CoCOA 101

COnstructive **C**ritique **O**bjective **A**nalysis (CoCOA) is an all-important aspect of the Creative Process. It is the opinion of the author (and most creators / instructors) that performing a CoCOA on a work, whether a film, or script, or other writing, or piece of artwork, or other multimedia project, is invaluable for both the creator and the interested audience as a learning tool. This is especially true in learning and educational situations. (Writer's and Filmmaker's Groups, school, etc.)

Feedback should always be requested by creators, and this is probably the best method and process to use, (especially for independent filmmakers, and others who tend to be isolated). Many people do not understand the methods, processes, and importance of Constructive Critique, unless they have taken college-level courses in writing, art, filmmaking, etc., where it is stressed as an important part of growing, strengthening, and becoming better, regarding the subject matter in question, in breadth and depth.

Here is some information about Constructive Critiques and Constructive Criticism.

The info presented here is gleaned from these websites, and other sources, and merged and edited together:

http://www.intekworld.com/Newsletters/vol2/12dec03/constructivecriticism.htm

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Criticism

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Critic

What is constructive criticism and constructive critique?

Here is how Ken Petress defined it (slightly edited) in "Constructive Criticism: a Tool for Improvement" for College Student Journal, September 2000:

Constructive criticism is judgment via objective analysis from a caring viewpoint given for the purposes of:

1. Offering receivers external views of their performance to compare with self-oriented and self-perceived views of their work.

2. Helping the receiver recognize or interpret ways to improve past performances, a current work, and/or ways to improve on future attempts.

3. Demonstrating to receivers that their efforts merit judgment. (as opposed to being ignored or distorted)

4. Showing genuine interest and appreciation for a receiver's effort.

5. Being encouraging, affirming, and supportive for the purpose of building confidence.

This author would add a sixth item:

6. One of the end goals should be for edification, awareness and education of both the giver(s) and the receiver(s), about the Constructive Critique process, the creative process in general, and the creative method / work in question itself (writing, filmmaking, etc.).

From this definition, we can see that constructive criticism is a valuable, and gentle, tool that we can use for our self-improvement and the improvement of others, both as giver and receiver.

There are various methods for offering constructive criticism and performing the analytical process. Often, a learning and growing atmosphere is the situation where a constructive critique can do the most good. Some suggest that the constructive criticism should be ***first introduced with a compliment*** about some aspect of the work being critiqued, which is not a bad idea, especially during the initial stages of the critque. (e.g., I liked this part, and that was nice, but I think this part can use some work...)

Positive, non-negative, non-derogatory wording should always be used, and the person who's work is being critiqued should never be personally attacked, or the work itself. A clinical atmosphere should be attempted, which is where the objectivity and analysis comes into play.

Everyone involved in the critique should understand that people have different perceptions, viewpoints, understanding, comprehension, backgrounds, ideas, etc., so advice and comments should always be offered and taken in the best sense of the descriptions and attitudes above.

Another thing that should be taken into account (by everyone involved) is the role of the givers and receivers when people of various "levels", experiences, and expertise interact, such as teachers, students, professionals, "experts", etc., where people's comments might carry more weight in certain circumstances.

Above all, the discussions should never degrade into argument, and respectful attitudes and behaviors should be attempted throughout by all involved. If need be, you can always agree to disagree, and then move on.

Know, too, that sometimes it takes time for information to be digested and accepted, which could be anything from "sleeping on it", to days, or weeks, or longer. Sometimes more real-world experience, or study and research, is required by people before they come to an understanding or acknowledgment. And sometimes people simply disagree.

Also, it is incumbent upon the receiver of constructive criticism to make the attempt to react to it in a positive manner, and attempt to shun attitudes and reactions like being defensive, and other negativity. This is not always possible, as people can probably understand, so it should be understood by all involved that this can occur and to react to it correctly and with an understanding attitude. As givers and receivers engage in constructive critique, these problems, if present, usually ease up as people become comfortable with their roles and understand the importance of the activity and become more familiar with it.

This does not mean that the creator cannot defend their artistic and technical choices and decisions, as long as it is done in a positive, constructive manner, and in the spirit of the process. Although, some suggest that the receiver should not respond and merely silently take in the information presented by others. And silently disagree, if they do, and think about it. The creator can always ignore anything with which they disagree. Some groups are adamant about the latter technique.

Remember: *We all have something to offer, and we all have much to learn.*

Edited September 2017