**Choosing Assertive Words Carefully**

**Guidelines for Assertive Word Choice**

* Use "I" statements, rather than "you" statements.

**Compare the following:**

"*You always interrupt my stories!*" (Aggressive)

"*I would like to tell my stories without interruption*." (Assertive)

* Use factual descriptions instead of judgments or exaggerations.

**Compare the following:**

"*If you don't change your attitude, you're going to be in real trouble.*" (Aggressive)

"*If you continue to arrive after 8:00 a.m., I will be required to place you on two days' probation without pay.*" (Assertive)

* Express thoughts, feelings, and opinions reflecting ownership.

**Compare the following:**

"*He makes me angry!*" (Denies ownership of feelings)

"*I get angry when he breaks his promises!*" (Assertive and owns feelings)

"*The only sensible policy is to match the competition.*" (States opinion as fact; aggressive, controlling)

"*I believe matching the competition is the best policy.*" (Owns opinion; assertive)

"*Don't you think we should table this for now?*" (Passive, indirect, denies ownership)

*“I think we should table this for now.”* (Owns thought; assertive)

* Use clear, direct requests or directives (commands) when you want others to do something, rather than hinting, being indirect, or presuming.

**Compare the following:**

"*Would you mind taking this to John?*" (Indirect, only inquires about willingness)

"*Will you please take this to John?*" (Assertive request)

"*Please take this to John.*" (Assertive directive)

"*Why don't you stop on the way home and pick up milk?*" (Indirect, encourages the other to think about *not* doing it)

"*Will you please pick up milk on your way home?*" (Assertive request)

"*Please pick up milk on your way home.*" (Assertive directive)

***Being Direct and Honest***

People avoid being direct and honest because they have learned it is impolite or pushy. Unfortunately, while attempting to avoid being inappropriate, we sometimes choose words that communicate a lack of respect. Sometimes we are so "careful" we don't communicate the real message.

When we say "Don't you think…" instead of "I think," we are communicating indirectly. If you really listen to the words, they sound condescending. When you ask, "Why don't you…" instead of "Will you," you are literally asking a person to find reasons not to. When you say, "I need …," and presume someone win take care of your needs, you communicate a lack of respect or an air of superiority. If you say "I need" or "I want," learn to add a request or directive in order to be assertive.

These may seem like picky details. You might say, "Most people know what is meant when I use those words, so what's the difference?" The difference is that you may be getting expected results only because people are able to figure out your unexpressed intentions. You may not be getting their respect. Continuing to use improper wording reinforces old habits and interferes with your being truly assertive. You can increase your success rate and improve relationships by using the direct, honest, assertive words.

**Some Do's and Don'ts**

Following are some do's and don'ts for assertive word selection.

**Do**

* Say no politely and firmly
* Express feelings honestly

*say* "I'm angry"; "I'm disappointed"; "I'm delighted"; "I enjoy being with you"

* Be realistic, respectful, and honest

*say* "This is the third straight month your report has been late."

*say* "Thank you for asking. I prefer no smoking in my car."

* Express preferences and priorities

*say* "I don't have a particular movie to suggest. I do want to avoid ones with violence."

**Don't**

* Don't say "I can't" or "I won't be able to."
* Don't depersonalize feelings or deny ownership, by saying:

"You make me mad"; "That's disappointing"

"That's delightful"; "You make me feel so good"

* Don't exaggerate, minimize, or use sarcasm, by saying:

"You are never on time with your reports."

"Uh, okay, we wouldn't want to strain your will power!"

* Don't defer to be sociable or agree unwillingly, by saying:

"I don't care—whatever everyone else wants is okay with me."

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| **Time to Practice** | | |
| With the preceding guidelines fresh in your mind, write an assertive response that is appropriate for the following situations: | | |
| 1. You did not understand what someone just told you and want her to restate her message.   \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_   1. You believe you deserve a raise and decide to ask your boss directly.   \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_   1. You have been invited to a social event that does not interest you. Decline the invitation.   \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_   1. You are pleased about what someone has done. Tell him or her your feelings.   \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_   1. You don’t think the project will be completed by the committed deadline. How will you say this assertively in an email to the client POC?   \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | | |
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