

# L MESSAGE

## Leading Through Criticism

Advice from a wise leader (not me):  
When we receive criticism it is a test of character, and therefore an opportunity to exhibit that character. These occasions also have the potential to elevate you as leader as you lead your people through these various storms.

We've spent a long time now on criticism, and this L-Message is both the conclusion to my thoughts on criticism but also a means by which we can allow that which we have learnt inform the way we not only live and cope but also lead.

Much like Moses in the desert listening to the constant grumbings of his people, we need to lead them toward the Promiseland. Unfortunately though, some people enjoy the wilderness. Some people find their security and safety in pessimism. They have to project their pain onto others (by tearing them down) and hurt others so as to avoid facing their own difficulties. The point is you can't change everyone. You can't effect them for good sometimes. You can't lead them to the Promiceland. These people would rather reside in the wilderness - holding onto the grievances they have, problems they see and criticisms they create - than relinquishing their downward spiraling attitude and enjoying the goodness life has to offer.

Let me share with you a thought provided by a man I'm coming to know as a friend and who's thinking is quite refreshing...

As you have written, there can be multiple reasons why people criticise but I honestly believe that for any of us to be effective in our areas (in or out of ministry) we need to allow that criticism to at least reach our **organ of sense**. If we do not allow ourselves to **feel** and understand the impact it has, we will not know how to handle criticism when it hits us again. The **challenge** that we face is knowing how to continue our business in front of those very people who criticised us in such a way that they are the ones defending us against the criticism when it confronts us again.

Now there is a model for leading through change! Which leaves us with the question: How do we meet that **challenge**?

I recall a situation early in my ministry where someone whom I was responsible for leading began stirring up a lot of dissention. They were speaking to selected people to gain their support to go in a direction that was opposite to the direction I was trying to lead people in. If these situations are left unchecked and unaddressed, division can grow and that destroys a ministry or Church. So I phoned this person up and after getting an ear full asked if we could talk it through over a cup of coffee. We met and after all the anger toward me was laid on the table, the person said in reflection "I just like the way it used to be." That as you realise was the turning point. We talked about what it used to be like. We spoke about what the future would like if we continued down the track that we had been on. The person even said, "I understand why you're doing it, and it makes sense, it's just hard you know." They were right, it is hard! I asked for a piece of paper and wrote at the top - "How we make this work". This led us to speaking about the possibility of the person moving on, how things might change further, and by the end of the conversation this person was now on board with the vision that I had. The conversation concluded with some words shared about how this person might be more effective next time in the case where they didn't agree with the direction, and that it was very harmful to the Church to build an *anti vision movement*. Now here is the best part of the story, some months after that difficult yet fruitful conversation, I overhear a conversation where this person is speaking to someone else about the vision we had addressed earlier, and this person was passionately challenging the person they were speaking to to appreciate what the future would like if all held this vision.

There are many ways to lead through change. Some successful, some not, but this experience showed that it involves courage, honesty, clear communication, vision, values, discipline, understanding and most of all love. If you hold true to these things you can rest assured that the Promiceland awaits.