

Creating Authentic Assertion

Part III – Assertive Development Trilogy

Karen Davies



Part III

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Karen Davies

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Part III – Assertive Development Trilogy



Creating Authentic Assertion: Part III – Assertive Development Trilogy

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Preface and Biography

It is widely recognised that assertive behaviour has a role in our leadership success and personal development. Without honing this essential skill, we become ineffective, lose respect and risk the physical and mental effects of stress. Yet assertive development too often focuses on the simplicity of applying new behaviours, rather than discovering the source of our lack of assertion.

In her first two thought-provoking books within this Assertive Trilogy, Karen explores the profound drivers that influence how we think, feel and act, offering an insight into the impact these factors have on our performance and our behaviour.

This third and final book in the series builds on the essential foundation Karen has created by addressing how to tackle real life assertive challenges. Karen's philosophy throughout has been about digging beneath the surface of our behaviour and unlocking the reasons why we consistently behave unassertively. Having explored the root causes to our patterns, we can now see how to achieve win-win results more often, making good quality choices about how we think, feel and act. Having developed a strong self-respect, which is at the heart of all behaviour, assertion becomes so much more do-able, thanks to Karen's approach.

We finally get to see how to turn around our challenges and by adopting key strategies, which are supported by a robust basis of self-esteem and see our struggles become a distant memory.

Bringing us this fascinating topic, Karen Davies offers us her passion about her work in self-development and honing the art of authentic assertion.

Whilst Karen has been in the personal development and coaching fields for twenty-five years, it has been in the last fifteen that her work has had the greatest impact, thanks to her own journey of self-discovery. After suffering from stress-related depression in 1997, Karen had a unique opportunity to explore herself profoundly and uncover the fundamental triggers that created her health problems. After some cathartic self-development, she worked through her challenges, many of them triggered by self-destructive thought patterns and her learning has become the source of her own healing, her inspirational teachings and powerful coaching.

Through her Consultancy, Karen inspired changes in hundreds of executives, leaders and aspiring employees across the globe, achieving success for over thirteen years. Today Karen is role modelling her 'optimise your potential' teachings by shifting her focus from business to personal transformation, inspiring the fulfilment of individuals, through her new vocation – My Well-being.

Karen's refreshing approach to development is far beyond the concept of the traditional training course. She uses her coaching philosophy to guide us on our own path of self-discovery, building on the notion that teaching is a passive activity; learning is active. You will not just read this eBook, you will take a journey and, engaged by her coaching exercises, have the opportunity to alter the way you think, how you feel and behave in all walks of your life.



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“Be the change that you wish to see in the world.”

Buddha

1 Introduction – Assertive Trilogy Part 3

If you have engaged with my previous two eBooks you will know that my philosophy on developing assertiveness is to take an *inside-out* approach, inspired by Stephen R. Covey’s book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. We can only create sustained, authentic assertive patterns when we understand what holds us back and then find a way to resolve those issues.

The first book in this three-part series, **Your Assertive Development Journey**, lays down some critical principles for raising our self-awareness, through which we gain a tremendous understanding of our current behaviours and what could be holding us back from that illusive assertive Utopia.

The second book, **Mastering the Power of Assertive Dialogue** looks at conquering the art of assertive interactions by exploring how our *internal dialogue* influences our self-esteem and how, through our *external dialogue*, others experience and build relationships with us. We discover the role our thoughts have on both our self-worth and behaviour patterns and we explore some of the latest research that reveals the mind/body connection – this has exciting potential for the way we utilise our brainpower in a business context. In addition, we uncover how to hold *influential conversations*, addressing so much more than traditional communication topics, enabling us to earn greater respect and achieve more collaborative results.

This third and final book brings the Trilogy together, creating an exciting climax to every day assertive challenges, offering a manageable set of strategies for a long-lasting change in our behaviour. Having read the first two books, with a degree of knowledge, understanding and faith, we are ready to embrace new ways of thinking, feeling and acting and begin to experience new results that can propel us forward in this fast-paced business world.

Individually, each book explores the pieces of our *personal and leadership effectiveness* jigsaw. Together they take us on a journey of self-discovery that broadens our mind to the magic of self-awareness, high self-esteem and sustainable change that generates a route-map for success.

1.1 Assertive Vision

There is a lot of talk in the Personal Development field about the Law of Attraction and how this is an important strategy for accelerating success and fulfilment. Quite simply this focuses on setting a clear image in our minds about **what we want**. Through regular reviews of this vision and stepping up our game, we can attract people, events and situations that drive us towards our desired outcome.

As we now combine all the assertive theory from the previous two eBooks, I believe that generating a clear vision of our assertion moving forward, is an important activity to engage with. So please follow this next exercise to create a very powerful success strategy using the Law of Attraction.

Buddha is reported as saying, ***‘Be the change that you wish to see in the world.’*** It is only after we understand what the change is that will bring us the best result, can we then step up and become it.

Assertive Attraction Exercise

1. Wherever you are sitting right now, just take a breath and get comfortable. Be present in this moment and allow your worries and pressures to subside, just for a while.
2. Now focus your mind on 3-6 months from now. Imagine yourself behaving assertively and complete these three statements, ***When I am assertive,***
 - a. **I am**
 - b. **I feel**
 - c. **I can**
3. Now visualise your answers and put them into your own personal mind movie. See yourself behaving confidently, feel the effects of your increased assertion, hear the sound of your voice and notice the impact you are having on others.
4. Amplify this movie. Make it larger, louder and more colourful. Feel it coming alive. Get a real sense of how you feel watching this image. Notice the pleasure, excitement, happiness, satisfaction that is happening for you right now. Tune into this feeling as this is the reality of your assertion.
5. Repeat this mind movie daily and as you experience more intense satisfaction, you will begin to attract positive situations. In addition to this, as you begin to apply the learning from all three books, you will step up your actions in such a way that you head actively towards your vision.

1.2 Benefits of Authentic Assertion

Ok, so we have the vision in our minds, we are playing out our movie on a daily basis and generating positive feelings when we do so. Here is a quick reminder about why this is important to us.

Authentic, sustained assertion has huge benefits for us. All too often we put our energy into pleasing or dominating others. Assertion allows us to put *us* firmly back into the space that we have the right to be in. No longer do we have to stand on the side-lines, tentatively wondering how and when we should make our presence known. Equally, we no longer need to position ourselves in the middle, looking for the power of the limelight to feel some sense of worthiness.

Having taken our *assertive development journey* over the course of the last two books, we begin to see the limitless possibilities for our potential and, through the conscious choices we can now make, get positive resolutions to our issues. What is more, when we operate this assertive simplicity from a place of robust self-esteem – we stand in a place of certainty and self-respect.

These symbiotic elements combine together to give us health, peace, natural behaviour and an armoury to deal with every situation that life presents to us. Sleepless nights lessen, conflicts fade, results improve and relationships flow better. Sure there will be challenging times that test our resilience, although with these fundamental tools we can cope, resolve and overcome them all in a more efficient and self-protective way.

We must give a mention to the benefits that others receive from our new position of confidence. The energy we project from our new space creates an enthusiastic atmosphere that others pick up on. When we project confidence, we generate confidence in others. When we deal with people respectfully, they respect us in turn. When we stand up for ourselves, people stop pushing us around. When we judge less, others do not judge us. The whole experience of interacting with people changes the minute we become more comfortable in our own skin and like the reflection in the mirror.

Organisations also reap so many rewards from our assertion. Whilst there will always be an argument for the *Lord Alan Sugar* or *Donald Trump* School of Ruthless Leadership, my view is that there is a price we pay for this consistent type of behaviour. When we adopt a genuine assertion that comes from strong roots, business activity becomes more robust and fortified. Customers receive a better service, teams feel valued and so raise their performance and everyone wins. Most importantly, when we behave in this way, we can sleep at night – and this is priceless.

So, are there any reasons for not harnessing this amazing development? Over the years that I have posed this question, my participants and clients have struggled to see any downsides to learning the art of assertion. Most particularly, when people see that this art is within themselves and that ultimately we are looking to create personal expansion, then everyone benefits.

"Leadership in the right hands is always a joy and not a chore."

Karen Davies



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"When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves."

Victor Frankl

2 Assertiveness Synopsis

Whether this is the first book in the Assertive Trilogy you have downloaded or whether you have read the previous two, I believe it is worth taking some time to recap on the general principles behind my *authentic assertion* premise. After all, it may have been a number of months since you started on this journey.

In this section, I aim to summarise assertion's core elements and present them in a different way, in the spirit of engaging our proactive minds. Of course, as we already know, **'Repetition is the Mother of Skill!'**

2.1 Assertive Principles and Values

There are three core principles behind authentic and consistent assertion and a handful of values that, when we honour, lead to improved results.

2.1.1 Principle 1 – The New Paradigm

The art of assertiveness is not a *sticking plaster solution* to getting what we want – simple assertiveness training only launches us a little way down the path to success. To achieve genuine assertion, we must give attention to the new paradigm, which focuses on introspection and self-awareness.

Getting to the roots of *why we behave unassertively* is the magic to unlock. When we gain the all-important insights into the source of our behaviours, beliefs and thought patterns, we have all the resources we need to adjust our behaviour patterns – for good. With the courage to look at ourselves profoundly, we can explore, appreciate, learn and change the way we think, feel and ultimately behave. Without this depth of reflection, old habits reign supreme and we are left to feel frustrated and dissatisfied with our inconsistent results.

When we self-appraise we have a whole heap of information that helps us fine tune our behavioural engine that delivers, in the end, a far superior performance. With the change of our spark plugs and some new oil, we can cruise through our work and personal lives with greater harmony and less conflict – surely this has to be on everyone's agenda?

2.1.2 Principle 2 – We Can Learn it!

Assertiveness is not something we are born with, it is a sophisticated art that we develop as we broaden our horizons and experiences. We **are** born with the primal reactions of *fight and flight*, which are innate, self-preservation behaviours, stimulated by a chemical defence mechanism inbuilt into our sub-conscious mind. When we acknowledge this, we arm ourselves with the opportunity to explore our unconscious patterns of behaviour, what has influenced their existence and their impact on our lives. This information then helps us to make informed decisions about how we need to change, given our goals and desires. It is only in the *unlearning* that we create the space to *relearn*.

2.1.3 Principle 3 – Hilltop of Experiences

The most dominant, primal instinct that drives our behaviour depends upon the environment within which we were raised and the people who had the most significant influence on our thoughts, beliefs and behaviours. Our adult patterns emerge from the people and events that we were exposed to consistently during our childhood. Those patterns form the composition of our own personal *hilltop* upon which we view and interpret the world before us. As events, situations and people pass by we make judgements about how to handle them based on our hilltop's embedded reference points. If we have adopted a fear of upsetting people, then in the face of an argument we unconsciously find ourselves withdrawing, complying and following the path of least resistance, just to keep the peace.

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The most influential people in our lives, positively or negatively shape our thoughts and beliefs, which lead to the creation of our habits. Our challenge is to tune into their teachings and review how constructive they are. Habits have a funny way of tripping us up and our default path is to blame others. Yet when we have the courage to look within, we find almost all the answers lying there, patiently waiting for our awakening.

As we age and gain more experience, we eventually find alternative ways to achieving better results and more constructive, harmony-building techniques become the norm. Yet to short-circuit this *eventual awakening*, we need to make a slight deviation along our unconscious path to the future. A reflective peek in the mirror will do the job. Investing time assessing how we operate, how our thinking patterns and external events trigger habitual behaviours, illuminates a fascinating and accelerated path to self-fulfilment and success.

2.1.4 Assertive Values – Philosophy Foundation

A number of core values collaborate with these three principles, providing support to our Assertive Philosophy, giving it definition and robustness. These values are best summarised in the table below:

I take responsibility for my own thoughts, feelings and actions.	I am active and proactive in my behaviours and attitudes.	I am driven by my integrity and the desire to be constructive.
I respect other people's opinions even if they differ to mine.	I trust in myself.	I only change those things that are within my direct control.
Behaviours have consequences and I consider these before I take action.	Fairness and equity sit at the heart of my interactions.	I am willing and able to look within before making outward judgements of others.
We are the same and yet different. I value and appreciate diversity.	I express myself in a direct, respectful and honest manner.	I assert my rights without violating the rights of others.
Assertiveness starts and ends with me.		

