Book Review How To Hug A Porcupine; Dealing With Toxic And Difficult To Love Personalities

In my opinion, this book is easily 10 times the value of what I paid for it. There was no fluff or filler content. Dr. Lund gave me verbal face to face permission to quote him and use sections of his book word for word.

My Summary

A porcupine is someone who is highly critical of others, especially their spouse and children. Dr. Lund also refers to an excessively critical person as a toxic individual; additionally he warns against moderate or mild criticism. A tame critic causes damage to a relationship and family. There are different degrees of toxicity. The toxic or critical individual can never be pleased; they are controlling and manipulative. You can never be or do enough to please a porcupine. A toxic person feels you exist to make them happy, but it doesn’t matter what you do, you can never please them. They may tell you what you can do to please them, but once you meet their demands or expectations, they change it. Toxic people place a carrot over your head, but raise it every time you are close enough to bite it.

The key to surviving a relationship with a toxic person is to define for yourself your own self-worth and what a reasonable loving person would do. You shouldn’t try to meet their standard or please them because you will never be able to make a porcupine happy.

Criticism never changes people. Many critiholics are this way because they are operating on false beliefs. They believe it is their job or responsibility in their stewardship to change their spouse and children. They try to change their family member through criticism, because they don’t know any other way and lack skills that actually work. Criticism can never change another because change must come from the inside. If the person doesn’t want to change or is unwilling to, no amount of criticism will generate transformation.

Dr. Lund compared criticism to bloodletting because the medical community in the 1800’s believed bloodletting saved lives, which it certainly did not. Bloodletting killed a lot of people. Today, society at large believes criticism changes people. Chronic criticism will kill your marriage and family over time, unless you develop the skills to protect yourself.

Dr. Lund believes that constructive criticism is a myth. Criticism even if done correctly never builds or edifies another. It always tears down. With that said, it doesn’t mean that criticism should never be given. There is a right way and a wrong way to criticize. Receiving criticism requires greater strength and skills than giving
it. Never attack a person’s self worth or character when giving criticism. NEVER name call.

Dr. Lund defined toxic behavior as “any word, deed, or action which detracts from you being your best self or hinders others from becoming their best selves.”

Toxicity Occurs In A Continuum, And The Medium Is Still Destructive

On one end is very little criticism and the other end are chronic criticism. Like most continuums, the average is in the middle with a huge bulging hump. This is known as the medium. Generally the middle ground is not bad, but not when you are talking about criticism. Being in the middle with criticism will still do significant harm to your marriage and family. People don’t recognize how much harm they are doing to their family by their critical behavior. If you are on the far end of the criticism continuum or the chronic end you are probably headed toward divorce. Unless that is your spouse and children put on a thick armor to guard against your critical attacks.

Dr. Lund said, “There are people who have as their greatest need the expectation to have their toxic behaviors accepted as normal. The problem, of course, is that everybody comes to a marriage with a set of “areas of needed improvement.” How this area of needed improvement is dealt with is the issue. **The way we approach our weaknesses and the weaknesses of others is at the very core of what is healthy verses what is unhealthy in a marriage.** The MEANS we use to address shortcomings in ourselves and others is what defines toxic from nontoxic behavior. In healthy relationships the quality of the relationship is never sacrificed at the expense of inappropriate or uninvited criticism.”

The Three Types of Toxicity Are; Selective, Situational and Universal

Selective: This toxicity is random and is not consistent. This type is the most dangerous to others self-worth and mental health because you are not predictable.

Situational: Only certain conditions trigger it, typically the most stressful and frustrating situations.
Universal: This is a person who is basically always critical to everyone and every situation. The universal toxic individual is a hard person to be married to or associate with.

The Three Most Common Porcupines Are;

• The perfectionist
• The control freak
• The critiholic

**Good Parenting Is About Transferring Responsibility Over To Your Children As Soon As Possible**

Dr. Lund talks about two programs for parenting, an “I Love You,” and “I Trust You,” program. These programs are independent of each other. You can love your children without trusting them. Children will try to manipulate parents through dysfunctional behaviors. It is important to note that you can show unconditional love toward your children even if they are behaving in destructive ways.

It is good parenting practice to have one on one time with your children, maybe a date night; doing something fun that the both of you like especially your children. This one on one time is a way to show unconditional love. Spend this individual time with your kid’s even if you are disciplining them for something else. You shouldn’t deny your kids or family this bonding as a form of punishment.

