

Correcting staff is a task dreaded by almost every business owner I know. It's the reason so many small business owner say, "I wish I could go back to being a one-person show." It doesn't have to be that way, though; just keep in mind this simple acronym:

**T** - **True**: Did you directly observe the behavior that's being criticized? If it's behavior reported by other staff members, can you confirm it with more than one person independently? Ask the staff member to describe the situation from their eyes, too; even if another person observed the behavior, there may be more to the story.

**H** - **Helpful**: Is your feedback focused on helping the employee improve their performance or avoid the problem next time? Give your team member specific ideas on what and how you want the task done. For example, if there was a problem with how an employee spoke to a customer, give them an example of how to respond to the customer differently next time. If the employee still doesn't seem to get it, consider role playing or ask them to observe and take notes of others, within your business or elsewhere, who handle a similar situation well.

**I** - **Inspiring**: Is your delivery of the criticism or reprimand going to inspire them to be a better employee? As with any communication, your words can pull people up and inspire them to be their best, or they can cut them down and belittle them. As simple as "I've seen you do this before so well..." or "All you need is to tweak this and you've got it covered..." lets your employee know that you believe in them and want them to succeed.

**N** - **Necessary**: Can you articulate to the employee why the criticism/reprimand is necessary? While some corrections are obvious - the action put a customer at risk or potentially caused a staff member to be injured, others may not be so obvious to an employee. Educate your staff about how their actions affect the well-being of the business; for example, "if customers feel talked down to, they will go somewhere else and we will lose business and profit." Help them see the connection between their actions and the business's overall mission and goals.

**K** - **Kind**: Is your criticism delivered in a firm but kind and non-hostile manner? Corrections ought to be delivered in a "charge-neutral" way, meaning without judgement expressed in your voice. Every person wants to do well at their job and the staff member probably feels badly about the situation already. Be direct in a kind and thoughtful manner.

I love this acronym not only for the five elements described above, but also for what it causes us to do when we remember the acronym: it makes us pause... and think. As I tell my kids, thinking before speaking is always a good thing.

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### About The Author

Helen Dutton is a veteran Business Coach and Owner of A Vision Of Your Own LLC. For over 10 years, she has coached CEOs and Business Owners to achieve business excellence with the mission "Achieving Excellence with Ease". Helen can be reached directly at [helen@avisionofyourown.com](mailto:helen@avisionofyourown.com) or 603-529-2345.