By recognising the importance of the three principles and honouring these values, we can take the first few essential steps towards *authentic assertion*.

Assertive Values Exercise

Using the values above, which do you honour easily and that thereby support your assertion?

Which values feel less comfortable for you? These may indicate where you need to put your attention as you learn to become more assertive.

This can be a most useful exercise in understanding the fundamental blocks you have to specific situations, which we will discuss later in the book.

2.2 Behavioural Characteristics

Investing in self-development work means we need to be prepared to assess our current effectiveness, styles and predominant behaviour patterns. It is only from here that we can move forward constructively.

In **Your Assertive Development Journey**, I presented a Behavioural Analysis Questionnaire and this accompanying Profile Summary, which provides a high-level assessment of our current patterns. We can use this to carry out a basic self-evaluation or alternatively please download the eBook to access the full Questionnaire.

<p>Assertive</p> <p>This behaviour focuses on natural, calm and rational outputs, adopting a win-win philosophy. It operates from choice, measured responses and consideration of others. Assertor's own needs are honoured, yet not at the expense of others, resulting in a collaborative interaction seeking compromise and resolution.</p> <p>With a high self-esteem, an assertor feels secure, can listen actively and express themselves clearly without anxiety. Driven by choice and appropriateness, an assertor may temporarily use aggression or passivity, whilst recognising the need to return to assertion as their predominant pattern.</p>	<p>Aggressive</p> <p>This behaviour operates from a dominant win-lose position. Low self-esteem and insecurity trigger this behaviour and aggressors use it as a way of gaining power to feel more secure. Aggressors use force, volume and emotion to express themselves and they invest in securing their own needs before the needs of others.</p> <p>Aggressors command, demand and defend instinctively when threatened. An aggressor's primal and irrational reaction can result in a passive swing, as they often feel guilty about their actions, fear rejection and consequently can feel insecure.</p>
<p>Passive</p> <p>This behaviour operates from a people-pleasing, lose-win position. They invest in satisfying other people's needs, often at their own expense. With a low self-esteem, passives are insecure and strive to gain approval and affection. Their behaviour focuses on agreeing, complying and fostering dependency to ensure their security.</p> <p>They rarely express themselves honestly as the fear of rejection or ridicule is overriding. They project timid, shy and quietly spoken interactions where fear, anxiety and worry are key triggers for their behaviour.</p>	<p>Passive Aggressive</p> <p>Passive Aggressive also operates from a win-lose position, although has a more indirect nature to it. Someone interacting with a passive aggressor is often unclear about where they stand, as facades and hidden agendas can be a feature here.</p> <p>Insecurity is once again a driver, with a fear of speaking 'the truth' in case it offends. Yet a passive aggressor can do as much damage just with less power than the aggressor. A need for security and protection dominates this behaviour, although they invest in a more subtle and indirect expression of their needs.</p>

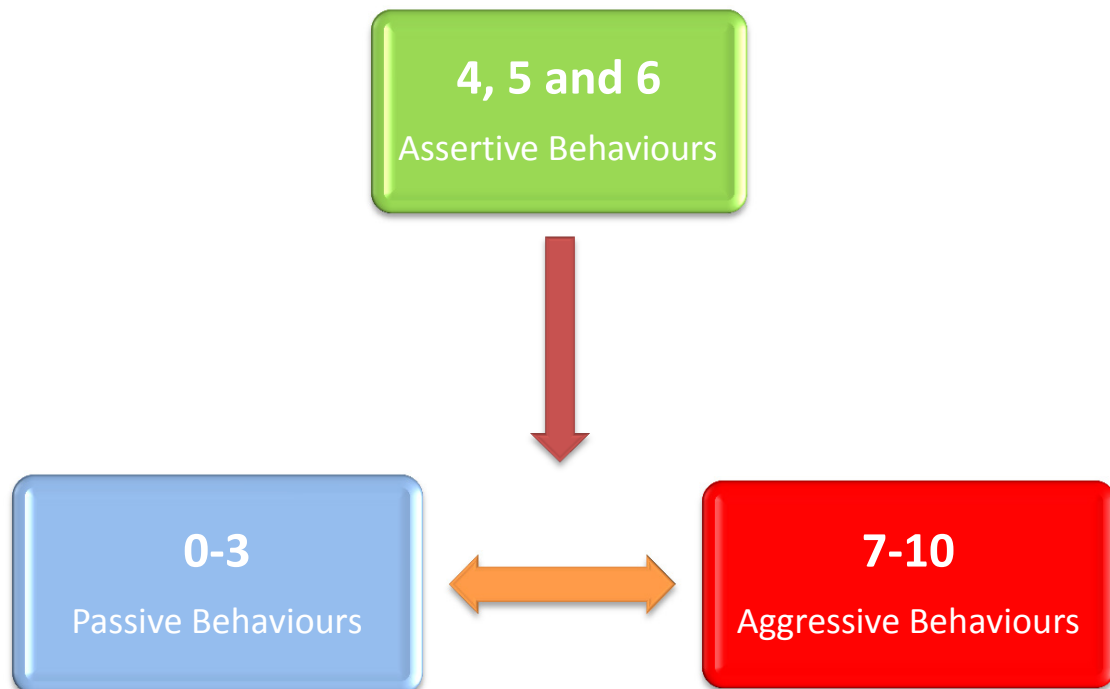
2.3 Behavioural Spectrum – Marginal Differences

Another way of looking at behaviour patterns is to use the idea of a spectrum. Imagine a line with **zero** at the left-hand side – representing **Passive Behaviour**. **Ten** is at the right-hand side – representing **Aggressive Behaviour**. Sitting in the middle, **dissecting this spectrum is five** – representing **Assertive Behaviour**.

Each number, from *zero to ten*, indicates a level of intensity relevant to the broad characteristics of the behaviour categories. For example, **zero** represents extreme passivity, a 'wall flower', someone who is shy, is uncomfortable interacting and has little or no self-belief. Whilst **three** is still passive, this number demonstrates more confidence in interactions, although still shows signs of timidity and uncertainty.

At the other end of the spectrum, **ten** is the extreme picture of aggression, which would be violence, abuse and bullying. Yet **eight** might highlight a more sarcastic, arrogant and subtle aggression that has less intensity than its number ten counterpart.

Five represents the ideal balance – the perfect assertion. Both **four** and **six** are both within its foothills, showing a slightly milder and strong presentation of assertion, sitting either side. This is what I call the *marginal difference*.



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This model can be helpful in exploring:

1. Where we predominantly operate.
2. Where we move to when we face a stressful situation.

A point worth mentioning here is that we are unlikely to remain just at one number for life. Various people and situations may provoke different reactions in us and these are worth examining. For example, we may operate predominantly at **three**, although there may be a particular team member whose energy zapping behaviour triggers frustration, prompting a leap-frog to **seven** in our interactions with them.

Often, if we sit predominantly at the lower end of the spectrum, we find it difficult to express our feelings and sometimes another person may behave in a way that tips us over the edge. Much like a champagne bottle, we explode and bubble over. We are then likely to experience remorse, guilt and regret for behaving 'out of character' and we very quickly return to our starting position three, until the next outburst.

Of course, the healthy alternative is to learn a more assertive approach, building the confidence to express ourselves more openly, so the leap-frogging behaviours are minimised, we protect our health and we restore our energy balance.

To bring this spectrum to life a bit more, let me use the playing card imagery; an exercise I often use during my Assertive Development workshops.



Imagine the scene. A group of ten people sitting in a meeting room; each chooses a playing card at random, from Ace to 10. (There is no zero in a pack of cards, so we need to be a little adaptive). The cards are face down, so no one else knows the value of their colleagues' cards. The group members must then contribute to the meeting, adopting the behavioural characteristics that are most relevant to the card's number, using the spectrum idea from earlier. The group then identifies who has which card, indicated by their behavioural representation, which provokes an interesting debate.

Playing Card Exercise

If you had to identify **playing card 2**, what characteristics would you look for? What would they be saying, how would they be saying it and what body language would you see?

What if you had to pin-point **number 7**? What would their characteristics be?

Now for a real challenge! If you had to define the *margins of difference* either side of **card 2** (i.e. 1 and 3) and **card 7**, (5 and 6), how would you tell them apart? What subtleties separate them?

Focusing on the diverse behaviours that people display can be helpful in, not only understanding our own patterns, also understanding how to best interact to create a positive and constructive outcome.

2.4 Six Types of Assertion

Using this principle of marginal difference, we can now begin to explore the *assertive element* more fully and clarify the behavioural subtleties involved.

The table below illustrates the *six types of assertion* we can access during an interaction. Referring to the spectrum from earlier, the points summarised below start around four/five, slowly rising, in small degrees, to seven. Please note that seven is not a conveyance of aggression, it is just a subtle increase in strength and must be appropriate to the situation and individual concerned.

Description	How to Use it	Communication Strategy
1. Basic Assertion 4–5	This is a statement of position, where we make our needs/feelings clear. Use it to give information, feedback to others or when raising an issue.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I need to be away by...” • “I feel pleased with...” • “The cost will be...” • “I haven’t thought about that before, I need some time to reflect.”
2. Empathic Assertion 5	This is a recognition of other’s needs/feelings as well as our own. It is good for situations where others are in opposition or in conflict and helps avoid over-reacting with aggression by slowing down our response.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I appreciate that, although...” • Although I know you’re busy, I need this job done tonight.” • I recognise that it is difficult to be precise, although a rough estimate will do.”
3. Discrepancy Assertion 5–6	This strategy points out when a discrepancy has occurred between an original agreement and the current reality. It is useful for clarifying misunderstandings or incongruent behaviour.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “As I understand it, we agreed that... You have now taken this action. I’d like to clarify which is the priority.” • “On the one hand..., on the other.... We need to agree the best way forward.” • “There seems to be a discrepancy here, what are our options for moving forward?”
4. Negative Feelings Assertion 6	This highlights the effect someone’s behaviour is having and helps us deal with negative emotions more constructively, without outbursts and tantrums.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “When you do this.. it has this effect on me.” (objective statement of behaviour) • I feel annoyed when this happens, so in future...” (description of effect on you.) • I’d prefer it if...” (preference statement)
5. Broken Record Assertion 4–6	<p>This is a progression of assertive styles, starting with the minimum affect to achieve your objective. The assertion can then strengthen as appropriate to the situation or desired outcome.</p> <p>The key here is that the message has not altered, so it sounds consistent and robust, although the intention is reinforced.</p>	<p>Basic</p> <p>“We need to speed up our productivity to get the job done on time.”</p> <p>Empathic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I understand that it means overtime for your crew, although it is imperative that we finish on time.” <p>Consequences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The productivity must improve otherwise the client will not pay us.”
6. Consequence Assertion 6 (may be 7 if absolutely necessary)	This is a <i>last resort</i> response where it informs another of the consequences of their continued behaviour. Only use when there is the authority and confidence to apply the sanctions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “If you continue with..., I am left with no alternative than to...” • I am unwilling to invest further resource until your team co-operates.” • Your lateness is not appropriate and from now on I need you to start on time, otherwise I will need to start disciplinary procedures, which I’m sure we both wish to avoid.”

You may notice here, particularly in the last point, how slight the marginal difference between assertion and aggression is and this is why it is the 'last resort' alternative. As with all these strategies, the key to keeping it in the assertive sector is **how** we deliver these phrases. The tone of our voice, volume, pitch, pace and body language that accompany these phrases will generate one behaviour or the other. Choose wisely!

By now we can start to see how assertiveness is not one Panacea – it is range, a fine-tuning, a basket of options that help us remain emotionally detached yet compassionate, calm, constructive and collaborative to create the right outcome that honours all parties.

