

Six Postures When Confronting Critics

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Being considered a “bad actor” is getting costly. You want a different reputation. What are your options? In order from least effective to most:

1. **The Hero.** You know you are a linchpin of civilization. Tell them so. *And watch them tell you why you are evil incarnate.*
2. **The Misunderstood Victim (the Hero Manqué).** Your critics are wrong, vengeful, dishonest, irrational, and far too powerful. Whine. Try to convince us you just look like Goliath; you’re actually David. *Good luck.*
3. **The Distracted Deity.** This is all a tempest in a teapot. Your critics are wrong on the merits, but the issue is too minor to fight about. You have far bigger fish to fry. *Sure. And just how sour are those grapes?*
4. **The Team Player.** You’re proud to do your part. So brag a little; claim the credit you deserve. It’s just a shame your critics thought they had to do battle; if they’d just waited or asked nicely, you’d have happily given them what they wanted. *Team Player is the right reputation to end up with -- but you can’t segue directly from Bad Actor to Team Player. You need a “transition reputation” first.*
5. **The Repentant Sinner (or its secular equivalent, the Most Improved Camper).** Admit you used to be a bad actor, and explain that you’ve mended your ways. *This can work. Its strength is acknowledging past misbehavior. Its weakness is the intrinsically low credibility of all claims of rebirth.*
6. **The Caged Beast (better yet, the Harnessed Beast).** Admit not just that your behavior has changed, but that your critics forced the change and are now calling the tune. *This is an easier sell than Repentant Sinner -- it gives the credit to critics (who thus find it easier to accept) and it is grounded in accountability instead of trust. It doesn’t claim to be responsible, just responsive ... and newly responsive at that.*

For more about my take on this issue, see:

- Packaging the Beast: A Public Relations Lesson in Type Casting (First Quarter 1999) -- www.prwatch.org/prwissues/1999Q1/beast.html
- Responsible or Responsive? (February 1999) -- www.psandman.com/articles/netwrkr.htm
- Accountability (Oct 2002) -- www.psandman.com/col/account.htm
- Giving Away the Credit: Managing Controversies by Claiming You're Responsive (though maybe not responsible) (Dec 2006) -- www.psandman.com/col/credit.htm

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