourself to who you want to be rather than others.
3. **Accept that you are not perfect.** No one is. Let go of the pressure to always be right. You say and do unwise things from time to time. Strive for continued improvement and excellence in what you do, but let go of the need to be mistake-free. In case you don't know, you are awesome, even though you aren't perfect.
4. **Being criticized and receiving correcting feedback is a gift.** When from credible sources, feedback helps you grow. Regardless of how poorly people give feedback, look for the kernel of truth that is valuable. The most significant problems people create for themselves are often rooted in an absence of corrective feedback.
5. **It isn't all about you.** Being criticized or asked to do something different can be good for others. People sometimes give feedback to retain their own dignity. People need to vent sometimes. You are helping others when you stay humble, listen, and if appropriate, take responsibility for making a change.
6. **Relationships are more important than being right.** Being right might be satisfying in the moment, but if it damages an otherwise good relationship, it is a loss in the end. In the spirit of maintaining good relationships, let others be right, particularly on trivial matters.
7. **Pick your battles.** Do not feel the need to resolve every issue. Consider what is worth your energy. Not everything is worth getting frustrated over. Keep in mind what you have and what is working. If someone's comments are insignificant in the overall context of things, they don't deserve your attention. Let them go.
8. **Not everyone will like you; accept it,** especially when they have values vastly different from yours. They might be a heckler or just a very different person than you. Ignore them. Move on. You can't win everyone over. You don't need to bring them to your way of thinking or be friends with them.
9. **Do the best you can every day and accept that you have done enough.** You may deserve correction and need to make changes, but change is hard and can take time. Make progress each day toward the change you need to make, and when you have done your reasonable best, you've done enough for the day. Work on it again tomorrow.
10. **Find meaning in something greater than being perfect, being right, or winning arguments.** Have faith. Find your purpose. Find a sense of satisfaction in something greater than others' opinions of you. Do not depend on others' approval. Do not outsource your self-esteem. As the American author Byron Katie said, "It's not your job to like me – it's mine."

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Article written by Mike Hawkins, award-winning author of *Activating Your Ambition: A Guide to Coaching the Best Out of Yourself and Others* ([www.ActivatingYourAmbition.com](http://www.ActivatingYourAmbition.com)), author of the *SCOPE of Leadership* six-book series on coaching leaders to lead as coaches ([www.ScopeOfLeadership.com](http://www.ScopeOfLeadership.com)), and president of Alpine Link Corp ([www.AlpineLink.com](http://www.AlpineLink.com)), a boutique consulting firm specializing in leadership development and sales performance improvement.

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