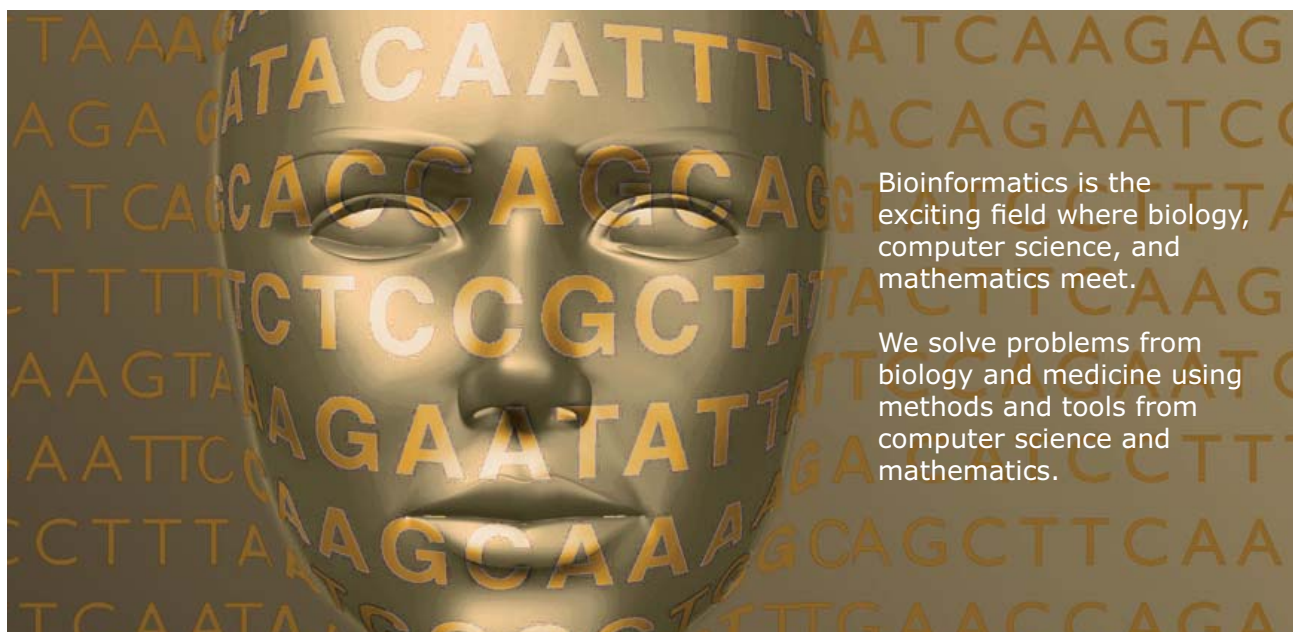
2.5 Influencing Model

Assertiveness is about how we influence others to achieve common ground, compromise and a desired outcome. It is not about forcing, dragging, instructing, telling or demanding action. It is so much more subtle than this.

The model below focuses on how to gently pull people with us, guide or push them, using just a handful of natural interaction skills. The left-hand side of the model below shows how, through the practise of self-expression, we can motivate a movement in someone without force. The right-hand shows the sensitivity that *people-centred techniques* can achieve to magnetise movement towards a desired destination.



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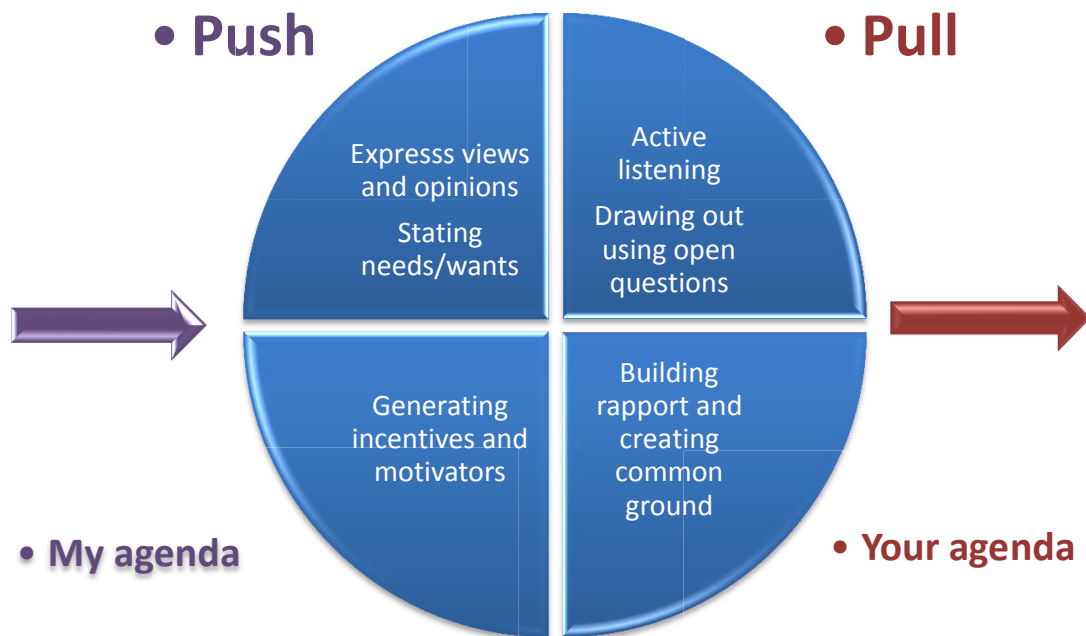


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Please notice the softness in the words I have used to demonstrate the *assertive marginal difference* compared to the drag and shove that might be more akin to the aggressive camp.

Win-Win Outcome Influencing Model



This brings us to the end of the second chapter. The momentum is building as we draw ever closer to the fine detail of situational assertion, based on all the scenarios that clients and participants have presented to me.

"What lies behind us and what lies beyond us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us." Ralph Waldo Emerson

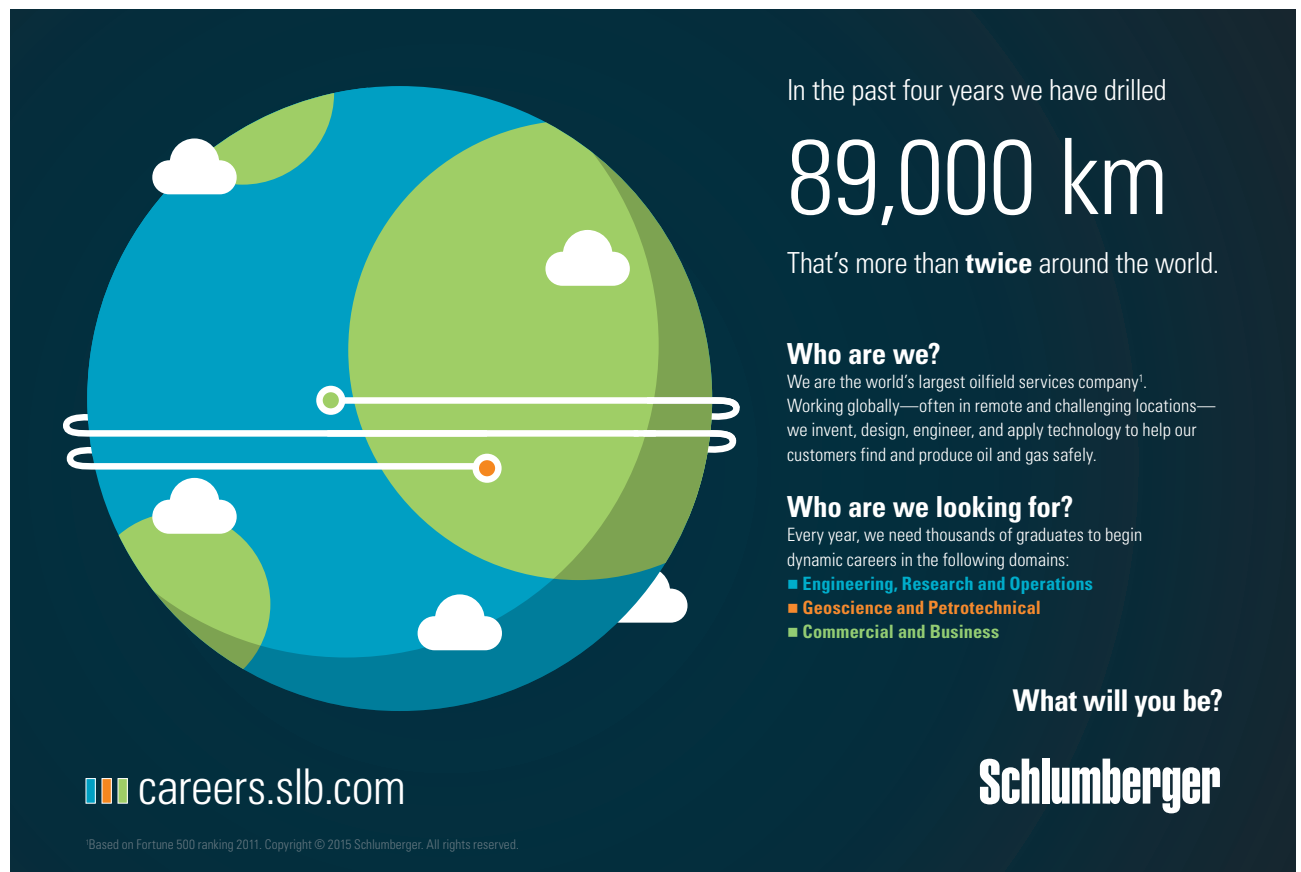
"Different strokes for different folks."

Song lyrics

3 Situational Assertion

Over the last twenty years of running Assertive Development workshops, I have had the pleasure of working with a diverse group of people who were looking to develop their skills for personal and professional reasons. Throughout these two decades, they have presented a range of scenarios that have evolved my workshops and my own understanding of this fascinating topic. It is, therefore, with gratitude to them all, that I sit here today writing this eBook.

Their problems challenged me in such a way that it enabled me to continue revising, colouring and re-evaluating the ever-changing needs of the business world, offering assertive solutions that they could personalise to match their own emerging authentic assertion.



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One of the biggest lessons I learnt about my own assertion, was that situations and people are unique and so each one requires a different approach, set of tools and skills to achieve the best outcome. There is no ‘catch all’ technique. In addition, I realised that because of the formation of my own personal hilltop, there are some situations I feel more comfortable in than others. This has helped me keep focused on where I needed to develop *my* skills and confidence.

Your Situational Assertion

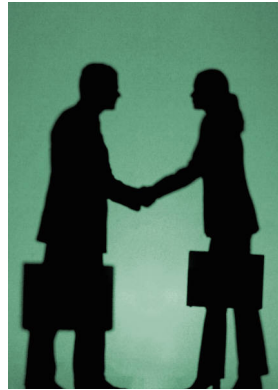
1. Reflect on the situations that you feel most comfortable and confident in and the people in your network who bring out the best in you. Notice and write down what it is about them that triggers this more assertive response. Why are you confident in these situations?
2. Review those circumstances and people where you fall into the *avoidance trap*, feel awkward, passive, aggressive or just generally uncomfortable.
3. Examine what it is about those scenarios that do not bring out the best in you. What patterns and triggers do they provoke and what inner fears and anxieties arise when you think about them?
4. Using this information, now refer to the sections in this chapter that are best placed to help you develop your situational assertion.

The following pages are a collection of ‘How to deal with...’ scenarios that I hope help with the mastering of our day-to-day assertive challenges.

3.1 How to Negotiate and Compromise

So many participants over the years have longed to know how to get better results through negotiation. Although what amazed me was people’s perception of what a negotiation sounded like. Cited examples often conveyed outright bully tactics that in today’s leadership environment are just not acceptable practice at all.

I guess it is fair to say that negotiation never really stops, especially in the working environment. Our success is based on **how** we deliver the negotiation message and the intent that drives our interaction in the first place. Here is my perspective on achieving great results using assertive negotiation skills.



3.1.1 Negotiation Definition

Firstly, let us be clear what a negotiation is. The Collins English Dictionary describes *to negotiate* as:

Discuss with a view to a mutual settlement

The two key words in this definition are ***discuss*** and ***mutual***. This is where most people fall down in their perception of what a negotiation is and why, I suspect, many of their attempts have failed.

