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### On Responding to Criticism

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By Mike Taigman

Even though bestselling author Ken Blanchard says, "Feedback is the breakfast of champions," it's not always easy to hear. The management team for Medic in Charlotte, North Carolina, was receiving their individual feedback from a 360-degree assessment tool. One's boss, peers, direct reports and customers appraised each manager's performance. The director of communications, Berry Bagwell, felt his blood boil as he read his report. "The supervisors who reported to me just trashed me," he said later. "I was so angry that I couldn't read the rest of the report, and I couldn't stay in the meeting."

Berry fumed on his drive home. He couldn't get it out of his mind. He tried to read the feedback report again later that evening and once again threw it aside in frustration. Finally, he decided, "I have a few choices: I can continue to be frustrated. I can ignore the whole thing and pretend that it didn't happen. Or I can work to make things better."

Choosing the last option, he scheduled one-on-one meetings with each of the supervisors. He sat with them and said, "Please tell me in detail what's going on. Don't hold anything back. I promise you that there will be no retribution, and that I'm going to work hard to make things better. I'm going to ask you to call me on things when I screw up."

Over the next few weeks, people would catch Berry's eye when he exhibited new behavior. They would wink and give him a thumbs-up to encourage him. During the next couple of months, his team cranked into high-performance mode with remarkable trust and cohesion. They implemented a one-of-a-kind vehicle electronic mapping system. They may be the first place in the emergency services industry to real-time track individual crew workloads and adjust their system accordingly. For this work, they were given the Diamond award for technological innovation, beating out companies such as Xerox. As of this writing, they have met the requirements for Center of Excellence Accreditation from the National Academies of Emergency Dispatch.

Most people enter a grieving process when faced with feedback that they would rather not hear. Most people stay in the denial phase. If, like Berry, you are able to work through all the emotional reactions to reach acceptance and then take action on what you've learned, you, too, will be able to enjoy your breakfast of champions, and your team's performance may improve as well.

*Mike can be found at [www.emsleader.com](http://www.emsleader.com).*

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