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Managing Defensiveness

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The good news is our brains are hard-wired to ascertain if something is a threat. This is imperative when faced with potentially life-threatening situations. Unfortunately, our brains can respond the same way when faced with less dangerous circumstances caused by challenges in our work and personal relationships. The natural human response is defensiveness, when someone personally or professionally takes an opposing view on a topic that you care deeply about. Typically, getting defensive doesn't end well, especially if you are engaging in a critical conversation. To help regulate your defensiveness, develop a healthy doubt about your own certainty and be curious about the other person's views. Try to discover why a decent and rationale person would think the way that she or he does (even if you've decided the person may not be decent and rationale.)

When the “opposition” is in the form of hearing critical feedback about ourselves and/or our work, our minds may translate this into a hostile attack and our anxiety and fear response takes over. This can result in defensive behavior that prevents us from learning and profiting from the information provided. Instead, approach the situation with curiosity. Remain receptive, ask yourself about the possible reasons behind the feedback and use the information to help improve your relationships.