



Communicate Assertively!

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People have written tons of articles about what makes a great leader. Some conclusions centre around his or her intelligence, charisma, or personal drive. But this might not be enough!

One might ask, “What’s holding this person back from being a great leader?” The answer that could come up is assertiveness. Some executives might be too overbearing and others not assertive enough to stand their ground.

Relating to research in this area, Profs. Ames from Columbia University (US) says that the reason assertiveness come up so often as a leadership quality, is that conflict is such an essential part of what managers and leaders deal with. He says, “Sometimes it’s avoiding conflicts that really beg to be embraced and engaged in. Other times it’s pushing too hard and straining relationships through conflict.”

Ames also points out that there’s variance across situations as well: “Someone who’s a real mouse to their immediate supervisor might turn around and be an absolute terror to the people who work for him or her.”

I think, too, that the motive or outcome behind “winning” has something to do with the effectiveness of assertiveness. A leader who wants to win just for the sake of winning is less effective than the leader who is going to go for something he or she believes in. But even then, a

CHARACTERISTICS OF ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION

The main characteristics of assertive communication are various.

Eye contact demonstrates interest and shows sincerity.

Body posture: congruent body language will improve the significance of the message.

Gestures: appropriate gestures help to add emphasis.

Voice: a level, well modulated tone is more convincing and acceptable, and is not intimidating.

Timing: use your judgment to maximise receptivity and impact.

Content: how, where and when you choose to comment is probably more important than WHAT you say.

ASSERTIVENESS IS A CHOICE:

Aggressive:

“I believe I can win, I am superior, You are no good. Others do no matter when I stand up for my rights, I am the one who counts.”

Passive:

“I feel I will lose, I am inferior, I am no good. My thoughts, ideas, and feelings are not so important that others should know about them. I can hide and ignore them.”

Assertive:

“We can find a way together, we are both fine, no one need lose. I am worth standing up for my personal rights. I have a right to express my mind, saying what I think and feel-as long as I accept that others have the right to do the same.”

highly assertive person (even if they’re fighting for the right reason) may not see the consequences of his behaviour. For example, he doesn’t see that the person he just dealt with is feeling frustrated or angry feelings that can linger and affect the next interaction – all that is important is the win.

ASSERTIVENESS FOR LEADERS

- *Is the ability to be firm, clear and personally powerful*
- *Energy is released and the person feels stronger*
- *Good ideas get the hearing they deserve*
- *Relationships improve*
- *Difficulties are resolved rather than left festering*
- *Improves communication abilities.*

CONCLUSION

Assertive communication is the ability to express positive and negative ideas and feelings in an open, honest and direct way. It recognizes our rights whilst still respecting the rights of others. It allows us to take responsibility of

ourselves and our actions without judging or blaming other people. And it allows us to constructively confront and find a mutually satisfying solution where conflict exists. Assertive communication can strengthen your relationships, reducing stress from conflict and providing you with social support when facing difficult times. A polite but assertive 'no' to excessive requests from others will enable you to avoid overloading your schedule and promote balance in your life. Assertive communication can also help you handle difficult family, friends and co-workers more easily, reducing drama and stress.

TIPS FOR BEING MORE ASSERTIVE

- *Deliver your message directly to the intended recipient.*
- *Use statements that make what you want, think, and feel as clear as possible. For example, "I want to..." or "I feel..."*
- *"Own" your message. Say "I'd prefer it if you..." rather than "You should..."*
- *Ask for and encourage clear, specific feedback.*
- *Be specific and objective when describing the behaviour or situation.*
- *Don't use generalizations such as, "you always..." or "you never". Focus on the most recent case, saying, "I noticed today you....when you do that I feel..." Using behavioural descriptions allows you to avoid using labels that hinder the other person's acceptance of your message.*
- *Avoid becoming emotional when describing how it makes you feel. It may be appropriate to explain why the situation or other person's behaviour makes you feel that way. Focusing on your feelings has two important effects: It invites the other person to see things from your point of view, and your own feeling cannot be disputed. This is especially true when you say, "I feel..." rather than "you made me feel", to which they may reply, "Well I don't mean to".*
- *Be specific about the action required from the other person, taking into account the rights, needs and feelings of the other person. If necessary and appropriate, clearly describe the consequences of the other person's behaviour not changing.*
- *Do not be apologetic about your feelings, rights or opinions. Say "no" to unreasonable requests, also without being apologetic. Even offering an explanation is strictly optional.*
- *Only address one issue at a time, rather than listing everything you believe the other person has done wrong.*
- *Be sure to acknowledge both the feelings shown by the other person, and any issues he/she brings up, then immediately return to your point.*

TECHNIQUES FOR ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION

1. **Behaviour Rehearsal:** *literally practicing how you want to look and sound*
2. **Repeated Assertion** (the 'broken record'): *allows you to ignore manipulative verbal side traps, argumentative bating and irrelevant logic while sticking to your point.*
3. **Fogging:** *allows you to receive criticism without getting anxious or defensive, and without rewarding manipulative criticism.*
4. **Negative Enquiry:** *this technique seeks out criticism about yourself in close relationships by prompting the expression of honest, negative feelings to improve communication.*
5. **Negative assertion:** *lets you look more comfortably at negatives in your own behaviour or personality without feeling defensive or anxious, this also reduces your critics' hostility.*
6. **Workable compromise:** *when you feel that your self-respect is not in question, consider a workable compromise with the other person. You can always bargain for our material goals unless the compromise affects your personal feelings of self-respect.*

Aggression is about domination and invasion; it is fundamentally disrespectful of relationship partner's personal boundaries. Passivity is about submission and being invaded; it is fundamentally disrespectful of one's own personal boundaries.

In contrast to these two fundamentally disrespectful positions, assertiveness is about

finding a middle way between aggression and passivity that best respects the personal boundaries of all relationship partners. Assertive people defend themselves when someone else attempts to

dominate them. Though they can be strong people who are capable of aggressive domination attempts, they never act in an aggressive manner, however, because they know that to do so would cause them

to disrespect their relationship partner's boundaries. Assertiveness is about mutual benefit: a win-win.

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