Negotiation derives from a desire to improve upon a set of terms presented for our benefit or the advantage of a group. It is not a battle to win at all costs to feel victorious. This premise would place the other party in a lesser position than ourselves, which is of course not the principle behind assertive behaviour. The objective is to ensure that each party achieves a satisfactory *mutual settlement*.

Brian Tracy, motivational speaker and author, believes that ‘everything is negotiable.’ Certainly, in a leadership environment I agree with him. His thinking is that because all prices and terms are based on a *best guess* of what another is prepared to accept, there is always a potential movement, as those prices are rarely set in stone.

The art of negotiating a better deal, price or set of conditions, bases itself on the **quality of the discussion** we have and **the needs of the other party**. The gap between the two people negotiating is based on the true valuation of the settlement that meets both parties’ needs. Therefore, the only issue we have is the different positions we both hold and how willing we are to manoeuvre towards each other’s strong-hold.

The starting point to an assertive negotiation is having a positive intent behind the discussion, and not a mind-set that means to cheat or ‘win over’ the other party for our benefit. Instead, its intention is to achieve a movement in a given condition, such that an improved and beneficial settlement can be achieved.

3.1.2 Twelve Top Tips for Assertive Negotiation

1. **Know yourself.** Before entering a negotiation, we must understand our anxieties. As we have seen in the previous two eBooks, our fears, conditions and patterns drive us to succeed or trip us up. Look within and get to know our areas of discomfort. If typically we find negotiation an awkward situation, then identify what fears, past influences and patterns are blocking us. Once we have established those blocks and eliminated the irrational beliefs behind them, the skills I have listed below will help make negotiating an effortless art.
2. **Be prepared before entering a negotiation.** As we know, preparation is key to so many business skills, and negotiating is no different. We must give ourselves time to learn about the other parties involved and their possible perspectives. Think about what will be in it for them to reach a mutual agreement. Understand their position when they initially composed the conditions and what is driving their request. This helps us focus on any potential objections they may have when we enter the discussion and help them feel that they are getting something from the settlement.



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In addition, take time to think about what our desired outcome is for the negotiation. Consider carefully what the compromise is, where and how far we are willing to move and adjust our position accordingly. **Remember that the mutual agreement hides in the gap between us and the other party** and understanding both sides of the argument helps to uncover what is acceptable.

3. **Know the audience.** Establish the position of the other person in the discussion. Their *best guess* will have been shaped around a set of parameters that they wish to meet and understanding their stand-point is an important phase of the negotiation.
4. **Be willing to engage in a discussion.** If a condition or request seems unfair, unrealistic or impractical, then knowing we have an opportunity to negotiate the terms is step one. That requires a willingness to ask good quality, open questions that engages the other person in the discussion. Do not be distracted by the **fear of rejection or disapproval** as it is in our interest (and perhaps the customer, staff member or family), to negotiate a better set of terms.
5. **Be courageous in our requests** for a price or condition. Start high and we can always come down. *Courage* and *elimination of fears* are central to a good quality negotiation.
6. **Partner the negotiating request with confidence, calmness and expectation.** If we enter a discussion, believing we will not achieve our desired outcome, then we are more likely to fail. Believe that what we want will come to us.
7. **Enter the negotiation with a statement of intent and a question** that uses positive language and an invitation to engage. Phrases such as:
 - a) *"I need to talk to you about X, when would be a good time for you?"*
 - b) *"I need to talk about X, who would be the best person to talk to?"*
 - c) *"I am quite surprised by the deadline on this project and need to discuss what scope there is for extending it."*
 - d) *"You have asked for X, which I need to discuss with you. What is behind your request?"*
 - e) *"I am having difficulties delivering on X, what is your final deadline and what flexibility is in there?"*
 - f) *"I understand that you need X doing by Y and my team is not free until A. What help can you give us in expanding the deadline so we can do a high quality job for you?"*
8. **Negotiation is always two-way.** Make sure that we build the **What's In It For Me** (WIIFM). The other party needs to experience a 'win' as well as us achieving our goal, so ensure that we offer a benefit to any possible manoeuvre.

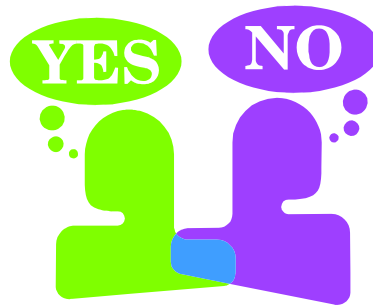
9. **Remain calm at all times, focusing on facts not emotion.** Amateur negotiators can be seen getting emotionally involved in the discussion when not getting their way, becoming demanding, angry or rude. This is not a negotiation; this is a one-way argument. This type of approach puts the other person's back up and whilst it may temporarily get the result, it does nothing for the on-going relationship and any future negotiations that may be required. Keep cool, even if the other person is emotional, using phrases such as:
- a) *"I understand (or appreciate) what you are saying, although I feel strongly that..."*
 - b) *"I need to find a way to..."*
 - c) *"I acknowledge that this is difficult, although we need to find some middle ground."*
 - d) *Use the Broken Record technique, repeating the same positive phrases, just in a different order or with a different emphasis.*
10. **Change tact if there is resistance.** If the negotiation comes up against an aggressor who is unwilling to manoeuvre, then consider the best course of action. We may decide that no result is better than a confrontation or we may feel that it is appropriate to talk to another party. Consider the situation, the importance of the result and the relationship with the individual before deciding how far we need to take the discussion.
11. **Ensure the negotiation is with the right person.** There is no point entering a discussion if it is with someone who does not have the power, position or ability to agree to the new terms. Always make sure that we are talking to the decision maker.
12. **50% of something is better than 100% of nothing.** Know when the limit of the settlement has been reached. If we push for more, we may destroy any good-will we have built up. Remember that negotiation is not about winning at all odds, it is about improving the terms of condition, price or request. We will need to make a judgement about the principle of the negotiation *versus* the amount of time we are investing in the settlement, because our time is a valuable asset.
13. **Appreciate the settlement we have reached.** Honour the relationship with the other party in readiness for any future interactions by appreciating them, their willingness to negotiate and the result we have mutually agreed. It is not about thanking them profusely in a people-pleasing manner, although it is about valuing our interaction and the compromise reached.

Negotiation Action Points

If improving negotiation is on your list, then identify which of the above twelve pointers resonates most with you. Which three do you most need to work on to increase your negotiation success rate? List them down and practise them in your next negotiation opportunity.

3.2 How to Say 'No', Without Feeling Guilty

When I think back to the Assertiveness courses I have run, without fail, each workshop had at least one participant asking for improved capability in saying 'no'. It was as certain as turning on the tap and getting a flow of water. Here are my thoughts on this very popular topic, honouring the possibility that this may be an important topic for you too.



Why is saying 'No' difficult?

The first thing I would like you to consider is why 'no' seems like such a difficult word to say.

1. What emotions does it bring up for you?
2. What fear is at the root of your discomfort?
3. What do you worry about losing if you were to say 'no'?
4. What price do you pay for your repeated compliance?

When you understand the answer to these questions, then you can focus your effort on resolving these issues by referring to the first two eBooks, which will help you tremendously.

3.2.1 Understanding Our 'No's

- If our predominant pattern is passive, then saying 'no' is tricky. We may say it confidently in our head, although saying it aloud is virtually impossible for fear of upsetting another. This means we develop a pattern of compliance, which honours the other person and not ourselves. This approach leaves behind it a trail of internal conflict, because we know we should say 'no', although we are driven almost completely by fear of losing something.
- It is worth understanding the irrational beliefs around our saying 'no' issues to help us unravel the intricate web of discomfort. Here are just some strands that weave their thread:
 - Saying 'no' is aggressive and rude and people may therefore dislike me.
 - It might show me up as being difficult, awkward or stubborn.
 - It might irritate them and this may affect our friendship or my performance review.
 - Being compliant is important, as I was taught as a child to 'do as I was told.'
 - Other people's needs are more important than mine are.
 - If I have been asked to do something by someone in authority, I must do as I am told.
 - Saying 'no' might sound petty and selfish.
 - Other people may feel rejected if I turn them down or say 'no'.



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- As we found out in the second eBook, **Mastering the Power of Assertive Dialogue**, we learn our beliefs and conditioning, primarily through our childhood experiences and influences. Once we have identified our irrational beliefs, we are then free to re-programme our mind with healthier, more assertive beliefs through working our mental muscle. To help us along the way, here are some constructive beliefs to consider:
 - I have the right to voice my opinion even if it differs to others.
 - Differing opinions simply create discussion.
 - In honouring myself first, others get a better result from me in the end.
 - A 'no' is not a rejection.
 - Saying 'no' is not about refusing the person; it is about refusing the situation.
- If aggression is a more dominant pattern for us, then 'no' is a common word in our internal dictionary and we have very little hesitation in using it. It is most likely to have a very specific tone to it and it is often accompanied with a hint of sarcasm:
 - "Err, no."
 - "No way."
 - "You have to be joking – no."
 - "No, not a chance."
 - "Not in this lifetime."
 - "Dream on."

3.2.2 Strategies for Making 'No' Easier

From an assertiveness view-point, I prefer to move away from the notion of simply saying 'no', which reduces the discomfort and removes the emotional attachment that accompanies it. Consider this response to a request for our time by someone from another team member:

"I'm busy right now, although I will be free in about half-an-hour, when I'd be happy to help you. How does that sound?"

In this example, there is no sign of the N word! This phrase does four things:

1. It makes a clear statement that honours us.
2. It demonstrates clear boundaries.
3. It shows a willingness to help.
4. It engages the other party in a discussion through the open question.

If we take this scenario forward and assume that the requestor does not like the sound of our proposal, here is how we might tackle their retort:

“No that’s unacceptable, I need it done now.”

“I’m sorry that we can’t make that work. As I said, I will be free and happy to help in 30 minutes. Perhaps you could speak to one of my colleagues and ask for their help on this occasion.”

Now if the requestor happens to be the boss, we could say this:

**“When does this task need to be done by, as I have something that needs completing, which will take me thirty minutes?
If it needs to be done now, then can you either pass on this task to someone else or could you take it off me to free me up?”**

What this approach does is show that we are standing up for our position and honouring it, remaining firm and offering alternatives, without being difficult, awkward or aggressive. 90% of the time, the first response produces a positive outcome, although if we are presented with obstruction and stubbornness, then we use the *Broken Record Technique* to hold a firm position.

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3.2.3 Six Ways to Say 'No'

In addition to these real-life examples, here are a further six techniques for refusing a request without feeling guilty. They come from UK psychologist Trevor Powell.

1. The Direct 'no'

If we are asked to do a task we do not want to, or cannot do, just say 'no'. Although this might sound simple, with the irrational beliefs I listed earlier, it may feel a hard option. The aim is saying 'no' without feeling that we must apologise, although as we start out on this saying 'no' journey, it may feel less aggressive to say, *"I'm sorry, I can't do that."* Over time though, I suggest that we practise without the apology, as it is not always necessary.

2. The reflecting 'no'

This involves acknowledging the content and sentiments of the request, then adding our assertive refusal at the end. For example, *"I know you need me to deliver that report today, although tomorrow is looking more likely."* This technique shows an emotionally intelligent quality to our interaction.

3. The reasoned 'no'

Give a very brief and genuine reason why we are saying 'no'; *"I can't have lunch with you because I have a report that needs to be finished by tomorrow"*.

4. The rain-check 'no'

This is my favourite type of 'no' because inadvertently it is a 'yes'. Psychologically the person requesting still gets what they need, although in a different timescale. It is a way of saying 'no' to the request at the present moment and gives us scope for saying 'yes' in the future. For example, *"I can't have lunch with you today, although I could make it sometime next week."*

5. The enquiring 'no'

As with the rain-check 'no', this is not a definite 'no'. It is a way of opening up the request to see if there is an alternative. For example, *"I am involved in doing an important job this afternoon. Is there anyone else in my team who could help you?"*

6. The broken record ‘no’

We can use this in a wide range of situations. We just repeat the simple statement of refusal. No explanation, just repeat it. It is particularly good for persistent requests. *“I can’t do it right now; I can definitely do it tomorrow.” “As I said, I can’t do it now.”* We notice how the broken record technique increases up the spectrum scale that we discussed earlier. We must be mindful of the tone of voice and body language we use to accompany this phrase, as it would be easy for this to scale up from a five to an eight if we became frustrated.

