

OFFERING CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM

Central to our ongoing effort to change the culture of air show safety is a parallel effort to change the culture of giving and receiving constructive criticism in our business. Put another way, our industry's traditional unwillingness to make safety-related observations to our Warbird colleagues and our tendency to react defensively when safety-related suggestions are made to us are, together, compromising our ability to make lasting changes to our culture of air show safety.

To that end, Warbird Safety would like to offer a few suggestions on how members might improve their delivery of constructive criticism.

- * Assess your own intention. Are you trying to correct or mitigate risk? Are you genuinely trying to help the person(s)?

- * Put yourself in the other person's position. How would you like to be approached on an issue of this sort? What would make you more willing to be receptive to the message you're trying to pass along?

- * Offer tips, suggestions and critiques privately. Even if your intentions are good and your concerns are valid, nobody likes being embarrassed in front of their colleagues. If more than one of you observed the same safety problem, you should still designate a single individual to offer the critique.

- * Use the "sandwich method." Make a positive observation. Offer the constructive criticism. Finish with another positive observation.

- * Be professional. Talk in a conversational tone. Be cognizant of your expression and choice of words. If you sound or appear agitated or condescending, the observations you make will not be well received.

- * Be clear and unambiguous about your concerns, but don't exaggerate and don't use frequent and subsequent repetition to drive your point home.

- * Criticize the actions, not the person. Most of us react less defensively when we understand that it is something we did, rather than who we are, that is being critiqued.

- * Be specific. Overly general comments are less likely to be received well and less likely to have the desired impact. And make sure your comments are specific to a recent issue that you have personally observed; don't generalize to past problems or safety issues that you have heard about from others.

- * Offer solutions. If you're able, help identify different methods or techniques that will eliminate the safety hazard with a minimum of difficulty or disruption.

- * Don't wimp out. Initially, you may find it uncomfortable to approach a colleague to express your concern about a safety-related issue. But making real and lasting progress in our ongoing effort to change the culture of air show safety requires that we get past that discomfort.