

If you can't say something nice...

By [Carol Howard Merritt](#)

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Immediately following my oil change, I got a phone call. It was an automated questionnaire asking about my oil change experience.

*On a scale of one to nine, the slightly robotic, slightly seductive woman asked, how were you greeted when you entered the service room? Was the service prompt? Were satisfied with your service?*

I hung up.

I don't understand why I should have to evaluate every single minute detail of my life. It makes me focus on things I would ordinarily blow off and leaves me mildly irritated. Of course the mechanic was abrupt when I entered. He's a mechanic. I don't go to him because he abounds in social charms. I go to him because he knows how to fix my car.

No, the service was not prompt. I was trying to fit the maintenance in on Friday at 4:30 before the holiday weekend.

Was I satisfied with the service? I didn't really watch him drain the old oil or put the new oil in, but my mechanic is an adult who has been changing oil for many years. I'm pretty sure he knows what he's doing. Can't we just let the poor guy just do his job?

I don't understand what's going on, but every time I turn around, I'm asked to fill out an evaluation on a service person, share my opinion on an item I bought, or review the book I just read. I know of a fifth-grade class where children were given Amazon accounts so that they could write reviews on the books they read (which explains a lot about some of the reviews on the site).

When did we become a country of critics? And who wants to live in a society where we pick each other apart all the time? If we don't watch out, our hyper-judgmental world will lead us to choke out our creativity, cultivate a fear of failure, and leave us

spiritually parched.

I was always told, “If you can’t say something nice about something, then don’t say anything at all.” Now it seems that our mantra has become: “If you can’t say something nice about something, then post it on the Internet.”

p.s.--If you want to read about handling on-line criticism, I wrote about it on [Duke Divinity's Faith and Leadership blog](#).