

ACCEPT CRITICISM

Question before the story: Have you ever been told by a parent or teacher or older relative “don’t do it that way” and you thought, “I want to do it my way”?

THE DRUM BEAT

Once there was a man who was a drummer in a small village. He heard about a big festival in the city, and he thought that he could play his drum at the festival to make some money. So he decided to go to the festival with his son, who was learning to play the drum, so they could play the drums together. So they walked all the way to the city, traveling for a whole day on a lonely road through a forest. At the festival, the people enjoyed the father and son playing their drums together, and so the people gave the father and son a lot of money in appreciation.

When the festival ended, the father and son started to walk back to their village. They were worried about robbers stealing the money that they earned, because they knew that robbers often hid by the side of the road in the forest and robbed people of all their money as they walked by. The son thought that he could protect himself and his father from the robbers if he beat loudly and constantly on his drum.

The father said to his son, “Don’t beat the drum like that. You should beat the drum occasionally, with a drum roll, then silence, then a flourish, like when drummers are leading a large group of important people. Then the robbers will think we are a big group with a king and they won’t attack us.”

But the boy did not agree. He liked to play the drum loud and fast. And he did not like to hear someone tell him he is wrong. He thought, “I know better – robbers will be scared by a lot of noise, so I’ll beat my drum really loud and fast so they will stay away.” So he beat the drum furiously, as he imagined that everything in their path will be scared away by the loud thundering pounding on the drum. He ignored his father’s advice.

Far up the road, a gang of robbers was waiting by the side of the highway. They heard the pounding of a drum coming down the road. They thought, “Here comes another big group of people with drums – let’s hide and leave them alone so we don’t get killed.” But as the drumming came closer, the robbers listened to the fast, loud beat. One of them said, “This sounds like a person who is scared. Like a frightened little dog barks loud and fast when he is scared.” Another robber said, “With such a scared drummer - this is no king or big group coming. Let’s take a look.”

The robbers peeked out from behind some trees and saw the father and son with their drums alone on the road. The robbers rushed out from behind the trees and robbed them of all the money they had earned at the festival. So the father and son trudged home, empty-handed and disappointed.

Questions:

1. Why did the father and his son go to the festival?
2. What did the father tell his son that that he was doing wrong?
3. How did the son respond?
4. Why didn't the son do what his father advised him to do?
5. What happened when they were traveling back to their village?
6. What did the son learn from that experience?

What the Buddha said:

“When someone points out your faults, let him correct you, instruct you and shield you from doing wrong; he indeed is loved by good people and hated by evil people.”

Dhammapada 77

Discussion about accepting criticism:

When the boy's father said “Don't beat the drum like that?” he was criticizing the way the boy was drumming. The boy did not like to hear someone criticize him, to tell him that he is wrong. He liked to be the one who knows better. He was proud of the way he played his drum and he did not want to hear any criticism about it, not even from his father.

But what happened when he thought that he was right and did not follow his father's advice? He suffered when their money was stolen by the robbers. He learned that his way was wrong and that his father was right and gave good advice. His father pointed out his error and instructed him to shield him from doing wrong, so he should have listened and learned the best way.

How do you feel when someone tells you “Don't do it like that, do it like this,” or that you are doing something wrong? It might depend on who is telling you. If a teacher tells you, you are more likely to listen and learn. What if a little sister or brother says you are doing something the wrong way? Maybe you think you know better. Also, it might depend on what the person is advising you about. If you think you are an expert at something, do you want to hear someone telling you not to do it that way? You might not want to hear his advice, criticism or ideas that are different from yours. What if you are just learning something new? You might be more likely to accept advice and criticism -- being told you are doing it wrong.

Generally, we like to be told we are correct, we like to know better than someone else, we like to show others that we are right. And we do not like to be told we are wrong, we like to be the smart one; we don't like when others show that they are right and we are wrong. We don't like to be criticized. Some of us think that we are an expert at many things! And we may be very intelligent.

But it is very important to at least listen to advice or criticism and think about whether it might be right. Why should we listen when we think we know better? If the other person is right and we are wrong, we can avoid the bad results from doing it wrong. Like the boy with the drum, his father was right and he was wrong, and if he had listened to his father, he would have avoided the bad results of getting robbed. Are there any other reasons why we should listen to advice even when we think we know better? Yes - we could learn something new, or a better way to do something. We can correct our mistakes. So we should be grateful to the person who gives us advice, even if we really didn't want it, even if we feel bad about being wrong. Remember, he may have saved us from a bad result, or a big embarrassment. Or he may have saved us time and effort by telling us to do something in a better way. So we should thank others for their advice.

Also, it is polite and respectful to at least listen to advice even if we are quite sure it is wrong. It is good to respect another person's opinion. We each have learned many things in our lives, but others have experienced things that we haven't experienced. So they may have a different perspective, a different way of figuring out a solution, a different way of doing things. So we should understand that people have different ideas and ways of doing things, and that is OK.

What should we do if we are not sure whether the person's advice is good or not? Or if we are not sure what we are doing wrong? Or if the advice doesn't seem to make sense? We can ask politely what we are doing wrong, or how we could do it better, or why he thinks it should be done that way. We should ask with the right attitude – respectfully, with the intention to understand better, not to annoy or be uncooperative.

There are foolish people who think that they are always right, and do not want to listen to others' advice or criticism. They are arrogant, and have not developed humility. Sooner or later they end up getting hurt or embarrassed from doing things wrong. At least we know not to be like those people!

Activity: Circle the best answer:

1. Your friend looks at your homework and says that you did not follow the directions, and that you are going to get a bad grade on it.
 - a) You tell your friend she didn't understand the directions.
 - b) You look at the directions again and make sure the homework is done correctly.
 - c) You tell her that you already read the directions and you did it correctly.
 - d) You look at the directions again, make sure the homework is done correctly, and thank your friend.

2. Your mother says you are not dressed warmly enough, that it will be colder outside later.
 - a) You put on a jacket.
 - b) You assure her that you will be warm enough.
 - c) You tell her that you appreciate her advice, but that you are warm enough.
 - d) You thank her and put on a jacket.

3. Your art teacher advises you to put more details on your art project.
 - a) You follow her advice even though you think it looks worse with details.
 - b) You explain why you didn't put in more detail, and don't follow her advice.
 - c) You politely ask her how you should put in more details, thank her for explaining, and follow her advice.
 - d) You stop working on your project because you didn't like the criticism.

4. A friend says that you didn't explain clearly enough.
 - a) You ask what is not clear, then explain more clearly, especially the part that he thinks wasn't clear.
 - b) You explain again, trying to be more clear.
 - c) You tell him he didn't listen carefully.
 - d) You repeat your explanation.

5. An older teammate says you are not performing well for the team.
 - a) You say, "I'll try harder next time."
 - b) You ask "How do you think I could improve?" and practice, following his advice.
 - c) You point out the mistakes of other teammates.
 - d) You give an excuse why your performance was not so good.

Answers: 1 d, 2 d, 3 c, 4 a, 5 b