Don’t fall for the line when your children say, “If you love me, you will trust me.” That is not true.

The I Love You program says; “Because I love you, I will assist you in becoming your highest and best self. But I will not enable you to self destruct, nor will I help you one inch to hell!”

The I Trust You program says; “I will trust you as you demonstrate responsible behavior. I will trust you when your words and behavior are consistent. I will trust you when you are doing what you say you will be doing and you are where you say you will be.”

Eventually children must take responsibility for their own lives, for their own successes and failures. Don’t let them blame you for their failures. It is not your job to bail them out of every poor choice or life tragedy.
There Are Two Keys To Protect Yourself Against A Toxic Personality

If you want to survive a marriage to a porcupine you need to put on a thick armor, so you can hug one without being pierced by their quills. The first key is personal responsibility. Don’t let others define your self worth, even your spouse. The second key is to give up the expectation to please the toxic person. Focus on your own your self but not in a selfish way.

A porcupine will do a real beating on you, if life events weaken your self worth. If you are already feeling down, and your family (porcupine) criticizes you; the criticism compounds your low sense of well-being. A critiholic will not employ proper criticizing tactics or be sympathetic toward your situation. A porcupine thinks since he has an opinion it is his right to run his mouth off without regard to your feelings. He will likely do it in a way that will attack your character and self worth. This is why you can’t let your mate define who you are. If they are attacking your character, you have to learn to let the criticism wash over you without it getting you down.

Dr. Lund gives 13 different tools to help you handle toxic personalities. I will comment on a couple and encourage you to read the book for the rest.

1. Self Preparation.
2. Defining enough.
3. Rewarding self.
4. Diversion.
5. Writing the criticism down.
6. Following the counsel you would give your best friend or your child.
7. Always have an exit plan.
8. Strategic retreat.
9. Give others the benefit of the doubt.
10. Limit negative contact.
11. Have a zero tolerance for abuse.
12. Leave the room, but not the relationship.
13. Leaving the relationship.

Self-Preparation and Defining enough: Remember that you will never be enough to the toxic person, so you need to define what is enough for yourself. You must define what a reasonable and loving person would do. You then do it, not because the other person deserves it, but because you are a loving person. Focus on being your healthiest and best self.

Leaving the relationship is obviously the last choice. The pain and misery is not worth staying with an abusive person, especially with an abusive person who will not change.
**Expectations Vs Wish**

Dr. Lund repeated over and over again in the book in various ways that you cannot change a critic. A wish is hoping that this toxic person will change. Of course change is possible, but only if that person wants to change. An expectation is what you can do. You have full responsibility over yourself. Dr. Lund says that you are only one half of any relationship. No matter how perfect you are and how hard you try, you are only one half of a marriage or relationship. You can’t control your spouse. **The best way to bring about change is to focus on what you can do.**

**What To Do When Someone Is Crossing The Line**

Abuse is never justified, it doesn’t matter what your family has done. Nobody should have to earn your respect. Respect should be an inalienable right, especially for your spouse and children. Your spouse and children are children of God and are eternal. The seeds of Godhood are inborn in them. Never forget that. You don’t have the right to abuse.

If you are being abused or if your spouse has crossed the line of being too critical you have to take matters into your own hands. It is also not wise to be a middle man or woman between your mate and children. You have to allow your wife/husband the agency to have a poor relationship with your children but you can’t let him/her abuse them.

The key phrase Dr. Lund suggests when things are out of control is something to this effect, “I am leaving, but not the relationship. I will return when you are in control.” The length of your absence depends on the situation. If your cup of receiving criticism is full, and you are being criticized in a manner where the other person is emotionally charged, you may want to leave for a few hours. If the other person is abusive, you may have to leave for a few days.

Criticism mixed with anger is deadly.

Dr. Lund describes nine inappropriate forms of criticism. Two of them are sarcasm, which is described as stripping of the flesh. The second is trailing barbs. A trailing barb is when you give a compliment with a but. The but is always something critical, something that the other person could have done better.
The 24 Hour Challenge

Dr. Lund issues you a challenge that should help you conquer being critical. The challenge is to go 24 hours without a single critical remark or thought. Critical temptations don’t count; these are thoughts that pop into your mind but you manage to expel them immediately. The difference between temptation and thoughts is thoughts go beyond temptations. Critical thoughts are when you nurture and expand the temptation, and when that happens start your 24 hours over again.