Saying ‘No’ Action Points

If saying ‘no’ is on your list, then identify which pointers resonate most with you from the past couple of pages? Which approaches feel most comfortable for you?

Also, be mindful of the reasons behind your compliance as you develop this skill, as it will make it much easier.

3.3 How to Lead Assertively

The art of leadership deserves a whole eBook of its own and I respect the in-depth nature of this topic. No assertiveness guide would be complete without some words about how to apply these strategies in a leadership situation. Whether we run a company, a functional team, a project or a classroom, assertive leadership is highly relevant today. So, without wishing to dilute the subject, I have chosen to focus more on the assertive principles to apply to leadership, rather than leadership itself.

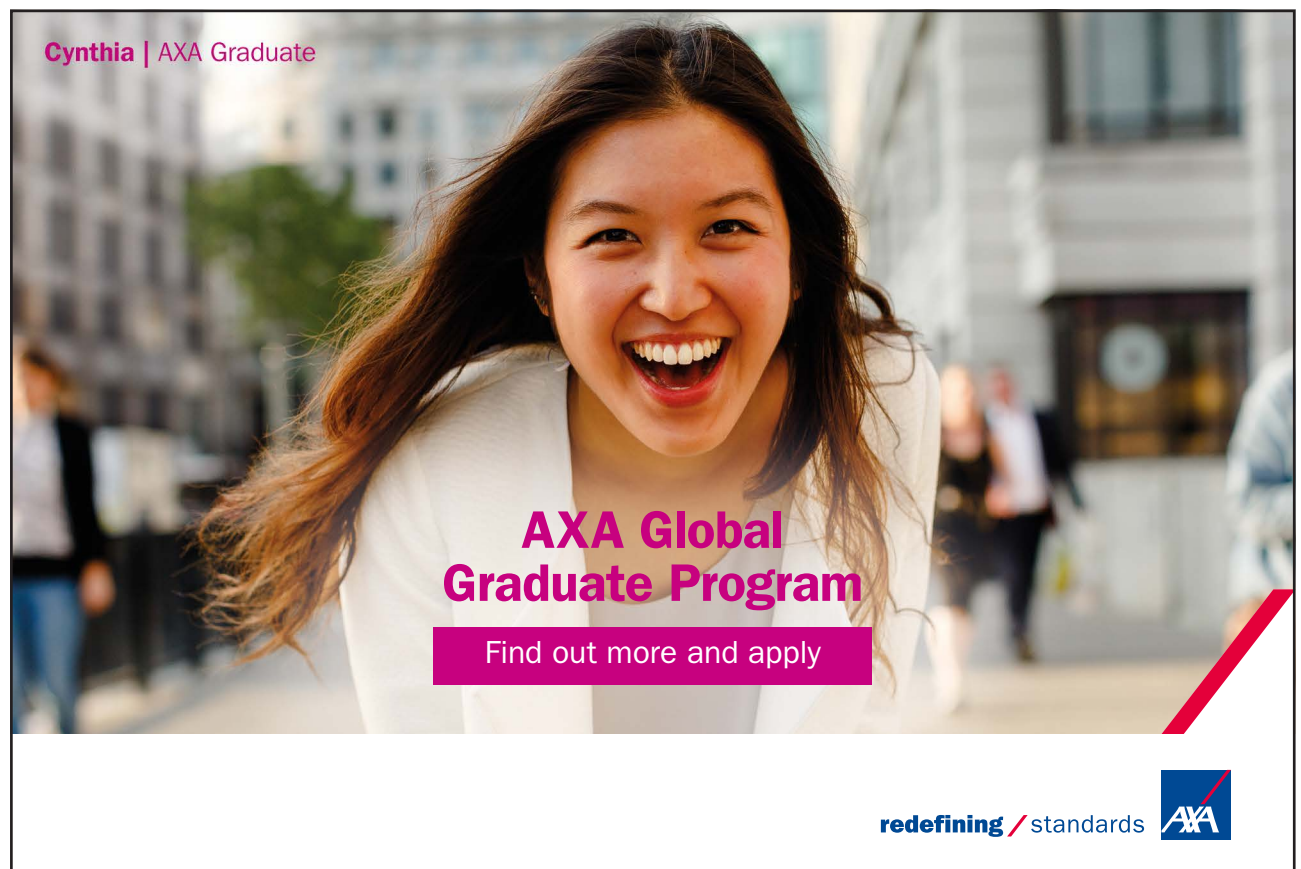
3.3.1 Leadership Essentials

Leadership is in high demand in today’s challenging business environment and leadership development has come a long way in the last twenty years. A shift is evident in the way we look at people skills and how we employ those skills within the corporate structure. Before I advocate the pursuit of assertive leadership, I think it is important to acknowledge the true essence of leadership so we can make the assertiveness links more easily.

Leadership *versus* Management

In defining these two important roles, what would you say were the differentiators between them? What sets them apart from each other? Think specifically about the behaviours we would see, the values that they hold and the business activities that they engage in.

During my leadership development, my mentor impressed upon me the importance of embracing both modalities and appreciating that they were just opposite ends of a continuum. Her view was that no business relies purely on either one of these approaches; organisations need a balance of both to achieve and sustain success. The key for us is then to recognise which style is the best choice for any given situation and the business needs at the time. Sometimes a business requires a focused line of attack that only management can offer, whilst on other occasions, the need for strategic leadership to move forward through periods of change and challenge is critical.



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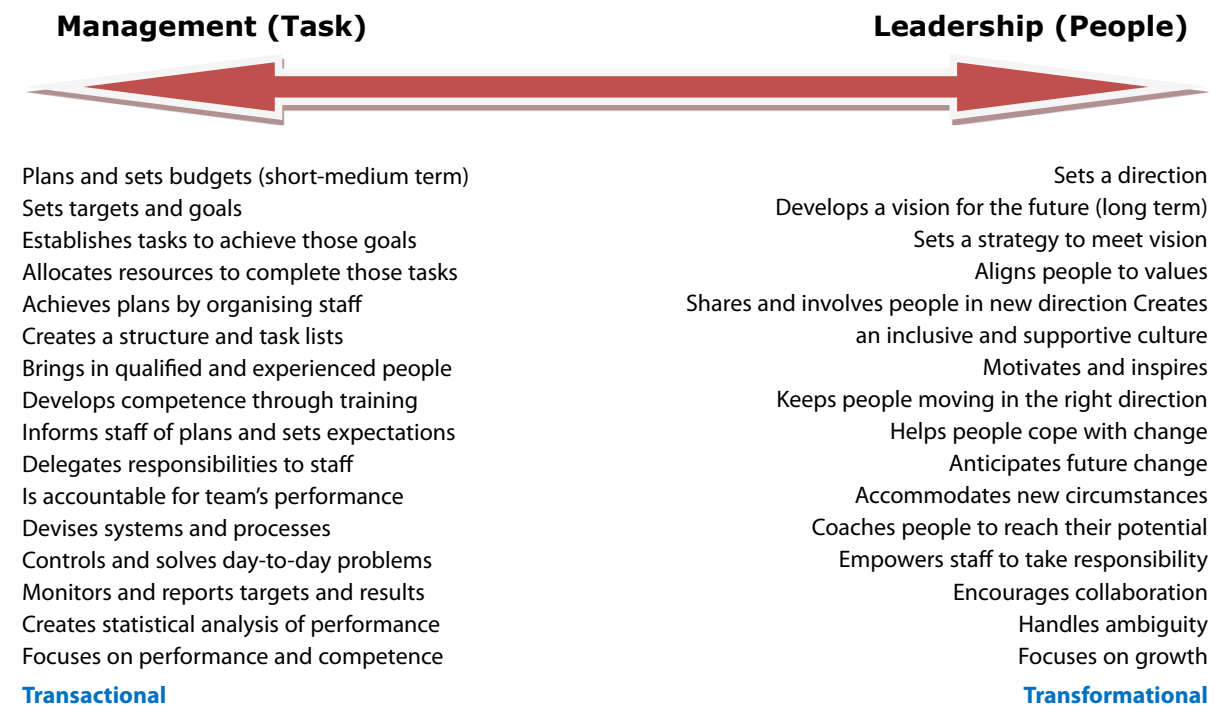
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Using my mentor's inspirations, this continuum illustrates the differences between the two styles:



Remember, neither style is right nor wrong as both are needed, although there is a current school of thought that supports transformational leadership as the majority rule in business today.

My view on the main difference between the two is the *task v people* element, and the values that create the foundation for each style. Management's primary value is **getting the job done in the most effective way**, whilst the leader's value is about **the best way to facilitate great staff performance through inclusion, engagement and envisioning**.

3.3.2 Leadership and Assertive Partnership

If we use these two primary value differentiators, we see that there are certain leadership attributes that lend themselves to our assertive philosophy. Whereas the management equation can be perceived as a demanding, instructive and more aggressive a stance – a broad generalisation, I realise, although none the less, in my experience has some truth in it.

Leadership and Assertive Partnership Exercise

In a journal and using the **Leadership** aspect of the continuum, list the assertive behaviours, attitudes and values that you believe are relevant to this style:

Behaviours

Attitudes

Values

Here is my contribution to the Leadership and Assertive Partnership exercise.

Behaviours	Attitudes	Values
Calm, in control and enthusiastic	People matter	Treat people equally
Fair and consistent	People come before the task	Everyone deserves a fair hearing
Active listener	People need to be involved	Treat people with respect
Inclusive	We are all different and it is important to respect not judge	Appreciate diversity
Engaging	Help people find their own solutions	Thinking and reflecting is important work
Asks open questions	Work together to achieve goals	Commitment and conscientiousness is rewarded
Balanced	Through motivation people are inspired to do their best	Transparency, openness and honesty
Collaborative	Inclusion creates greater buy in	Freedom and independence creates ownership
Gets to know what makes each person tick	When I entrust others they will raise their game	I value myself and others
Compassionate and empathic	See other's perspectives	Change is constant
Sets boundaries.	Everyone has potential with the right guidance.	Be flexible.

Leadership Action Points

Using the table above, acknowledge the three *stand out elements* from any of the three columns that you already display or hold true.

Then, list three that you could do more of to increase your assertive leadership.

3.4 How to Handle Conflict



For those of us who demonstrate a pattern of people-pleasing passivity, handling conflict is a big concern and often we play out a fantastic episode of avoidance and compliance. The consequence of this behaviour is that we constantly put our needs secondary to others, lacking the confidence to express our opinions and, at its extreme, are walked over.

It is important to acknowledge the two-stage approach with conflict. Firstly, there is the **preventative strategy**, which ensures conflict does not arise in the first place. Secondly, if we find ourselves in the conflict already, then there are some tips about what to do when we are in the vortex.



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Before we discuss these approaches, here is a definition to get us started:

Conflict occurs when two or more **values, perspectives or opinions** are contradictory in nature and are not **aligned, agreed or discussed**.

3.4.1 Understanding what Causes Conflict – Preventative Strategies

When we recognise the source of a conflict, we are better able to resolve it and even prevent it from happening. By understanding what activates a potential conflict and being aware of the trigger points, we can behave in a more proactive and mindful manner, preventing a confrontation from arising. Here is a summary of some of the main causes:

- **Group diversity** – when a group comes together, they bring with them:
 - Different values, attitudes and beliefs
 - Different views of the world – hilltops
 - Individual styles and approaches.
- **Poor communication** can lead to conflicts when there is a:
 - Miscommunication in what is said or heard
 - Incongruence in message to body language
 - No communication is offered at all so people are left to make up their own stories
 - Lack of understanding when a message conveyed – no checks are made to ensure that the message given is the message understood
 - ‘Grapevine’ is trusted, which creates a ‘blown up’ issue
 - Lack of clarity over what is expected.
- **Ineffective leadership**, in particular where there is:
 - Inconsistent leadership
 - Little or no follow-through on decisions
 - No involvement
 - No compassion, integrity or value-led behaviours.
- **When we feel threatened** by another’s action or inaction and consequently we react emotionally and fearfully. Such threats are triggered by:
 - Unwanted or poor feedback/criticism
 - When feeling attacked by another
 - When basic needs are under attack.

