

The Dalmatian And The Heron

Handling criticism in a positive,
powerful way is possible.
This three-point plan shows you how.

By: Andy Andrews; Photo By: Peter Nash



1. **Know your goal and why you want to achieve it.** Be able to answer the following fully:
 - What will the accomplishment of this goal mean to you?
 - What will failing to accomplish it mean to you?
2. **If those closest to you happen to be the ones criticizing, consider that there is likely a positive intent behind their behavior.** Think about the following:
 - Do your critics completely understand why you're pursuing this goal?
 - How could you more clearly communicate why this dream is so important to you?
 - Leverage the power of your own enthusiasm. The venom of criticism will be neutralized and powerless in the presence of enthusiasm. Your level of enthusiasm is completely up to you!
3. **Manage your response to criticism.** Pause. Listen. Rather than wasting energy getting defensive, thank your critics for taking the time to give you their input. This will help you maintain your personal momentum as well as disarm your critics.

Those closest to you might, at certain times, express questions and statements like: *"When are you going to get your head out of the clouds? When are you going to get a real job? Don't get your hopes up so high. It's probably not going to work anyway."*

Have you ever wondered why family and friends, who mean so well, sometimes still seem to hurt and discourage us at every turn? Is it because they are trying to be mean? Is it because they'd like to inflict pain on us? It's probably like the story of Lucy and Hank.

Chasing Our Herons

Lucy our Dalmatian is our dog daughter. We live on an island on the Gulf of Mexico. Our house backs up to a big, high sand dune and there's a large deck on the back of the house. When my wife and I stand out on the deck at night looking down at the beach, we often see a giant heron. Keep in mind; this heron is not just an ordinary bird. He is a really big bird. He likes to hang around our house in the evenings. We affectionately call him "Hank the Heron."

Lucy hates this heron. She wants to have him by the neck. Lucy often joins us for an evening trip to the deck. Hank will be down on the pier. When Lucy comes out, she'll be fine at

You will receive criticism. This is a given. It's part of living. If you're not being criticized, you're not doing anything, or you just haven't told anyone what you're doing. A general rule of thumb is this: The bigger the accomplishment you seek, the more critics will emerge and the more criticism you will receive along the way.

Buckle up: The jabs will be small, large, soft, hard, expected and unexpected. They'll come from unimportant people and people that mean the world to you, such as family and friends. Most likely, the criticism that hurts the most will come from those closest to you. However, if you've truly set your mind on accomplishing something great, you must first learn to handle criticism effectively. Here are three critical points to keep in mind as you pursue your dreams and objectives:



first. Then she'll see Hank, lower her head, and start growling. In a flash, Lucy bursts down the stairs. My wife and I will say while laughing, "How can she get down the stairs so fast and not fall?" Like clockwork, Lucy flies down the stairs, through the guesthouse area, down another set

of stairs, hit the beach on a dead-run, and catch up with the heron in a matter of seconds. It's quite the sight.

It never fails: Just when Lucy thinks she has Hank the Heron exactly where she wants him, he'll take flight. He'll fly way down and land on the neighbor's dock. Then, Lucy will race over and run him off. Hank will then fly back and land on our dock. And Lucy will run across the beach back to our dock. She'll do this back and forth for a while. We just laugh. It is the funniest thing to watch a Dalmatian tirelessly chase a heron.

Do You See What I See?

But what would happen if we walked out to the deck one night and never really knew anything about the heron? What would happen if we had not seen the heron at all and instead, watched Lucy come out, lower her head, growl, fly down the stairs, hit the beach and run back and forth while barking hysterically? Without having the heron in our sights, we'd react like any other sane person and think: Mad dog! Get her to the vet. Something's wrong with her. She was fine all these years, and then all of a sudden, she's running back and forth barking like a crazy creature. She's lost it! She has to get to the doctor. She needs help!"

Please understand, in pursuing your dreams, it's so important for you to be patient with your family and friends as they cautiously approach your vision. There's nothing wrong with them and nothing is wrong with you. They simply don't see the heron. They don't see what you see. All they see is that you *used to be* normal — just like them. So, as your vision begins to find its wings and your enthusiasm fuels it on, your critics won't fully understand your newly found momentum, nor should you expect them to.

They just don't see what you see. Knowing this, it's important to hold fast to our vision and avoid the very real danger of giving too much credence to our critics. Here's the danger: Let's say as critics, we never saw that heron at all and instead witnessed this seemingly crazy behavior from Lucy. My wife and I could continue to scold the dog saying, "No, No! No!"

then lock her up in the laundry room. We could get onto her to the point where she would go down to the beach and maybe the heron would be there but Lucy would just act like she didn't see it because it's just too much hassle to chase the heron and not worth getting scolded over. Even though chasing the heron is one of the greatest pleasures in Lucy's life, we could have taken that away from her without even realizing what we were doing. Don't let that happen. Keep your eye on what you're going for. Keep your eye on it!

So move forward steadily toward your dreams knowing that criticism is all part of the journey. Know that your life is like a play unfolding beautifully; a work in progress. *You* are writing the script. *You* are the main actor on stage. Everyone else is an extra in your play. What do *you* want your story to be like? How would *you* like to experience it? Be grateful for your critics — every great story has one. They will help you grow into the person you want to become. Without the friction of the cocoon pressing firmly against the butterfly's wings, this magnificent creature would never develop the strength to fly. The same goes for you. Without critics along the way, reaching your goals wouldn't be half as sweet. The purpose of the journey is to grow and handling our critics with grace is just part of that process.

SIDEBAR:

Making Peace with Criticism

Remember to face criticism head on and apply the following tools to get you started today.

- 1. Know Your Vision:** Start a journal today and write out a mission statement that describes your vision and how you will make it happen. Be bold and describe what your life would look like minus your vision. Do everything you can to chart out your course in getting there.
- 2. Communicate to Your Critics:** why you are uncompromising in your pursuit of your vision. Be patient with their understanding. Use this time as a resource for your own growth knowing that the more you repeat your vision, the more you will own it.
- 3. Practice Managing Your Response:** Be grateful for your critics. Acknowledge criticism and thank them for their insight all the while holding tightly to your vision. A practiced response might be: "Great. Let me think about that. Thank you for your suggestion."
- 4. Gather Your Tools:** Jumpstart your vision by logging onto www.AndyAndrews.com and choose from a collection of free downloads that will help you define and chart your goals.

Remember, in dealing with criticism, no one is right or wrong. We all just possess different degrees of understanding. Your critics may not see the heron yet; but due to your persistence, they will one day see what has always been right before their very own eyes.

Andy Andrews will be hosting this year's ICM Awards, live from Nashville's Acuff Theatre on November 9. His audio books can be found at www.AndyAndrews.com and at most major book retail outlets.