This is a lot harder than it looks. Once you make a critical remark or nurture a critical thought, the 24 hours start over. This challenge is for all situations and circumstances and all people. It counts even while you are driving. Nothing is immune. This challenge will rewire and retrain your brain to stop being critical.

It will cause you to consciously think about your behavior and the harm you are doing.

How To Give Criticism

Step One: Think Before You Speak

BEFORE YOU SPEAK ASK YOURSELF TWO QUESTIONS:

1. Is the criticism a part of my stewardship or business?
2. Is the criticism not only true, but is it necessary?
   If the answer to either of the foregoing questions is “NO”, then BACK OFF!
   If the answer to both of the questions is “Yes”, then proceed with the following:

STEP TWO: THE PROCESS

1. Ask for, and receive, permission to criticize.
2. Be alone with the one being criticized at a mutually agreeable time and place.
3. Be in emotional control and logically explain your concerns. No yelling, crying, swearing, threats, physical, or emotional intimidation.
4. Stay focused on the issue or behavior in question. DO NOT ATTACK SELF WORTH! Separate the issue from EGO. Protect self-worth.

STEP THREE: AFFIRM WORTH

1. Convey acceptance.
2. Give affection.
3. Show appreciation.
Dr. Lund recommends this approach when you are ready to give criticism; “I’m very concerned about saying something that will hurt your feelings. I would like to be able to talk to you about an issue or behavior without your feeling I’m attacking your self-worth.” I love you, or I care about you, or I’m sincerely concerned and I just want to help you be an even better person that you already are. This is why I’m not yelling or crying. I am genuinely concerned.”

**How To Receive Criticism**

**STEP ONE:**

Stop! Immediately remove your EGO from the issue or behavior being criticized.

Look: Look at the person.

Listen: Do not defend, make an excuse, or apologize. Don’t speak, LISTEN!

**STEP TWO:**

Write the criticism down where you can evaluate it.

**STEP THREE**

Feed it back without emotion.

**STEP FOUR:**

Excuse yourself from the immediate response and set a time and place to respond.

**STEP FIVE:**

Evaluate the criticism and your resources for dealing with it, i.e., time, energy, will.

**STEP SIX:**

Respond at an appointed time and place. The response will fall into one of three categories:

- I will change.
- I disagree and this is why...
- I will not change because I am unwilling or unable to do so.
Concluding Thoughts And Remarks

Dr. Lund likens criticism or hyper criticism to cancer. Cancer is a deadly disease that kills everything it comes in contact with. Cancer spreads to other parts of your body, possibly even consuming everything. To cure cancer requires intrusive therapy, surgery or radiation therapy. Criticism is second nature to a toxic person and to be free of it requires drastic measures.

On pages 177 to 182, Dr. Lund identifies the various toxic behaviors with a positive behavior to replace it with. Overcoming frustration is a secret and all frustration comes from unmet expectations. On page 94, Dr. Lund talks about four levels of response to any situation. Every unmet expectation no matter what it is causes frustration, even if it is for only a split second. Many have learned to move past the frustration very quickly; however, toxic people dwell on their annoyance. The highest level is the loving response, which is the ability to consciously think through a situation instead of acting on autopilot. The loving response is the ability to hit the pause button and separate yourself from the situation and evaluate it.

If you are a toxic person, this book is a must read. If you are married to a porcupine, it will help you to live with one, even love one.

Chronic criticism is the opposite to love. Dr. Lund defines love as “any thought, word, or deed that is supportive of the "loved one" becoming his or her healthiest and best self.” How you show love is as important as what you say. Criticism does not build or strengthen others. People do not change through criticism, because it is not motivation from within.

If you are a toxic person, and have recognized that you may lose your family if you don’t change; expect your family not to trust your efforts to change for a while. You have a long history of hurting your family, and you need a long history of treating your family with respect and love before they will truly believe you. Time and patience is the key for you, and long suffering is the attribute your family needs to develop while you undergo the process of shedding the quills and transforming yourself out of a porcupine.

Bret Bradshaw

This book review was originally posted to The-Living-Prophets.com.

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Learn more about Dr. Lund at drlund.com.