- **Internal turmoil** causes a vast majority of conflict issues, arising from:
 - Values and attitudes being misaligned
 - Fears at the potential loss of something
 - Anxieties and worries created by a difference between our ‘ideal’ and our ‘reality’.

3.4.2 Techniques for Dealing with Conflict

Coping with Arising Conflict	Resolving Conflict Confidently
• Stop, Think, Choose	• Appreciate other's situation – use the Hilltops model
• Notice our reaction and internal dialogue. (See Mastering the Power of Assertive Dialogue for more on this.)	• Take the initiative and be in control by choosing an appropriate response.
• Assess what values, opinions or attitudes are out of line?	• Listen and ask open questions that help create an understanding of their situation.
• Respond not react – buy ourselves time to think before we take action.	• Empathise sensitively and not patronisingly.
• Consider the most appropriate options, taking into account their position.	• Be open and honest about how we feel.
• See things through someone else's eyes and see how things might look.	• Use the appreciation frame; I agree, I understand; I appreciate
• Remember their hilltops – we are all different.	• Use powerful language such as; I feel, I believe, I noticed.
• If the conflict is a reaction to someone's behaviour, remember that their behaviour is communicating a NEED. What need are they expressing?	• When giving feedback, remember to depersonalise and focus on the behaviour/action and not the personality of the individual.
• Remember our right to our opinions.	• Assert our right to express yourself.
• FEAR is only false expectations that appear real. Keep rational about our fears	• Keep good eye contact with the individual, asserting our position.
• Consider what our desired outcome is and head for a win/win.	• Use the broken record technique if we don't feel listened to.
• Believe in ourselves and recall the negative impact SID has on our actions.	• Plan what we want to say and how we are going to say it.
• Remain rational and maintain a positive perspective of the situation.	• Take responsibility and accept our role in the conflict.
• Realise that conflict can create a positive interaction and therefore is not something to be feared.	• Engage the other party in a conversation rather than an argument and explore why they feel the way they do.
• Choose not to engage with the conflict.	• Agree to disagree rather than trying to win at all costs.

3.4.3 Specific Assertive Behaviours to Resolve Conflict

- **Use 'I' statements.** Let the other party know how we **feel** when the conflict is occurring. Let them know which of our rights we feel is being ignored.
- **Speak calmly, coolly and rationally**, so that they listen to and respect us more. Otherwise, they may go on the defensive.
- **Avoid blaming.** This will keep the communication flow going. It encourages understanding and empathy for each other's feelings. It recognises that for most conflict to exist there must be at least two parties involved.
- **Be willing to forgive.** Forgiveness is a powerful tool. We have a chance for personal growth by forgiving others for their part in the hurt and pain we have suffered. At times, this is the only way to resolve a conflict.
- **Be willing to forget.** Once we have resolved a conflict, let go of the issue. Once we have implemented an agreed resolution, get it out of our minds.
- **Be honest.** It is imperative that we are honest with ourselves and others about our feelings and reactions to the conflict. If we behave compliantly and untruthfully, then the conflict's resolution is a false one and the conflict will recur. We gain nothing by being dishonest in the management of conflict. We waste our time and energy and end up feeling a failure or guilty.



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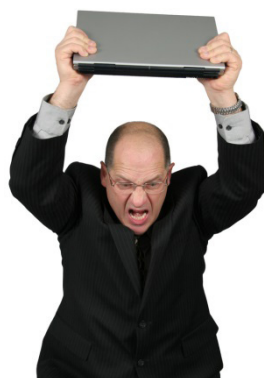
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- **Focus on feelings rather than on the content.** Effective listening is key in the productive resolution of conflict. Listen for their emotions and reflect empathy and understanding. This creates an atmosphere of compassion and reduces defensiveness. It focuses on the process involved rather than on the issues and it brings the parties to a clearer recognition of their individuality and humanity.
- **Show respect for ourselves and for others.** We gain more in resolving a conflict through respect than by disrespect e.g., being vindictive, taking revenge, threatening, yelling, accusing, belittling, ostracising, ignoring. If we are on the receiving end of disrespect, remove ourselves as soon as possible and continue the discussion when everyone has 'cooled down'. If we become disrespectful, stop as soon as possible by either removing or silencing ourselves.
- **Be willing to apologise or admit a mistake.** It is necessary to admit to a mistake and to apologise for our behaviour before a stalemate can be achieved. It takes courage, character, and fortitude to admit an error.
- **Be willing to compromise.** If we cling to our opinion as the 'right and only one' we close out the other person's view. To succeed in resolving conflict, all parties must feel like they have gained in the resolution. Only through compromise can we both feel like a winner.

Handling Conflict Action Points

Using the information we have discussed, acknowledge what three assertive techniques will help you handle conflict more effectively.

3.5 How to Handle Aggression



We are likely to experience two different types of aggression:

1. Someone else's aggression
2. Our own internal aggression, triggered by anger, frustration or irritation.

3.5.1 Other's Aggression

As we have explored in the previous two eBooks, our behaviour has its roots in our beliefs, conditioning, values and past influences. When faced with a situation, we make decisions about how to behave by unconsciously consulting our deeply engrained reference points, held within our subconscious mind. Based on those pointers, we unconsciously feel an emotion, think a thought and ultimately adopt a behaviour that we display, creating an interaction.

Behind the two primal behaviours of aggression and passivity is an unconscious need to feel safe, secure, loved, accepted and worthy. For example, a compliant behaviour is a subliminal message of ***'Please like and approve of me.'*** An aggressive, dominant behaviour can be a message that says, ***'I need to dominate you so that I feel better about myself.'***

Added to this is that our behaviour is dominated instinctively by a set of core values that form the basis of how we interpret our world and how we interact with another person.

For example, say we have a strong value around *respecting others* and *courtesy*. If we are faced with a shop assistant who is rude or perhaps disengaged with us, we could find ourselves feeling frustrated or annoyed, triggered by their behaviour towards us. As a result, we start reacting aggressively towards them and raise the potential for a confrontation.

The key to this scenario is to remember that it is not that individual who has *made us mad*, it is our internal reaction to their behaviour, which our programming triggers. They are behaving a certain way because of their internal programming and not because of us.

When we understand this, it disassociates us from the aggression and allows us to interact more constructively and compassionately. We start to consider that the other person has their own 'stuff' that influences their behaviour and this can then prevent us from reacting. Sometimes just the simplicity of a smile can interrupt their aggressive pattern – try it – it works!

With this basic premise in place, here is one fabulous technique for dealing with aggressors:

Fogging Technique

Fogging helps us to *respond* to the situation and not instinctively *react*. This strategy slows aggressors down by an unexpected response. It helps us to remain calm, side-step their issue and yet still retaining our point of view and integrity by agreeing with only some part of what they say.

It robs the aggressor of their destructive power and whilst superficially it may seem like a submissive response, it is in fact assertive because of its implication. By refusing to become upset or angry, we are able to remain detached from the situation, which temporarily dis-empowers them.

We call it fogging because the effect is like suddenly facing a blanket of fog when the way appeared to be clear. Imagine what we would do if we were driving along in clear weather and then faced a bank of fog. It unsettles us for a time and makes us refocus. Here is an example.

“I can’t believe that the company are treating me like this – what have I ever done to deserve this treatment?”

“Yes, I can understand that you must feel shocked by this treatment. Let’s talk about what the options are for resolving this.”

Trust and responsibility

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Inés Aréizaga Esteva (Spain), 25 years old
Education: Chemical Engineer

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The word **YES**, takes an aggressor by surprise and puts the brakes on. The objective of fogging is to give us time to get our assertive response together – not to be evasive. Here are some other ways to fog the aggressor:

- **Agree with the truth** – find a component in their conversation that is truthful, and agree with that statement.
- **Agree with the odds** – agree with any possible truth in the statement.
- **Agree in principle** – agree with the general truth in a logical statement such as, “That makes sense.”

Other phrases typically used when fogging are:

- That could be true
- You are probably right
- Sometimes I think so myself
- I agree, I understand, I appreciate
- That is true
- You are right
- You have a point there

3.5.2 Our Own Internal Aggression

During the course of this Assertive Development Journey, we have talked about what influences our thoughts, feelings and behaviours. We should be well on our way to shifting the predominant patterns that have shown up in our lives and delivered, up until now, less than constructive results.

Although in reality, anger may still arise because there are going to be some primal instincts, which some people and situations will trigger within us. It is chemical and it is what makes us human. Being assertive does not mean that we enter a dream-like cartoon, where everything is rosy – the world is just not like that and nor are we.

Here are some additional techniques and thoughts that may help to curb a rising negative emotion:

1. **Accept anger as a powerful resource** – a fuel, if we choose to use it from an assertive standpoint. Author and Coach, Christian Pankhurst has a fascinating opinion about how anger is necessary for our well-being, happiness and success. He describes anger as an elemental, primal source of energy that we simply need to refine.

With our new-found self-awareness, when we accept anger as a primal emotion, we can use its energy as a natural fire, a passion that, with the right communication channels can be expressed healthily to others. Recognise that the *sharp, angular anger* comes from a place of the unconscious; *refined anger* communicated with strength, assertion and self-worth, comes from place of self-awareness and acceptance of its fuel.

2. **Channel negative emotion into a constructive interaction.** When we have moved beyond the 'anger is bad' view-point, we can explore how to use communication more effectively to convey our emotions. Again, when we stand in an assertive space, we think rationally about how we feel, what has triggered the anger and then talk to others about those feelings. Use the ***Traffic Light, Stop, Think and Choose*** strategy I mentioned earlier to refine anger into fuel. Then use language like, "I feel angry about this." "That conversation hurt me because..." "I am really disappointed by what has happened."
3. **Anger is a natural assertion when conveyed with awareness.** Remember that anger, which fuels our aggression, is an emotion; we cannot and must not stop it. When asserted, it demonstrates a degree of self-worth and boundaries that say, 'This is not acceptable to me and I need to express this.' The key is how we present our anger and do it with awareness and clarity.
4. **Accept that it is ok for other people to think and feel differently to us.** When we operate from this space, then we find ourselves getting less angry and irritated. When we see the world from someone else's *hilltop* and learn to appreciate our differences – compassion and understanding dampens the sharpness of our anger and channels it more constructively.
5. **Remove ourselves from the situation to contain the fire.** If the chemical reaction and our mouths have combined too quickly in the venting of our emotion, then quickly notice what is going on and choose to step away from the situation. When we remove ourselves from the situation that is trigger, then we have the opportunity to control the fire and channel it more appropriately.
6. **Notice our emotional triggers.** Our expectations, standards and values create the source for our negative emotions. When we are perfectionist and principled, people will consistently fail to meet our model of the world and we end up living in constant disappointment. When we understand our triggers and accept that other people are just different, not better or worse, this lessens the annoyance we feel about someone's behaviour, performance or standards.
7. **Write down aggressive patterns.** When we notice a consistent trigger that 'makes our blood boil', it can be useful to write it down and map out what is going on behind our behaviour. When we explore what is happening and who is involved we can deal with the trigger proactively. Remember it is unlikely to be the individual or the situation per se, rather something that they represent for us that activates an emotional response. Once we have surfaced this we can then consider whether this pattern is constructive to hold onto and, if not, choose to change the pattern by using the techniques I outlined in **Mastering the Power of Assertive Dialogue**.

