

Appendix E

Coaching and Critiquing

Coaching and critiquing are tools that leaders use to provide feedback during training. In coaching, leaders make corrections or give additional guidance during the actual performance or practice of a task. In critiquing, leaders point out all the strong and weak points of a unit's or team's performance

Throughout the performance or practice of a task, leaders constantly coach and critique Marines to correct their mistakes and to reinforce what they do well. Coaching and critiquing are especially important the first time Marines practice a task. Once tasks are performed correctly, leaders can reduce the amount of coaching and critiquing, but coaching and critiquing are never eliminated. See figure E-1.

COACHING

Coaching is the most powerful tool a commander has to improve performance. It permits immediate correction of a mistake and prevents negative learning. During step-by-step practice, leaders coach heavily to reduce errors. Coaches and leaders watch every action performed by Marines, correct mistakes on the spot, and provide tips to ensure that Marines, crews, and units learn correctly.

It is important to start coaching as soon as Marines need help and before they become frustrated or confused. While Marines are practicing tasks, leaders use coaching to focus on fine points that improve speed and quality of performance. For example, a squad leader may tell Marines to increase the space between them as they advance to an objective. Leaders also use coaching to help Marines perform daily operational jobs and tasks. Coaching emphasizes safety and security and continues until Marines perform the task correctly. When Marines practice tasks the right way, they learn them the right way.

COACHING (During Performance)	CRITIQUING (After Performance)
Corrects errors on the spot.	Identifies strengths/weak- nesses.
Provides help when needed.	Answers critical training questions.
Focuses on critical details.	Indicates any additional practice needed.
Prevents negative learning.	Encourages open discussion/ group participation.
Improves speed.	Improves understanding of tasks.
Provides immediate feed- back.	Promotes retention.

Figure E-1. Tools for Evaluating Performance.

Leaders must develop solid, effective coaching skills. To coach effectively, leaders must—

- Be able to perform the tasks themselves.
- Coach the way they would want to be coached. During initial practices, leaders are understanding and patient. They assume that every Marine can improve. During advanced practice, leaders become more demanding to ensure that Marines perform their tasks to standard. Coaching becomes more detailed as practice focuses on proficiency.
- Provide help when signs of confusion or frustration appear.
- Point out the critical cues. As practices progress, leaders reinforce cues to ensure that Marines have learned the proper responses.

CRITIQUING

Critiques are discussions that leaders conduct after practice. They are mini AARs. They bring out both strengths and weaknesses. They answer three questions that are important to learning:

- What happened?
- Why did it happen?
- How could it have been done better?

Leaders critique each task after it is practiced. After each critique, Marines practice the task again to reinforce what they learned in the critique.

Critiques occur at a logical breakpoint; e.g., right after a platoon has taken the objective, reorganized, and consolidated. The platoon leader might call a break in the training session and conduct a critique on the tasks associated with making the hasty attack. Critiques are verbal and informal, taking only a short time immediately after completion of the task.

During critiques, Marines talk about what they did during the training. As they attempt to answer the three questions, they correct each other's understanding of the tasks. The leaders listen to the discussion, add the appropriate information and comments, reinforce the correct actions taken, identify incorrect actions, and determine if additional practice is required. If necessary and possible, leaders conduct more practice immediately after the critique. Such repetition helps Marines remember what they learned in the critiques. Leaders ensure that Marines correct their mistakes and then critique the practice again.

For collective tasks and missions, subordinate leaders are also critiqued, but never in front of their Marines. After their private critiques, subordinate leaders help critique the Marines. This approach has several advantages:

- Leaders maintain credibility with their Marines.

- Subordinate leaders practice their critiquing skills under the watchful eyes of experienced leaders.
- Leaders reinforce their own learning as they pass on corrections to subordinates.
- Leaders and subordinate leaders work in unison, creating a healthy command climate.

To be effective, leaders must keep in mind that critiquing—

- Centers on the Marine.
- Is required if performance or practice stops because of confusion, incorrect performance, or lack of understanding.
- Reinforces good performance and corrects deficiencies or weaknesses.
- Occurs as often as needed.
- Lasts as long as needed to get the points across.

The spirit and tone of the critiques are important. Marines must feel that they can discuss their practice honestly. Leaders encourage open, honest talk and encourage all members of the group to participate. They convince Marines to help themselves and each other by taking part in the critiques. Critiques consist of three parts: description, analysis, and definition.

Description

Marines should describe both good and bad points in their own words. The description does not encourage opinions or judgments; it is limited to facts. To get Marines to state the facts themselves, leaders may have to prompt them on some of the details by asking questions. As they talk, Marines are forced to think about their performance, which helps them profit from the review.

Analysis

During a critique, Marines and leaders analyze what they did correctly and what they did poorly. The analysis concentrates on why performance fell below standards. Standards in the ITSS manual, MCCRES, or unit SOP are referred to as often as needed. The analysis should not over emphasize mistakes, but should reinforce strong points and good performance. Since much of our training is intended to prepare for war, the analysis identifies the consequences that would result if these actions had occurred during combat. Knowing why tasks must be performed a certain way in combat gives Marines more incentive to perform tasks correctly and gives them a greater sense of responsibility to the team.

It is best if Marines judge their own performance and discover the correct answers themselves. If they can identify their own faults, their confidence will be higher. Even if only one or a few Marines were responsible for short falls, sessions should cover everyone's performance. Weak performers are critiqued separately. Although personal embarrassment is normally to be avoided, peer pressure is also an effective tool for rapid improvement, when required.

Definition

Any problem identified during the analysis must be defined in detail. Marines should have enough information to determine what to do differently the next time. Leaders guide the discussion so that Marines learn how to perform the tasks properly. If Marines develop proper performance methods themselves, they will remember the correct method longer, especially if their leaders confirm their findings.