

EXPLORE YOUR ENTHUSIASM

EPISODE 116: CRITICISM: SHOULD YOU TAKE IT OR IGNORE IT?

Should you focus only on the people who love your work, and dismiss everyone else as "not your right people"? Or should you take criticism so you can improve and grow and serve your people better?

Welcome to Explore Your Enthusiasm, episode 116, with me, Tara Swiger.

Today's episode was inspired by a tweet conversation I had a couple of months ago. It hit me hard and I've been thinking about it ever since. I'm going to share the whole story, and then we're going to discuss criticism: when you should listen to it, and when you should ignore it.

Here's what happened:

I shared a picture on Instagram that showed people how to turn on notifications. Instagram was changing how its feed worked, and I was about to introduce a daily challenge, so I didn't want people to miss it. I knew that a big percentage of my people wouldn't understand the change, or that you even can get notifications of people you follow on Instagram. (I know this because my mom didn't know about notifications, and she has Instagrammers who she wants to see EVERY message from. I have a local friend who has notifications turned on, for her favorite Instagrammers, and she loves it.)

But keep in mind, I am not a person who turns on notifications. In fact, I have ALL notifications turned off from my phone, for replies on FB, Twitter, Instagram, even email. The only notifications I get are from Asana, which is where my team posts questions or customer service issues they need my input on.*

So a message about how to get notified of someone else's posts, isn't for me, or people like me, who don't want notifications.

After I posted that explanatory image, I then saw MANY tweets from people who were complaining about those kind of images. Not my images, but others like them. They were saying, in effect, "don't tell me to turn on notifications and follow you. I don't like notifications."

And I get that. I don't either. And to be honest, for a few minutes, I started to feel really weird and icky about MY image. I started to worry that *I* was annoying people.

But then what struck me is that these people were reacting to something that wasn't for them. They didn't like messages that weren't meant for them. The messages were meant for people who

1. Like to turn on notifications.
2. Didn't know how to.

So why not just ignore the messages?

So I got on Periscope and that's what I said! Every message isn't for you. If I share an instruction for something you already know how to do, then obviously that message wasn't for you! Don't get offended or say "she shouldn't say that," just ignore it!

If someone shares MOSTLY messages that you don't feel are useful or interesting or apply to you, then unfollow them. That's the reaction that makes sense - you stop interacting with them. What doesn't make sense is for you to tell them they shouldn't post the message. Because the message wasn't for you... but it may have been exactly what someone else needed.

So I said in this Periscope: "If you don't like my messages and you don't like the content I share, just stop following me. Stop watching. We'll both be happier if you stop."

As content creators, we have to keep this in mind at all times. It's up to the reader or follower to stop following if it isn't right for them. We help them figure that out by creating the best content for our biggest supporters.

Some of our messages are for a section of our people. Some of our messages aren't for the people WE follow online. The buyer of your painting, or purses, or designs, ISN'T a person with an online business, so you can't talk to her like she is. You have to give her info that your peers probably already know. So when you see people saying "I'm so sick of hearing this", you have to keep in mind that they're NOT your right people (at least for this message), and ignore them. Keep doing what you're doing, for YOUR people (your buyers!)

Now, after that Periscope, I had several Twitter replies from a listener who asked (and this is paraphrased because I didn't want to dig back through 3 months of Twitter replies), "What about taking criticism? Isn't it dangerous to tell people to ignore everyone who isn't a Right Person? If I disagree with you, should I just go away?"

To be honest, at first I was crushed: *Oh no! I don't want anyone to think they can't give me feedback! I don't want anyone to go away!*

And then, I was righteously indignant: *Actually yes, if you don't like or respond to the majority of what I share, stop following. If you like 99% of it, but one message annoys you, ignore it. Maybe it wasn't for you.*

I stand by the sentiment: If nothing I teach or talk about helps you, stop following me. It's not my responsibility to share ONLY stuff you like, it's your responsibility, as a user of the internet, to filter so you're only listening to/paying attention to what will be most helpful to you.