8. **Rehearse what we want to say.** Thinking about what we want to say before we say it is always good practice, especially if we are feeling emotional and uptight. With a degree of discipline, when we learn to respond rather than react, using the principles I have outlined above, we can get to a place where we can begin to make sure 'our brain is in gear before opening mouth', as my gorgeous dad used to tell me as a child! Thinking about what outcome we want to achieve, how we might say it and what the consequences of that conversation could be, all help us find a more constructive space to start from.
9. **Communication is the hub of positive relationships.** When we have the courage to accept that we have aggressive tendencies and we know what triggers our outbursts, then we are one step closer to getting in control. We can then forge constructive relationships by talking to people who trigger an aggressive reaction and discuss with them the impact their behaviour has on us. Setting boundaries and communicating these clearly to other people will prevent future outbursts from destroying or straining relationships, both at home and at work.

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Handling Aggression Action Points

Given the story we have told in this chapter, what aggressive trigger points have you noticed in yourself? What aggressors do you have to work/live with on a daily basis and, using this information, what three commitments are you willing to make to be more constructive in this energy?

3.6 How to Build Rapport and Good Relationships



The art of relationship building is not always as easy as we think. *As a child*, it seems effortless and we bumble our way in and out of friendships without a second thought. *As adults*, for some reason it seems harder as we invest more into our connections and the price we pay for break ups increases. Add to this, the work-place conundrum that has us torn between the need to build relationships and the struggle to keep a professional distance.

Relationships form the basis of the web that connects us within businesses, across the globe and that sustain our communities. Without them, we are merely empty vessels of transactional matter.

When we talk about assertiveness, we need to give some space to the art that is *building relationships*. When we master that art, the effortlessness we experienced in our childhood can return to give our lives the well-being and harmony that are too often missing.

3.6.1 Building Empathy and Connection

We can define empathy as ***the ability to understand and share the feelings of others***. This suggests that we need to employ a certain set of skills that enables understanding and sharing.

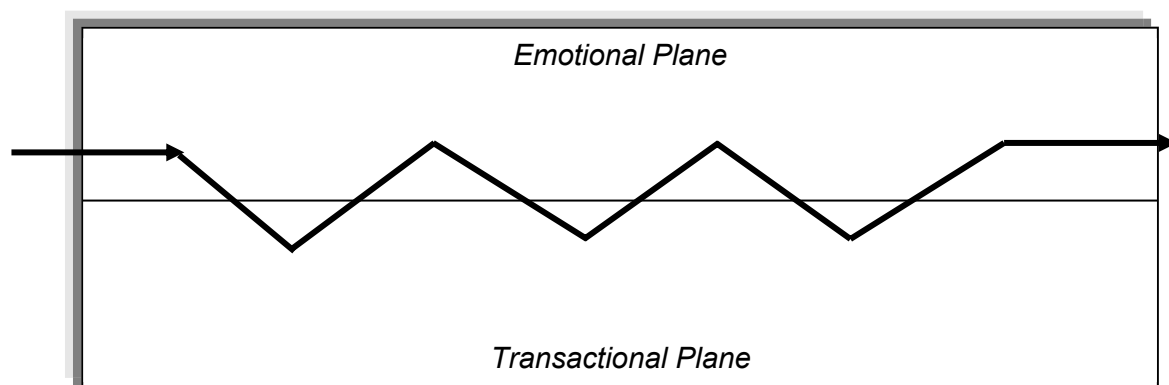
Very often, during the course of a formal interaction, our attention remains in a highly transactional plane, where we focus on the business at hand. This becomes a very outcome-driven conversation that does very little to foster a positive *understanding* and *sharing* with the other party. This may well be appropriate for some business interactions. Although, consider for a moment how much more could be achieved by creating a greater connection with that individual or group.

The benefits of creating connections with people are:

- Less conflict
- Easier conflict resolution
- Joint problem solving
- Healthier discussions that encourage co-operation
- Greater opportunity and willingness to collaborate
- Sharing of resources and ideas
- Healthier negotiations
- Increased sales, improved service, greater quality
- Easier 'difficult conversations'
- Greater support.

The model below demonstrates the flow of a typical interaction, which can be applied to a customer or colleague interaction. During many of our work-based relationships we stay in the transactional plane as it means we can remain slightly detached.

To really build and maintain relationships, we need to enter a conversation at an emotional level, building rapport and understanding. Then we can safely and smoothly move into the transactional plane where the majority of the interaction will take place in a business-like and assertive manner. And, if you exit at the emotional level, we leave our customer or colleague feeling supported and personally dealt with.



We can build empathy and connection in the following ways:

- Enter into a conversation with the **attitude of respecting differences and diversity**.
- Ask an **open question** that enquires about them, their health, family, business or holiday.
- **Make notes** of what they say about themselves for future conversations.
- Be prepared to **disclose information about ourselves**, if asked by the other party or offer it up voluntarily in response to some common ground shared.
- Where possible **use first names** or ask permission to do so.
- Demonstrate that we **value them** by listening actively. People like and need to be heard.
- **Mirror and match their body language** (if face-to-face with them) so we can subliminally connect with them. Give them active eye contact to show attentiveness.
- Use the **same language**, tone and pace where possible during a conversation.
- If the relationship is one that we interact with on a daily basis, invest time in **getting to know the person**. Listen out for what motivates them, what their values and beliefs are and any self-esteem issues.
- **Offer support**, encouragement and coaching where appropriate.
- If on the phone, turn off and **remove all distractions** from our eye-line so that we can focus our attention totally on the other person.
- If our conversation is sensitive in nature, **find a private room** to talk so they are encouraged to open up.
- Always **have sensitive conversations in person** and not via email or text.



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Jane, Chinese architect

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3.6.2 Rebuilding a Broken Relationship

If there are relationships in our network that feel frayed, strained or broken and we have the desire to fix them, then look no further. The following steps provides a guide towards reconciliation.

When the Breakdown Occurs

- The breakdown may have caused some heat and emotion, so perhaps best to leave things to **cool down** for a while.
- **Understanding** is the next step to take. Take some time to think about what happened during the breakdown without over-analysing. Consider what contribution we had to it and what responsibility we need to accept.
- Think about how the other person might be feeling and **appreciate their perspective**.
- Think about how we will **approach them** to begin recovering the relationship.
- If we feel that an **apology is appropriate** and justified, then only do it if we are genuine.
- Consider how to **communicate** the recovery.
- Remember to change something about our relationship, think about **what we can change**, not about what we would like someone else to do differently.

Approaching the Recovery

- Suggest that it would be useful to **talk about what happened** between us and communicate our desire to solve the situation.
- **Meet somewhere private** and neutral where possible. Remember that we are initiating a recovery and feel good about this. Avoid re-igniting the discussion by going over old ground.
- Ask the person **what they believe was the cause of the problem** and listen actively to them.
- If anger or emotion arises again, avoid reacting to this. **Remain calm** and remember not to personalise it. State clearly what our feelings are about the situation.
- **State our view of the problem**, even if this is different to theirs.
- **Ask open questions** to clarify understanding and avoid reacting to what they are saying.
- Avoid making the discussions personal. **Keep objective** and stick to the important points. If they make personal comments, avoid taking them to heart. Listen to them and if necessary ask for clarification.
- Accept that a difference of opinion has occurred and, if necessary, **agree to disagree**. Outline what we can take responsibility for in the breakdown early in the discussion to encourage a non-hostile response.
- Enter into some **problem-solving discussions** with them and together decide how to best move forward.
- Be prepared to **negotiate and compromise** with them.
- **Build on the other person's ideas** and acknowledge them.
- **Acknowledge our achievements together** and exit the conversation on the emotional plane.

After the Recovery

- Find an early opportunity **to build rapport** with the person, using supportive language.
- **Use positive body language** and smile to reinforce our recovery.
- **Avoid replaying the events** leading up to the breakdown, in our minds. It is history now and our recovery should begin to build new foundations.
- Take time to **get to know the person** and disclose some things about ourselves that encourages trust building.
- If the other person continues to bring up past problems, then **talk about how it could be better** in the future, acknowledging rather than dismissing their opinions.
- **Communication is the key** throughout this process, so continue open and clear interactions.

Building Relationships Action Points

Consider your relationship network and those that are healthy and constructive. Identify what makes them this way and list the success factors.

Now look at the relationships that are less healthy or perhaps broken. Establish the breaking points. How can you rebuild them using this information?

3.7 How to Handle Performance Issues

This topic comes up so often on workshops and remains high on the list of most stressful situations for new managers, leaders and executives. This section promotes some very specific techniques that might help if this situation resonates.

Performance Challenges

If this is a relevant challenge to you, then it would be worth exploring in more depth what troubles you about these situations.

Please reflect on what has caused, or might cause you anxiety when you think about poor performance issues. Be aware of what triggers you to feel that way and explore the root of your concerns.

Then, given the techniques we have discussed in the previous two books, what SID's (Self Imposed Doubts) and fears do you need to address that will help alleviate your anxieties?

3.7.1 Performance Challenges

In my experience, performance discussion anxieties can be broken down into the following concerns:

- What if they cry?
- What if they deny it and try to cover it up?
- What if they become aggressive towards me?
- What if they storm out?
- What if this results in a more formal discussion because they won't change?
- What if their performance becomes even worse?
- What if they whinge to others about me and undermine my leadership?
- What if they blame someone else?

These are all very real reactions to the fear of poor performance conversations and perhaps all eight of them appear in our fear repertoire. Anxieties like these prevent us from having the team and the results we deserve and often affects the individual themselves from having the success **they** deserve.

Our leadership is critical to the overall performance of the people who work with us. They rely on us being able to have those difficult conversations to help them develop, hone their competence and ultimately deliver outstanding performance.



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What type of performance issues might we be looking at? Here is a sample of issues that have come up from past participants:

- Arriving to work late, consistently
- Making personal calls during work hours
- Making mistakes consistently
- Being rude to a team member, colleague or customer
- Giving wrong information or advice
- Demonstrating a lack of knowledge or incompetence in a given area
- Behavioural issues that do not match company values, competence requirements or general cultural ethos
- Attitudinal issues that show a basic disregard for procedures, hierarchy or colleagues
- Resistance to change that is disruptive to the wider team
- Lack of co-operation to company policies and HR processes.

3.7.2 Tackling Performance Assertively

As with all of the challenges I have raised in this chapter, the resolution primarily starts with us. If we can identify what causes our discomfort and are willing to address this, then we are half way to achieving a better outcome.

When we realise that much of our dis-ease is sourced in a fear of being disliked, then we have the key to unlock our leadership and human potential.

On the surface, an aggressor may seem as though they do not care about anyone else's feelings. Although, as we now know, an aggressor is very often dogged by the same low self-esteem issues as those who are submissive. Superficially they may seem unaffected, although the internal stress and anxiety simply fuels further aggression in the pursuit of gaining control and not being seen as weak.

Here are some well-grounded strategies for handling these situations more confidently:

- ***'Listen with your eyes and hear with your heart.'*** This is a lovely quote that I've used on many a Leadership Workshop. It focuses on how we interact with our teams. When we make a decision to lead with compassion then we experience things differently. Observing how our teams operate and looking beyond the performance issue rather than judging them, creates an empathic approach that sets out a much calmer place from which to start a discussion.
- ***Look for patterns of behaviours.*** Sometimes we are very quick to pounce on a performance issue and whilst we need to be mindful of the timing, observing someone's patterns gives us more evidence to work with, rather than reacting to what might be a one-off incident.

