

BE A KOSHER CRITIC

by Mordechai Dixler

Among the numerous Commandments in this week's Torah portion, 51 in all, is the Mitzvah of *Tochacha* – to correct others when we see they've done something wrong (Lev. 19:17). This is a challenging Mitzvah, because it can only be fulfilled with one who is receptive to criticism. As human beings with a healthy sense of pride, we all find it difficult to accept rebuke, especially if it's uninvited. So how does one properly observe this Commandment?

King Solomon writes in Proverbs 9:8, "Do not criticize the fool, lest he hate you. Critique the wise one, and he will love you." The advice seems simple: offer criticism only to someone who welcomes it. A trademark of the wise is their openness to negative feedback.

However, Rabbi Isaiah Horowitz zt"l (known as the *Shla"h HaKadosh*, 1555-1630) offers a more profound reading of this proverb: Don't critique someone by calling him a fool. That will breed hatred and prove counterproductive. To help a person change, call him "wise." When you've demonstrated your respect for him and how you hold him in high esteem, he will love you, and be willing to hear your constructive advice.

This applies to every person at every level. An approach that emphasizes the positive is always more likely to have positive results. May G-d give us the strength, and sensitivity, to perform this Mitzvah correctly, and thereby introduce more people to His Torah and His Goodness.