



THE PRACTICES OF A HEALTHY LEADER

Episode Two: When Criticism Feels Like a Verdict

EPISODE SUMMARY

Criticism is an unavoidable part of leadership, but it doesn't have to define us. In this episode, Brad and Rick explore why certain criticism feels disproportionately painful—not because we're weak leaders, but because it often attaches itself to deeper questions of identity. Healthy leaders don't ignore criticism, nor do they absorb it as a verdict on their worth. Instead, they learn to discern it as information, separating what is true and useful from what isn't theirs to carry. The goal isn't becoming immune to criticism; it's becoming secure enough in God's love that criticism becomes an invitation to grow rather than a threat to survive.

REFLECTION

Think about the last piece of criticism that lingered with you. Why did that particular criticism have so much power?

Rick suggests that not all voices should carry equal weight. Who are the trusted people in your life whose feedback you genuinely trust? Whose opinions have you unintentionally given too much authority?

Brad describes several common reactions to criticism. Which one sounds most like you?

- Becoming defensive
- Over-explaining
- Rehearsing imaginary conversations
- Avoiding difficult conversations
- Immediately trying to "fix" everything
- Withdrawing or shutting down

What does that response reveal about what feels threatened?

Rick says a healthy response begins with curiosity instead of defensiveness. How difficult is it for you to respond with, "Tell me more." What usually keeps you from asking that question?



THE PRACTICE GUIDE

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THE 24-HOUR PAUSE

One of the healthiest leadership habits is refusing to let your first emotional reaction become your final leadership response. Most criticism does not require an immediate answer. It requires thoughtful discernment.

This week, commit to practicing the **24-Hour Pause** whenever criticism comes your way.

24-HOUR PAUSE

Step 1: Don't React

When criticism arrives: Don't defend yourself. Don't explain yourself. Don't make a decision. Don't fire off a quick response. Instead, intentionally *create space*.

Step 2: Regulate Before You Respond

Use those 24 hours to pray, reflect, and allow your emotional temperature to come down.

Ask yourself:

- What actually happened?
- What emotions am I experiencing?
- Why does this criticism feel so significant?
- What part of me feels threatened?

Step 3: Discern the Criticism

Before responding, place the criticism into one of three categories:

Own It | What truth do I need to acknowledge and learn from? Are there appropriate changes I need to make?

Hold It | There may be truth here, but I need more time, prayer, or wise counsel before drawing conclusions.

Release It | This criticism reflects another person's preferences, expectations, pain, or projections. I can care about the person without carrying what isn't mine.

Remember: Healthy leaders don't ignore criticism, nor do they surrender to it. They learn to listen carefully, discern wisely, and respond from a secure identity rather than a threatened one.