

CHRIS'LL DEAL WITH IT

episode notes



EP 30 - Water You Going To Do Now?

Status	Published ✨
Publication Date	@May 22, 2023

 www.ChrisKreuter.com/CDWI

© 2023 by Kreuter Studios - All rights reserved

AI Statement: All elements of this episode are products of the author, Chris Kreuter, made without any use of AI tools.

I just had my first annual review. My boss was critical of pretty much everything: My work, my attitude, and my future with the company. I like my job and would like to keep it, but I don't think there's anything I can do to change my bosses' mind. What should I do now?

Reversing someone's first impressions can be tough. For today's episode, I'm going to **dispense** my advice using 6 metaphors involving **water** that should help give our asker some perspective with which to take their next steps:

1. Water always finds its level

- You had a bad review. It's not the end of the world.
- It's never easy hearing you're not up to the task, but that doesn't have to define the rest of your career.
- Right now, your mind is **sloshing** around, trying to figure out what to do next. Trust that it'll find its level again.
- Ride out the storm: Trust that the seas will calm and then you'll be in a better place to navigate to a better destination.
- Remember the vastness of the sea. Waves come and go, yet water always finds its level. Same with emotions.
- Feel the hurt. The sting of the words & their implications. But don't react to them in the moment. No matter how brutal they are, **let them wash over you**. When the storm waters recede, then you can take calmer action.
 - If you overreach in the moment, you run the risk of burning a bridge permanently. There's little you can do to recover from that.
- I'm a firm believer that as long as you remain on the boat, you've got the ability to recover your position. That despite a bad first review, you can find a path to thriving.
 - Were there any positives at all during your review?
 - What elements of your situation (or theirs) is keeping you in your current role?
 - Use the answers to both these questions as the start of a new foundation upon which to build a new reputation within the company.

2. It's water under the bridge

- It's important to reflect on your bosses' position. They have their own mandates for performance, and the responsibility to manage their team to the best of their ability.
- I know we'd all like a complete understanding of everything that goes into a manager's viewpoints and their decision making. But that's impossible.
- This also means their information about you is just as imperfect of your information about them. There's likely elements of the manager's review that are wrong.

- There's no way they could have perfect insight into your mindset, situation, or capabilities.
- The fact that our asker is even asking the question points to a desire to improve that their manager may not believe exists.
- But there's certainly some hard truths in their review, and it's up to you to focus on the key elements of that feedback that are going to turn the tide.
- As hard as it is feeling that you're not on their good graces, it's just as hard for most managers to have to give that kind of feedback.
 - Try your best to make them feel as comfortable as possible with having said the hard things.
- Let lingering resentment & anger go. Your manager is just going their job.
 - Even if they're doing it badly, recognize the review as part of their responsibility to try and get the best out of their department.
 - Because if you can't let it go, like [water under a bridge](#), there's not going to be any viable path towards improving your situation.
- Show your boss that you can take criticism. That the negative review means something to you, that you listened. That you're focused on proving them wrong rather than hating them for pointing out flaws. That's an attitude that changes minds.

3. The Parable of the Depths

- Our asker feels like they're [in deep water](#). With that comes added pressure and less visibility.
- Additional tools are needed to survive in the depths.
 - Your focus is forcibly narrowed
 - The pressure (resistance) magnifies exponentially.
- On top of this, our asker may feel like there's no shallow end to swim towards. No life preserver being thrown their way. That it's up to them to either sink or swim.

- This bad review is an opportunity to go down deep inside ourselves. Assess what we've been doing, what we're made of, and what we're capable of.
 - So much wisdom can be uncovered in those depths.
 - Sink deeper if you're able: And you'll uncover insights that few take the time to attain.
- To think deeply we must live deeply: Be willing to do the hard work at improving ourselves first.
- Conversely, you can remain on the surface & the shallows. It's vast and easier to see what may lie beyond the water. You have more options available to you.
 - And you may have to stay on the surface: Your reality might be that you're stuck on a boat that you need to keep afloat.
 - Yachts can hold a lot of stuff but they take up too much room. It's impossible for them to travel down into the depths.
 - Assess what you would lose with this job. The risks to the well-being of yourself and those who rely on you.
 - Are those elements causing stresses and/or compromises that could be causing the very behaviors or mindsets that contributed to your negative review?
- And when you surface from those journeys into the deep, be willing to jump into the deep end again and again.
 - In German there's an expression: [ins kalte Wasser springen](#) (to jump in cold water)
 - Make a big splash when you do: Especially if you're trying to change perceptions quickly.
 - The person getting on the tall diving board catches attention, while the people getting in the shallow end is routine.
 - The diving board comes with more risk.
 - Not to say the shallow end is bad. Both approaches are equally successful at getting into the pool.

