The Tester’s 3 Critical C’s:

- criticism
- communication
- confidence

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What do testers do?

- testers’ work:
  - investigate, check, assess, find bugs
- applied to:
  - other people’s work output
- we are critics
  - we criticize other people's work

You’re doing a great job - but you’re doing it all wrong!
What is criticism?

• from the Greek “krites” - judge
• Wikipedia definitions
  – examination, analysis, interpretation, judgement of something
    • positive or negative
  – disapproval expressed by pointing out faults / shortcomings
    • negative
  – a spoken or written attack on somebody / something
    • negative

Three types of criticism

• valid criticism
  – true or an element of truth
• unjustified / invalid criticism
  – we don’t live up to someone else’s expectations or fantasy
• vague criticism
  – difference of opinion
  – says more about the critic
When we are criticized

• awareness

• response
  – natural reactions (two extremes)
    • counter-attack / defensive
    • passive / accepting
  – better reaction: assess the criticism
    • different reaction to valid vs invalid criticism
  – use assertive techniques to respond

• action

Assertive responses to criticism

• fogging
  – acknowledge there may be some truth in it
  – deflects the criticism
  – not “yes, but”!
  – listening / reflecting technique

• admitting the truth
  – if the criticism is valid

• requesting specific feedback
  – leads into action
Advice for receiving criticism

**DO**
- realise they could be right (you may not be perfect)
- put it into perspective
- discuss openly
- work through an action plan to fix the problem
- get feedback on the action plan

**DON’T**
- ignore it
- assume they are wrong
- get angry or retaliate
- argue about it or get defensive
- be anxious
- keep “stewing”

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Giving criticism

- realistic mutual goals & expectations
- “DASR script”
  - Describe (the specific behavior)
    - “When this happens…” / “when this is input”
  - Acknowledge (the effect)
    - “I feel…” / “the system does this”
  - Specify (different behavior)
    - “What I would prefer is…” / “it should do”
  - Reaffirm (their worth / ability to correct it)
    - “We/you will improve” / “I like this” or “confident in you”
### Testers as critics

- **bug reports**
  - neutral wording, specific, detailed
- **recurring type of bug from a developer**
  - e.g. use DASR
  - action: would you like a checklist?
- **consistent under-estimates for testing**
  - criticize your boss?
    - identify common goals
    - use DASR or pull style

### Advice for giving criticism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>DO</strong></th>
<th><strong>DON’T</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>gather all the facts</td>
<td>get angry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>be open to their view</td>
<td>use sarcasm or jokes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(you could be wrong)</td>
<td>want the person to feel bad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>want the person to succeed</td>
<td>be vague</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(in their best interests)</td>
<td>walk away after criticising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>be specific</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>work through an action</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>plan to fix the problem</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Push Style

Rationale behind “Push Style”
• people influenced by convincing proposals
• key to success is quality of information given
• defend your proposal as it is the only proposal
• very little common ground

“Push Style” can be effective under the following:
• immaturity or dependency
• no threat in accepting the proposal
• high degree of trust
• recognition of expertise

key word: “tell”

Pull Style – is harder to do

Rationale behind “Pull Style”
• people influenced by uncovering needs
• key to success is quality of questions asked
• seek common ground
• building on ideas & proposals
• building relationships

“Pull Style” can be effective under the following:
• strong opinions
• threat in accepting proposal
• uncertainty (play safe)
• relationship is new or mistrust
• push style has failed
• influence needs longer lasting effect

key word: “ask”
Examples of push and pull

**push**
- my detailed estimate: three weeks for testing
- we need another two testers for this project
- perform the tests in this order – this is best
- we need the following for the test environment
- leave project unless…

**pull**
- what are the risks if we don’t test thoroughly?
- how important is that deadline?
- what are the most important tests to do 1st?
- what would happen if our test environment didn’t catch this type of bug? is that ok?
- risks / success criteria

Communication interaction model

Source: Virginia Satir (via Jerry Weinberg and AYE conference)
Interaction model example 1

- major concern
- worried
- they haven’t thought it out
- my job to assess
- have to tell my concern

Ok to go ahead?

here is a risk

doesn’t like my idea
- threatened
- already agreed
- get through the agenda
- have to stop re-discussing

Interaction model example 2

- ignoring risks
- ignoring me
- doesn’t value my strengths
- think I am worthless
- no point in responding

we have agreed it!

ok

we have agreed it!
Ways of communicating

- there are three ways to communicate:
  - written
  - verbal
  - body language

You can only communicate with people if they let you

Don’t underestimate the power of body language

Examples of body language
What is confidence (self-confidence)?

- Wikipedia definitions
  - assurance, being sure about decisions, freedom from doubt
  - belief in yourself and your abilities, firm reliance on oneself
  - a state of hopefulness that events will be favorable
  - feeling good about yourself and what you do
  - not worrying whether you did the right thing – leave previous decisions behind

Where are you?

- put yourself down
- crushed by negative criticism – take it personally
- don’t believe praise
- if good, think it’s a once-off / luck
- confidence easily damaged

- seek feedback and act on it
- enjoy successes
- realistic view of self and others
- give credit to others
- open
- negative criticism evaluated objectively

- blow own trumpet
- ignore negative criticism
- blame others if not good
- expect and seek praise
- defensive
- attacking
- closed
What kind of tester?

- under-confident
  - not reproducible means not a defect – that’s ok
  - don’t stand up for the users, bow to developers
  - martyr complex? (poor me)
- over-confident
  - antagonistic – offends developers with defect reports / I know best
- confident
  - report bugs objectively, firmly, not pushed around
  - know your value to the organization / product

What kind of test manager?

- under-confident
  - not defend estimates (targets rule) - cave in to unrealistic deadlines – “do the best I can”
  - not enforce entry or suspension criteria
- over-confident
  - don’t listen to others (testers, users, developers)
  - inflexible – unneeded battles, not cooperation
- confident
  - stand firm under pressure, good negotiator
  - defend the test team, recognition for their work
External vs internal confidence

• need to inspire confidence
  – even if you don’t feel as confident inside!

• needn’t match how you feel
  – you can learn to “act”
  – the more you act, the more it will become real

• techniques
  – practice feeling confident - visualization
    • especially just before a “situation”
  – you have a choice – only you control your thoughts
    • where your thoughts are, behavior will follow

“As you think, so shall you be”

How to become more confident

• increase competence
  – training / certification (recognition)
  – find a mentor or coach
  – measured achievement of goals

• change your view of yourself
  – appreciate yourself
    • give yourself permission to recognise your own skills
      and abilities (and limitations)
    • believe in yourself
  – subconscious mind – visualize, body, pretend

“The greatest discovery of our generation is that human beings can alter their lives by altering their attitudes of mind”
- William James
Summary

- Under-conf
- Confident
- Over-conf

Push/pull style
Two-way
DASR

Criticism

Communication

Confidence

Be aware of the confidence of the person you criticize

CCC -> better tester

Be aware of those you communicate with
- Appearance of confidence inspires confidence
- Act as though you are confident

References

- Richard Carlson, Stop Thinking, Start Living, Element, 1993.
  – Rather OTT but does have some useful tidbits in the sales pitch
- Gerald M Weinberg, Perfect Software and other illusions about testing, Dorset House, 2008