

# BUILDING A THICK SKIN

BY CAROL L. BROOKS, SR/WA



*"You have to grow thick skin. That only comes with time and learning."*

*Karlie Kloss, fashion model*

Let's face it, it takes courage to meet a property owner on their own turf. There's no way to predict what kind of response you may face when you knock on their door. Will the owner behave maturely and unemotionally? Or will they criticize and complain about what you're taking from them?

While experts tell us that being overly sensitive is not atypical, I learned early on in my right of way career that agents need a thick skin. After all, you never know when a landowner might unleash their anger on you. When this happens, it takes a thick skin to loosen the knot in your stomach. People with thick skins aren't necessarily insensitive - they are just able to take negative comments, pick apart the pieces of truth, and apply them in a way that's productive. So what are some ways of developing a thick skin?

## It's Not You; It's the Situation

Imagine that a property owner erupts with harsh words about your project, employer and even you. The trick is to not personalize their comments, because their frustration may have nothing to do with you. You just happen to be there, giving them someone to target with their darts of fiery anger. They just want to be heard, so if you give them the time and space to voice their concerns, you can help diffuse their anger. Stay calm and think objectively as they let off steam. By remaining professional and appearing unruffled by their demeanor, the owner may be more willing to listen to what you have to say.

## Accept the Partial Truth

The hardest criticism to take usually has a bit of truth in it. It's this partial truth that we find the most difficult to accept. It might be related to a part of our lives that we have rationalized or haven't been able to face. In these cases, criticism can be helpful. Don't run from it, but allow the truth to strengthen a weakness and thicken your skin. However painful, when we remain open to a nugget of truth embedded in criticism, it strips away our defenses and gives us a chance to actually fix a problem.

## Rehearse the Positives

A single moment of criticism can be so poisonous that it makes us forget the positive feedback we've received. We easily recall disapproval, while compliments and victories are dismissed and

forgotten. If your inner critic gets unhinged easily, create a daily affirmation based on your positive qualities or compliments you've received.

Think back over your life and list the victories you've enjoyed and the affirmations that impacted your attitude. Create a personalized support system by displaying tokens of your accomplishments and photos of family and friends. Celebrate your strengths, because when adversity strikes, past victories and affirmations will help you form that thicker skin.

## Grow Some Scar Tissue

We all need critics, as it's often the critic that teaches us important lessons. When we listen, we can improve ourselves. The more we shelter ourselves from negative information, the more distorted our reality becomes. The best way to develop thicker skin emotionally is to build some scar tissue. The body has an amazing healing mechanism. When you break a bone, the re-fusing of bone tissue makes the point of breakage stronger than it had been before. The best way to absorb and handle adversity is to face a lot of it.

## Practice Selective Listening

In a fit of frustration, most people will regret what they say. During someone else's tirade, ask yourself, "Is what they're saying true?" If not, tell yourself to listen objectively and only pay attention to the morsel of truth that may actually be buried within their ranting.

It's not easy to handle being rejected, insulted or ignored. Most of us will respond emotionally, so it's crucial to have a thick skin. The thicker your skin, the more you will persist when times are tough.

---

### Carol L. Brooks, SR/WA

*Owner of Cornerstone Management Skills, Carol is an internationally-recognized author and lecturer on conflict management, interpersonal skills and success strategies. She has nearly 20 years experience in the right of way profession and is a Master Instructor for IRWA courses. ©2013 Carol L. Brooks All Rights Reserved. For more information, visit [www.cornerstonemanagementskills.com](http://www.cornerstonemanagementskills.com)*

