

Increasing your Assertiveness Skills

Have you ever wished you could voice your opinion to a “strong” personality, or raise a difficult issue with others? Many of us could do with a few more assertiveness skills in the workplace, or with family and friends.

So what is Assertiveness? It means expressing ourselves in ways that are respectful to others and ourselves. These communications are direct and honest and are appropriate to the context of the particular situation. This shouldn't be confused with submission or aggression.

Submission is a lack of respect of your own needs and rights e.g. not expressing your honest feelings, needs or values, allowing others to invade your space, deny your rights, and ignore your needs or by expressing your needs in a very apologetic manner.

Aggression, on the other hand, is when someone expresses their feelings, needs, and ideas at the expense of others. This type of person may be abusive, loud, rude, domineering or sarcastic. They may also be passive-aggressive, where they express aggression indirectly by, for example withholding information, starting rumours or “forgetting” to do something you asked them to.

So how do we become more assertive in our daily lives? Listed below are some communication hints for assertive conversations:

1. “I want to” and “I'd like to” statements.

These clarify your wants to both yourself and to others e.g. “I'd like some encouragement about my work”.

2. “I feel” statements.

These allow you to express your feelings without hurting the self-esteem of others e.g. “I feel humiliated when you reprimand me in front of others, and I'd prefer to have those discussions in private”.

3. Mixed feelings statements.

Allowing you to name more than one feeling e.g. “I feel good about my raise and appreciate that, but I also feel disappointed that I'm still not paid as much as other supervisors”.

4. Empathetic Assertion.

Expressing sensitivity towards others, particularly if the other person may be offended by your assertion e.g. “I can see you're upset with me now, but I would really like to talk this over more fully when you are ready to talk”.

5. Confrontive Assertive.

Used when a person's words are not matched by their deeds e.g. “I thought we agreed that you would be more considerate towards my needs, but you still seem to be ignoring them”.

6. Criticism Sandwich.

Using an affirming statement followed by the criticism, followed by another affirming statement e.g. “I really appreciate the support you've given me over the last three weeks, but this morning when you criticised me in public, I felt humiliated and I'd prefer if we spoke about issues in private. I'd really like to thank you for being so approachable”.



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