But I thought on it some more and realized: We are talking about two totally different things.

What I was talking about: Focusing on the people who are going to be your buyers.

What she was talking about: Taking criticism.

The distinction between the two is something it's really easy to misunderstand, and since I so often talk about only talking to and serving your right People, it's important that we ALSO talk about what to do with criticism.

What should you do with criticism? Ignore it? Pay attention to it? Change because of it?

The answer is: *It depends.*

No, you shouldn't listen to ALL criticism.

No, you shouldn't ignore ALL criticism.

Instead, you should pay attention to what's useful and ignore what's not.

How do you know the difference?

I've found it comes down to one question: Who is giving the feedback?

If it's a paying customer, you need to not just listen to what they say, you should actively seek it out. You need to find out if your customers are happy with your product, with the way you described it, with how it arrived to them. You need to find out ANY little thing that disappointed them, and then fix it, so that you continue to be more and more awesome for them.

How? Ask them!

Send follow-up emails to customers (in the beginning, you can do this to everyone, as you scale, maybe do this 2-5 times week) a few days after you shipped their item and ask "Did you get

your package yet? I wanted to check in that you were totally delighted with it. I'm always trying to improve and I'd love to know: How would you rate the product or experience on a scale from 1-10? What could I do to make it a 10?")

You see, the more you actively seek feedback like this, the less scary it's going to be to get feedback. The less you're going to dread messing things up, because you're realize that everything is a learning opportunity and that fixing things and getting better IS YOUR JOB.

Warning: Don't personalize things.

Although your business comes from your heart and passion and vision, it is not you. Your worth is not a reflection of your business success. To take feedback and improve your business, you have to remember that your business is a separate entity, that people can have a problem with your business and not have a problem with YOU. And if there's a mistake in your business, it doesn't mean you suck or aren't worthy. You just need to take responsibility and fix it.

Turn it into Action

It's one thing to get feedback on what to fix, it's another thing to actually FIX it. So whenever you get feedback, turn it into an action, something you can DO to make things better for the next time. You can use the worksheet below to decide what action to take from the feedback.

If it's not a paying customer, then you should ask yourself: who is this coming from? Is this a person who would spend money on what I sell? Or not?

For example, your mom, your partner, your kids: Do they buy the thing you sell (probably not). In that case, their feedback isn't necessarily grounded in the reality of your business.

And if this is a stranger on the internet who is talking in generalities (ie, not writing to you, just generally saying "I don't like this thing"), you should block them out with all your might. That's what was happening to me and the Instagram post. I saw tweets NOT AT ALL AIMED AT ME, that said something MANY people were doing was annoying. And it made me doubt my own choices. But it was so unhelpful! The strangers on the internet don't even know that I exist! And it's certainly not my job to make everyone on the internet happy - only the people I'm serving.

REMEMBER: IT ALL COMES DOWN TO FOCUSING ON YOUR BUYERS - MAKE CONTENT FOR THEM, AND LISTEN TO THEIR FEEDBACK SO YOU CAN MAKE YOUR PRODUCT AND SYSTEMS BETTER AND BETTER FOR THEM.

TURN CRITICISM INTO ACTION

Use this worksheet whenever someone says something and you think it applies to your work (whether they say it directly to you or not).

Is this person a paying customer?

If so, what is their feedback?

What is your gut-level response?

If you're sad, mad, or generally cranky, is it because you're personalizing this?

If you're personalizing it, rewrite their feedback so it is NOT personal, so that it's about the product or systems, and not about you:

What action could you take to improve your product or systems to improve this aspect?

If the person is not a paying customer, do you REALLY feel like you need to pay attention?

If so, why?

De-personalize this. Rewrite it so it's NOT about you, but instead about your product or systems.

Does the feedback seem actionable?

If not, how could you turn it into an action?

If so, what action could you take?

Now think of your best buyer - if you made this change, would it make her experience of your business better?

If so, do it!