

Criticize in Private

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In his book *The Essential Wooden*, with Steve Jamison, Coach Wooden offered his input on: *Seven Ways to Make Your Criticism Count*.

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| 1. Get all of the facts. | 5. Do it privately to avoid embarrassment. |
| 2. Don't lash out. | |
| 3. Be specific. | 6. Only the leader gives criticism. |
| 4. Don't make it personal. | 7. Once done, it's done. |

The idea of criticizing privately was a fundamental principle that anchored the culture of team spirit that was so strong in Coach Wooden's basketball teams.

This does not mean that Coach Wooden did not correct players at practice in front of other players. He did. In his book *A Game Plan for Life* with, Don Yeager, Coach described his approach to serious discipline issues:

If there was an issue I felt needed attention with my players, I tried to do it by taking them aside and speaking to them privately. There is an understanding that is forged and an appreciation for the private correction. No one likes to be called out in front of his or her friends. Humiliation is not the same thing as correction: One attacks the person; the other attacks the problem.

Coach also described his policy on public criticism of a player's performance:

I would never publicly criticize a player for poor performance. Even in moments of extreme frustration, I would check myself because it just didn't seem right — because it didn't seem like something my father would have done.

In the book *Coach Wooden's Leadership Game Plan for Success*, former UCLA Head Coach Gary Cunningham, who was John Wooden's Assistant Coach from 1966 through 1975, described how the culture of *Criticize in Private* impacted the way Coach Wooden treated his Assistant Coaches in front of the players:

He was very inclusive and gave us both authority and respect. When we fouled up, he never criticized us in front of the team, nor would he allow the players to challenge us.

The manager who corrects the assistant manager in front of an employee undermines the authority of the assistant manager, offends the assistant manager, presents themselves in a bad light and makes the employee feel uncomfortable.

The same could be said for a parent that corrects another parent in front of a child, the coach who corrects the assistant coach in front of a player, the supervisor who criticizes an employee in front of another employee and a supervisor who corrects a salesperson in front of a customer.

Telling an employee you want to see them in your office, right now, in front of a coworker or using the intercom system to page an employee to come to your office qualifies as public criticism and should be avoided.

Employees are hesitant to communicate this to their boss because they don't want to get in trouble, but they are offended and less receptive to being coached.

People must be held accountable, but as Coach Wooden demonstrated, there is a right and wrong way to handle these situations.

Yours in Coaching,
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