- But our asker's in a position to change perceptions, and likely quickly. The only way to do that is to [make that big splash](#).
- And even if their dive isn't a perfect ten, sometimes being willing to jump at all sends the intended message.

4. Mit allen Wassern gewaschen

- This translates to: [Washed with all the waters](#)
- The saying refers to someone who knows every trick in the book. Someone who is smart, crafty, shrewd, experienced, and streetwise.
- It takes a lot of experiences, positive and negative, to become washed with all the waters.
- Recognize that you're probably early in your career. This won't be the last time you're criticized.
 - Despite giving this podcast, I still face criticisms. I'm an imperfect Human.
 - But every criticism is an opportunity to learn, one more washing on a larger journey.
- You've learned not just what you're doing wrong, but also how others perceive of your attitude, actions, and abilities.
- Even if your boss were to be 100% off base with the entirety of their assessment, their perceptions are their reality. If you can figure out how they've come their conclusions, you'll be that much smarter and shrewder in the future.
- Treat the washing of your first bad review like [water off a duck's back](#). Learn from it, but don't let it settle on you so much [it sinks you](#).

5. “Be Like Water”

- Water metaphors abound in the martial arts. Bruce Lee popularized this one like no other: [Be Like Water](#)
- The meaning here is to be formless. To not allow yourself to be trapped in a particular mindset.

- To be like water is to be capable of adapting to any situation.
- **Water can't be broken.** You strike it and it flows around the strike. Likewise, you can flow around the impact of the words in your review and remain wholly intact.
- This doesn't mean water doesn't react. It just remains fluid, able to respond to strike after strike with no loss in resiliency. It finds its level again.
- Many dojos want you to begin training by "**Emptying your cup**" - Or entering a flow state of beginner's mind. Never coming into training with preconceived notions or assumptions of having everything figured out.
 - For our asker: Is it possible to approach your job in a fresh new light? To empty their proverbial cup and pretend that they're restarting your tenure from day one?
- Being like water also means understanding that **we are all made of water**, whether we realize it or not.
 - No individual is inherently more valuable than you are.
 - We're all made of similar molecules that get the same 24 hours in a day to work with.
 - The container we find ourselves in might be different, but our capacity to be like the water within them does not vary.
 - You can consider if you view your current container as half-full or half-empty. But don't stay within that form. Dump the cup out and flow onward!

6. You can lead a horse to water but you can't make it drink

- This metaphor refers to someone who you've tried to help through guidance and support, but continues to fail at helping themselves.
- Mistakes happen. People have bad days/weeks/months, even years.
- I can excuse a ton of mistakes, but I can't excuse someone failing to attempt to improve their situation. To try & improve their ability to avoid making similar mistakes again.

- There's fewer things more frustrating about managing people than investing time, energy & care into people who don't want to help themselves.
 - I should be clear here: I'm assuming our asker has both the means and capability to take direct action to improve their situation. There's a stark difference between *wanting* to help themselves and being *unable to do so*.
 - Should there be elements restraining you from being able to help yourself, consider bringing those to your manager's attention.
 - A few examples here could be a disability such as dyslexia, financial constraints, complex child-care arrangements, changes in health, and/or anxiety.
 - There's likely a lot about you that your manager does not know. But managers can't react to problems they don't know about. Clarifying your own situation gives them greater context: A deeper insight into who you are. But this certainly comes with risks, perceived or otherwise. Will your manager appreciate you diving off that board into the deep end?
 - If they do, that deeper understanding could open up more options. This may also reveal knowledge or skills that are being under-utilized within the organization. They may even be able to offer up assistance in navigating towards that better, brighter second review that you're seeking.
- People should be entitled to live their life on their terms. Not everyone is going to be as driven as their peers and/or managers. Not everyone is ready to hear (or wants to hear) the call to improve & change.
- Our asker needs to look themselves in the mirror and decide if and how they want to meet the challenge. If they'll drink the water and let it fuel a better future.

Episode 30 Quote:

I like this quote from David Foster Wallace's famous 2005 speech [*This Is Water*](#)

It's from early in the speech and misses a bit of earlier context - but it's a nice reflection on some of the metaphors from today's episode. And in an article about water I'd be remiss if I didn't bring up one of Wallace's most famous works.

The point here is that I think this is one part of what teaching me how to think is really supposed to mean. To be just a little less arrogant. To have just a little critical awareness about myself and my certainties. Because a huge percentage of the stuff that I tend to be automatically certain of is, it turns out, totally wrong and deluded.