

Interactional Styles at Work

We all have different styles of interacting with others in our personal and professional lives. Some of these differences are due to cultural factors; others simply reflect individual differences in personality and life experiences.

1 Read the examples of interactional styles below and discuss them in a small group. Consider:

- the possible impact of each person's interactional style on his/her career and job satisfaction
- how each person could adjust his/her interactional style to advance their career



Octavio

Octavio is an energetic marketing assistant. He enjoys his job and puts his heart into it. Whenever he hears negative feedback from his manager during performance evaluations, he becomes upset and angry. He defends himself vigorously against any suggestion that his work is not consistently excellent.

Sheila

Sheila is an administrative assistant in a large financial services company where she has worked for 11 years. She is quite shy and never attends any of the company's functions. She does not eat in the company cafeteria but instead runs errands everyday during her lunch hour. Sheila is very good at her job but wants a change. She has applied for several higher-level positions in the company, but has never been considered for any of them.

Alvin

Alvin is a hardworking manager in a pharmaceutical company. He is constantly worried that his staff are not carrying out their duties to his high standards. He frequently points out their mistakes to help them improve.

Fariba

Fariba is a sociable, outgoing woman who works as an accounts payable clerk in a government ministry office. Her big laugh can often be heard throughout the office. She enjoys chatting with her co-workers throughout the day.

Pascal

Pascal works as a counsellor for a non-profit organization providing community programming for children and parents. Pascal often has ideas for how things could be improved in his workplace. He talks about his ideas to some of the other counsellors but never speaks up at meetings.

Being Assertive

Being assertive means expressing your needs, feelings and views in a way that is honest, direct and respectful of the rights and feelings of others. Below are two features of assertive communication:

1. Using “I” statements instead of generalizations or “you” statements

When we use “I” statements, we calmly state the feelings we have and the event that caused these feelings, without blaming others. “You” statements can convey accusations and generalizations; “I” statements focus on our own views and acknowledge that different people have different opinions. Consider the following examples:

Generalization or “you” statement:

You can’t expect me to finish the report today!!
You make me so mad.

“I” statement:

I’ll do as much as I can on this report today.
I feel angry when you come home late without telling me.

2. Using descriptive, specific statements about others instead of judgements or generalizations

When we talk about others, we often make value judgements and generalizations, such as *He’s so rude*, *She’s brilliant*, or *You always come home late*. These statements are usually not factually true, but are exaggerations and generalizations. They are also value judgments. They praise or condemn someone, rather than focus on specific behaviour. Assertive communication focuses on accurate statements of fact. Because these statements are specific, they can lead to finding solutions. Consider the following examples:

Judgement or generalization:

She’s really irresponsible.
He’s racist.
You are always late.

Descriptive and specific statements:

She left early three times last week.
On three occasions, he would not allow me to take the day off work for a religious holiday.
You were late five times last month.



1 Search the Internet for information and tips about using assertive language. Write three tips and provide examples of each tip in use. Share the tips with the class.

Possible search terms: *being assertive; assertive language*

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For each scenario below, write an appropriate assertive statement. Use “I” statements and avoid generalizations.

1. Your manager frequently gives you work at 4:45 p.m. and tells you she needs it completed before you leave for the day.
2. A co-worker makes fun of your accent.
3. You ask a bus driver for directions. He mumbles something that you can’t understand and you ask him to repeat. He says, “Are you deaf?”
4. A co-worker tells you jokes that you find offensive.
5. Your manager frequently criticizes you in front of your co-workers.
6. Your child’s babysitter constantly teases your daughter about her weight.
7. At a job interview, the interviewer asks you if you are planning to become pregnant.
8. A co-worker asked you out for a drink after work several months ago and you accepted the invitation. However, you realized you didn’t want to socialize with him/her again outside of work. Your co-worker keeps asking you out.
9. An acquaintance frequently sends mass emails that contains racist information. You want him to stop sending you these types of messages.
10. Your mother-in-law often makes negative comments about the way you are raising your children.

