



YOUR PRACTICE / BUSINESS

## Criticism: The Challenge Of Every Generation

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I would like to inspire you to consider the criticism you have and will face. To also respect it for what it offers and to determine what life choices you must make to compensate for and benefit by it. Criticism can enhance one's greatness as a healer. Though the path is challenging, the rewards are many.

For me, it started at the beginning. The criticism. Friends in my high school thought I was nuts because I hung out on a bus stop bench studying big old books with a Japanese guy who wore a brown dress (as I called his monk's robe). "He's weird and you're weird," they said. "Why don't we ride bikes to the beach and get ice cream instead?" Debating the viability of my studies while a freshman in high school never got me anywhere.

The criticism continued. You haven't lived until you've purchased needles from old men who don't speak English, hate the idea of little, white, teenage girls practicing acupuncture and spend their golden years in opium dens behind beaded curtains. In the very early 1970s, I went armed with a password that my teacher had given me to hidden locations in parts of town I had never been to. The password was different every time and I had to remember the strange sounding Japanese syllables, because if I resorted to reading them off my hand or a little slip of paper I got kicked out before the beaded curtains stopped swinging.

Some of it was avoidable and I did my best. I never told an "adult" what I was doing. At least not for the first decade. It would only result in, "What's a nice girl like you doing sitting at a bus stop bench with a stranger? Does your mother know?" Once I was college age, I heard things like, "Why don't you do something worthwhile?" Or, "Why devote yourself to such foolishness? Finish up your graduate studies in medicine, as you had planned." I was condemned for not following in my stepfather's footsteps, an MD with a specialty in Internal Medicine. But, from my perspective, his medicine had limitations that pained him and his patients and I wanted to help him get everybody body better by

adding something of value to what he offered. Of course he thought I was a nut because I chose this life path to help him resolve his problem.



For years I couldn't get a medical license because there weren't any for what was considered to be my "crackpot" hobby. Instead, I got arrested for practicing medicine without a license. Hmmm.

Eventually we got licensure. I convinced my stepfather to help me bring acupuncture into the Kaiser Permanente hospital chain. I was able to buy needles from people who spoke English and didn't have to tolerate being spit on by resentful old men.

But the criticism didn't stop. "You just want to hurt people, don't you," a patient said after I (very gently) busted open a point filled with stagnant *qi* sending strong sensations through the entire *Chong mo*.

I have been kicked out of medical conferences, disapproved of socially for taking the wrong path in life and denied emotional and financial support for my studies by government agencies and family members. Even my daughter never believed in what I did. She thought acupuncture didn't work until she was 15 and had a revelation that somebody must be benefiting or I couldn't be paying for Girl Scout dues or prom dresses. Ah, the good old days. If you weren't criticized, you weren't trying to practice TCM.

As time passed, we got less criticism and more acceptance from outside the profession. But, it seems that inspired many of us to criticize each other. Some organizations have used the strategy of belittling other organizations to further their own programs in the financially competitive environment of our young industry. There have been periods when the entire profession has been politically divided due to

in-fighting.

I felt this phase directly, too. Colleagues have used blogs and speaking platforms to call me names, intentionally misinterpreted things I have taught or written to feed their own agendas, even if they knew their interpretations were not accurate. I have given lectures in rooms filled with so much resistance to my teachings that you could cut it with a knife. The critical talk within our ranks has been rampant.

Why have I shared this unpleasant aspect of history with you? Well, just in case you had argumentative patients today, or you thought you were alone in the condemnation coming at you from family regarding your choice of profession, or you were getting grief from your spouse as to your high hourly commitment to your practice or your kids are ashamed that you are funding their daily bread by sticking needles in people, or you aren't making enough money doing what you love, or your education bills are staring you down, or you are in the midst of a mid-life crisis, feeling utterly alone and angry that you can't afford the Porsche or house or private trainer, or if you are drained by putting in too many hours marketing and not enough treating patients, you may now have a slightly new perspective.

People who do powerful things in life attract criticism and hardship. This medicine is powerful and your position with your patients is powerful. The tremendous goodness that you bring into the world attracts the challenges. Light, (*Yang*) attracts dark (*Yin*). Because you bring positive change into the world you are also ripe to be raked over the coals.

What criticism are you running into? How are you handling it? Do you need help? Are there people out there who could help you, support you? Don't minimize the impact that criticism brings into your life, the self-esteem challenges, the dampening of spirit. No, you don't have to live through what I lived through. I was stubborn and an English speaking TCM industry with formal schooling, licensure, insurance and governmental policy acceptance, medical product availability, etc, hadn't been born yet. We built that so you could stand on our shoulders. And I didn't live through what our colleagues of a hundred or a thousand years ago lived through.

In my last column, I wrote about the challenges faced by practitioners of herbal medicine many centuries ago. They risked life by making up potentially risky herbal formulas in an effort to move the field forward. They faced the accidental killing of themselves or others to advance the knowledge base of herbal medicine. Somebody had to experiment, to risk all to expand the field. Do you think they were criticized when their attempts backfired? Do you think they lived with that pain for the rest of their lives?

Or, what about the practitioners who came over to the Americas as, essentially, slave labor for the railroads? How was their work condemned in the U.S., by bosses who had no idea what they were doing and as a result, belittled or prohibited it, as they did many aspects of Asian culture? How hard was it for those exhausted doctors, engaged in menial labor, to acquire needles and effectively treat patients during the great railroad expansion?

Those who walked before us take the risks for their generation. They take the heat. They get the criticism. And now, you are getting yours. Remember, people who do powerful things in the world get criticized. It's part of the *Yin/Yang* balance of life. It's inherent in the sacred energetic path of this medicine.

If you have the courage to embark on this adventure, this profession, you are going to have to learn

how to deal with the tremendous power you are given as well as the negative ramifications of that power. If you haven't run into it already, remember the inherent attraction power of *Yin*, the darkness, to *Yang* the light. How are you going to handle the flack? What are you going to do to take good care of yourself so you can survive it and walk your talk? It does you no good if you tell patients to live a balanced life in the face of challenge when you don't. The imbalance comes back to bite you. Trust me on this one. I have learned it first hand.

The negativity that comes with the blessing of healing others is not erasable. But if you build your life with wisdom and forethought, you can use it to your advantage. Criticism can become a tool to enhance your commitment to goodness and growth. You can find freedom in the restrictions and insight in the struggle. There is yang within yin. There is insight within criticism. While it may seem like a back handed complement, but that is what I wish for you. The acquisition of wisdom, insight and peace through the experiences of criticism and conflict is what I wish for us all, indeed, for every generation of us.

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