

SERVING A VENDOR WITH A HELPFUL REBUKE

By Rick Boxx
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Have you ever thought about the importance of constructive criticism, or a timely rebuke? Several years ago, a printer we had been using for some time delivered a project to my office that was intended to represent our organization visually to thousands of people. Upon reviewing the work, however, the colors failed to match what we had requested. They were not even close to our instructions.

My tendency is to lean toward being a people-pleaser, so I struggled concerning what I should do. "I don't want to sound like a complainer," I reasoned. "Maybe the colors are not that far off, and we can overlook the fact they are not an exact match." My assistant at the time, however, did not share my struggle with being unwilling to hurt someone's feelings. She knew what needed to be done.

"We can't send this out looking like this," she asserted. "They will have to do the job again."

My assistant was right, of course. We had painstakingly chosen the colors for representing our organization and had accurately specified what we needed. And we were not doing the printer any favors by accepting substandard work. Rather than being concerned about offending the printing company, it was important for them to know when their services were not meeting expectations. Otherwise, how could they realize the need for taking corrective measures to ensure the quality of future work?

Rather than taking offense, the printer appreciated being informed of the error and was quick to respond. The next day we received our project – it had been redone, looking much better. I was glad my assistant had the determination to hold the company, and me, accountable.

Looking back on this situation, I realize I had forgotten some important biblical principles that apply to the value of providing correction when needed, whether for a vendor, an employee or even a customer:

The gift of a rebuke. Telling someone, whether a fellow staff member, friend or supplier, that their work is not acceptable can be an act of kindness if done in the right spirit, intended not to demean but to help them in doing better in the future. *"Like an earring of gold or an ornament of fine gold is a wise man's rebuke to a listening ear"* (Proverbs 25:12).

The obligation of a rebuke. If you find someone performing substandard work and fail to bring it to their attention, in effect you are participating in, even condoning their failure. *"Do not hate a fellow Israelite in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in their guilt"* (Leviticus 19:17).

The benefit of a rebuke. Many times it may seem hard to offer words of correction and rebuke, but if these help the individuals become more effective and productive in their work, the end result might be gratitude for our willingness to provide the constructive criticism. *"He who rebukes a man will in the end gain more favor than he who has a flattering tongue"* (Proverbs 28:23).

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Rebuking a vendor in love – caring enough about that person, or company, to make them aware of falling short of your expectations – can result in affirming your own commitment to excellence, as well as theirs.

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. How easy – or difficult – is it for you to correct or rebuke someone else when you find them performing work that is unacceptable and below their capabilities?

2. Turning the question around, how readily do you receive the rebuke of others when they feel your work does not meet expected standards and needs improvement?

3. Do you agree with the idea that to withhold necessary correction amounts to being a contributor in the other person's failure? Explain your answer.

4. Have you ever confronted someone concerning the quality of their work and later discovered that experience had contributed to strengthening your relationship? If so, how did you approach the situation?

NOTE: If you have a Bible and would like to read more about this subject, consider the following passages:

Proverbs 13:1, 17:10, 27:5-6; Ephesians 4:29-32; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; James 3:9-11

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