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Role-play the scenarios with a partner.



<p>Situation 1: Student A</p> <p>You are in a lineup to place an order at a bakery. Another customer jumps in ahead of you. Speak to the customer.</p>	<p>Situation 1: Student B</p> <p>You just stepped in front of someone who had been waiting in line longer than you. You are in a hurry and your order will be quick.</p>
<p>Situation 2: Student A</p> <p>Your landlord frequently knocks on your door at inconvenient times and announces he needs to fix something in your apartment. You know that by law, he must give 24 hours notice to enter your home. Speak to your landlord.</p>	<p>Situation 2: Student B</p> <p>You are the landlord. Your tenant requested a repair to a leaking faucet. You are very busy and want to do this repair now.</p>

Being Assertive: Giving and Handling Criticism

Giving and receiving criticism can be difficult, and can result in feelings of anger, resentment and defensiveness. However, constructive criticism can lead to positive change and improved relationships. Giving and receiving criticism in a constructive way involves focusing on facts and specific observations, avoiding value judgments, and maintaining respect for the other person.

Handling criticism

Handling criticism assertively involves remaining calm, seeking clarity from the other person, agreeing with any specific truth in the criticism and calmly disagreeing with specific statements that are not true.

Criticism

You are a terrible driver!
You've been late all week.

Handling the criticism assertively:

It's true that speeding yesterday was a stupid thing to do.
I was late on Wednesday and I'm sorry about that.
But I started at 9 a.m. on the four other days. Can you double-check the sign-in sheets?

Giving constructive feedback and criticism

Giving criticism constructively involves expressing your observations about the behaviour of another person and the consequences of that behaviour. It includes observations about behaviour you appreciate and/or behaviour that bothers you, and making a request for change.

For example, *I noticed your report was well written and carefully thought out. I also noticed it was submitted two days late. As a result, we weren't able to discuss the financial aspects of the project at our last meeting. In the future, could you submit your report at least two days before our planning meeting?* This kind of feedback or criticism focuses on facts and specific behaviour rather than on people as individuals.

Constructive criticism generally follows three key steps:

1. Describing the behavior as you have observed it. Stating the facts.
2. Stating the effect of the behaviour on you or on the workplace.
3. Expressing appreciation or concern and requesting a change.



Audio 3.13: Listen to three dialogues of people giving and receiving criticism. For each dialogue, identify if and how the speaker follows the three steps of constructive criticism. Record the details in a chart (similar to the one below) for each dialogue.

	Details	Response
Step 1		
Step 2		
Step 3		

Here are some more tips for giving feedback about another person's behaviour:

- Don't generalize by using the words "always" and "never" (e.g., *You never help me when I ask for help; You always interrupt me when I'm talking*).
- Don't make judgments or accusations (e.g., *You are a lazy person; You're spending too much money*).
- Keep the focus on specific observations of behavior and state the consequences of the behaviour:
Last month I noticed that you spent \$300 on clothes, and now we have a credit card debt.
I hear you mowing your lawn sometimes very early in the morning. It wakes my children up and they don't get enough sleep.
I really don't like it when you raise your voice.

2 | Reword the following statements so that they focus on an observation of behavior and the consequences of that behaviour.

1. You never listen to my ideas. _____
2. Your work is sloppy. _____
3. You are so disorganized. _____
4. You never meet your deadlines. _____
5. You always criticize me in front of others. _____
6. You didn't do your share of work on the project. _____

3 | For each situation below, prepare an assertive response.



Situation 1

Your manager is angry because he believes, wrongly, that you are responsible for a serious mistake in the department. What do you say when your manager accuses you of making this mistake?

Situation 2

You frequently take your elderly mother to a walk-in clinic for appointments. You have noticed that the nurse speaks rudely to your mother and is rough with her when she gives her injections and takes her blood pressure. As a result, your mother gets very anxious before each visit. Speak to the nurse.