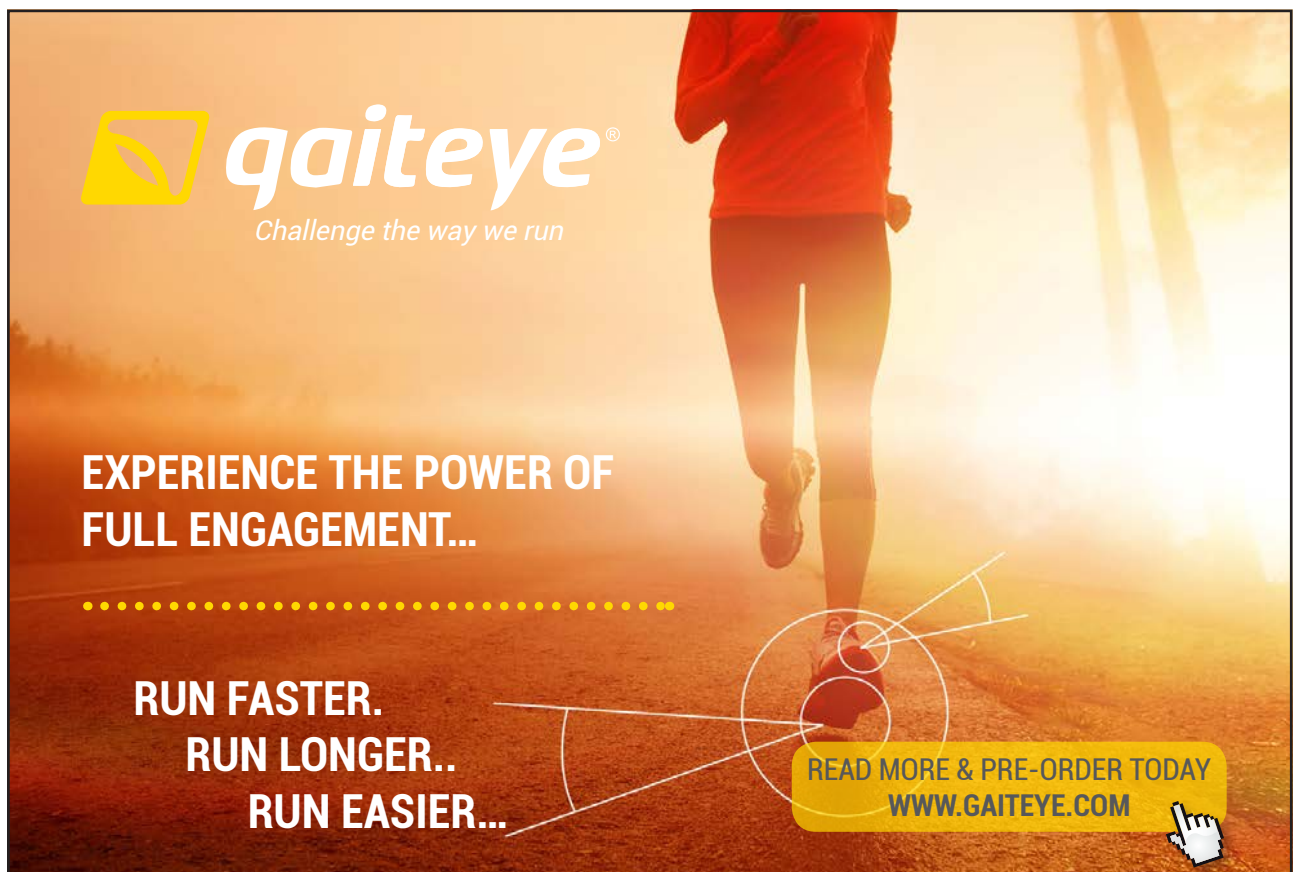
- **Collect concrete evidence not hear-say.** People will respond more favourably when there are tangible examples of what they have been doing. Often I hear people reporting 'I have been told by X, that you have done Y.' This is such an unhelpful opening. We must share **our** experience of their behaviour and not be shaped by what another has observed.
- **Timing and planning are essential.** Fears and anxieties often influence us to put off a difficult discussion, although responding to something in a timely way is important, once we have seen a pattern of behaviour emerging. Obviously, if there is a completely inappropriate display of behaviour such as rudeness, swearing or an outburst, then we must respond immediately. Before entering a discussion, it is important to think about what we want to say and what outcome we need to achieve.
- **Focus on the behaviour not the person.** People often react defensively when they feel attacked or threatened. So comments like, 'You were so aggressive.' 'You didn't handle that very well.' 'You can't treat someone like that', are all likely to get us an unconstructive reaction. The 'you' is the key to the threat and sounds very accusatory.


Instead use phrases like, '**I noticed that** you **seemed** upset during that phonecall.' 'When I asked you to complete that task, **you seemed** uncomfortable.' '**Tell me about** that call you had, as by your reaction, I felt that it hadn't gone so well.'

The difference in emphasis and language, means that our feedback is less attacking. The responsibility is firmly with our observations about their behaviour and it opens up an invitation to engage, which results in a more constructive discussion.

- **Be clear about the performance issue.** Hopefully the above approach will keep the discussion constructive and give the person permission to open up. Although if they are blind to the issue, it is important to be very clear about our observations, expectations and what specifically is inappropriate. The person must go away certain about their behaviour and the impact that has on their performance, the team or the customer.
- **Keep discussions private.** This may seem obvious, although I have seen many discussions about performance happen in the public arena, which is tantamount to disaster. A public debate does nothing for the protection of the individual's welfare. A private room is essential.
- **Open with an invitation to engage.** If we want to achieve a positive outcome for our feedback discussion, then engaging the person in conversation is key to our success. If they feel involved then we have a better chance of moving forward. Use phrases such as, 'Tell me about,' 'How did you feel when,' 'What happened this morning,' 'What's going on for you right now?' Opening up the conversation in this way often allows them to report the very performance issue that we need to pick up with them, which enabling us to simply agree with what they are saying and explore how to deal with the issue together.

- **Use open questions to explore.** To prevent the individual becoming defensive, enter the conversation with the intention of exploring and helping. Use open questions (Who, Why, What, When, Where and How) to get the person to open up, explore reasons for their behaviour and find solutions to preventing it in the future. If they blame someone else, again, use open questions to explore their perspectives and be prepared to offer an alternative view.
- **Offer help.** Everyone deserves a chance to change and if we keep the discussion open, we can focus on helping to improve the situation. Ask what we can do to help them, ask what commitments they need support with and focus on coaching them through the challenges rather than dictating what needs to happen.
- **Get commitments.** At the end of the conversation we need to close the discussion positively and provide some encouragement and affirmation where we can. Whilst this is not appropriate for all performance discussions, more often than not it will help the individual see that they are supported and valued. Secure commitments that they will make to change the situation and ensure they are equipped to honour those actions.
- **Make notes.** In any type of performance issue, it is important to take notes of the conversation, even if it is of an informal nature. This not about *marking someone's copy book*, although it does give everyone clarity about what was discussed and agreed. It also provides a record for follow up conversations to track progress or take to the next level if poor performance continues.



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3.7.3 Formal Performance Discussions

It is important to make a quick mention before we leave this section about the more formal performance discussion. The above strategies are very much driven by a more informal conversation, although the reality of today's business is that performance issues centering on behaviours, competence and capability factors need addressing in a very specific way.

There is a very precise formula for these types of discussion and must, for legal and ethical reasons be tackled with structure and formality. Please seek guidance from a Human Resources expert if there are any doubts about how to tackle a performance issue and what action is needed to manage the discussion appropriately and in line with current legislation.

Managing Performance Issues - Action Points

What will you commit to doing or thinking about differently as a result of this section?

I hope this collection of difficult situations has been useful and has resonated at some level. Our assertion needs are unique and one person's concerns are another's strength. Acknowledging our capabilities and development areas are so important, enabling us to target our learning specifically rather than generically.

Our last chapter aims to give a full summary of all the strategies woven amongst the Trilogy so that there is a one-chapter reference and summary to support our assertive development.

"You don't get harmony when everyone sings the same note."

Doug Floyd

"Our greatest enemy, the one we must fight most often, is within."

Thomas Paine

4 Assertive Strategy Guide

This final, technical section provides a useful One-Chapter Guide to all the techniques that I have discussed through the course of the Trilogy. If this is the first book you have downloaded, then you will have a good tool-box of strategies to access. Of course, it would be more powerful to read each of the books, although if time is tight, then this will at least provide support along the way.

4.1 Self-awareness Strategies

The first book in the Trilogy focused on self-awareness being the key to developing greater assertion. Using the new paradigm of looking within, we can move beyond the classical *sticking plaster regime* and create authentic change by understanding what makes us behave the way we do. Self-knowledge is absolutely at the heart of our happiness, success and fulfilment. Here is a summary of the self-awareness tools I talked about in **Your Assertive Development Journey**.

- **Understand our Hilltop.** When we recognise our influences; the people or events that shape us, we can begin to see where our patterns of behaviour come from. This realisation plays an important role in seeing why we do what we do and, therefore, noticing what needs to change. Unconstructive patterns soon impede our success and happiness and understanding the deep-rooted influences that we use as our reference points and decision drivers, are primary steps.
- **Understand our Triggers.** When we have explored the composition of our hilltop, we can then discover more readily what triggers us to think, feel and behave a certain way. Learn to understand that someone or something will subliminally hook us into thinking a certain way, feeling an emotion and ultimately creating an interaction. Knowing our trigger points helps us to uncover why they provoke us and we can begin to unravel the web that surrounds it, thereby creating more constructive responses in our thinking and behaviour.
- **Know our Values, Attitudes and Behaviour patterns.** Invest time in learning what is important to us as this develops an appreciation of the source of our decisions and actions. Values are cornerstones of our behaviour and recognising our core values enables us to choose our responses more wisely and recognise where our internal conflicts come from. Also being able to recognise thinking and behavioural patterns enables us to identify those unhealthier habits that drive unconstructive interactions with our friends, family and work colleagues.

4.2 Thinking Strategies

The second eBook, **Mastering the Power of Assertive Dialogue** helped us to appreciate the critical role that our mind has on our behaviours. When we recognise the huge influence that our subconscious thoughts have on our self-esteem and that subsequently shape our predominant behaviours, we have the key to transforming our assertion. What we think really does shape what we do. Here is a summary of the mental muscle workouts that we need to engage in.

- **Circles of Influence.** The late Stephen Covey talked about understanding where to put our energy. When we consistently put energy into things that are outside of our control, we cause ourselves stress and frustration. When we focus our energies on what is within our immediate concern, i.e. our behaviours, attitudes and emotions, then we can become more selective in our choices. Actively letting go of situations that are outside of our control or influence, releases more energy for us to invest in other more meaningful and fruitful activities.
- **Look beyond the front cover of the book.** ‘Don’t judge a book by its cover’ is a phrase we are used to hearing and this is so relevant within the assertiveness arena. When we invest in looking, exploring, questioning and understanding, we learn far more than our mere judgements and primal verdicts assume. Enter interactions with the mindset of exploration, compassion and understanding and we will achieve a more meaningful result.
- **Consider other people’s Hilltops.** We talked earlier about the importance of looking at our own hilltop. We can also apply the same concept when building an appreciation for other’s opinions and behaviours. Think about what might influence someone to think or behave the way they do and that momentary consideration of their world-view instantly creates a stronger compassion and subsequently influence the quality of our interactions.
- **Traffic Light.** Learn to *Stop, Think and Choose*. We instinctively react to events and those interactions end up being less constructive than they could be. When we adopt a pattern of slowing our reactions down, considering our plan and thinking of other’s situations, we begin to experience more successful relationships.
- **Get to know SID.** Self Imposed Doubts play an invasive role in our self-image. When we explore the SIDs we have dirtying our minds, we begin to challenge their validity by questioning the evidence upon which they are founded. If the evidence is shaky and questionable, then we can learn to dismiss that doubt and replace it with a more constructive thought process.
- **Recalibrate our thoughts.** When we follow a process of challenging our irrational fears and thoughts, we can begin to retune our repertoire of self-esteem thoughts and craft a new and more constructive internal view. This view becomes the foundation for all our positive thinking and confident behaviour. When we learn to like ourselves, then we can begin to change our interactions with people and stand in our own space with greater strength and character.
- **Learn the science of affirmations.** Replacing our old style thinking and creating more affirming beliefs is the source of our change to assertive behaviour. When we think more compassionately about ourselves, we begin to behave more compassionately to others. Such is the collaboration between thoughts and feelings. If we have little self-respect, we are likely to have little respect for others.

4.3 Behavioural Strategies

Woven into each of the three books has been a kaleidoscope of options that enable us to select more constructive responses. Here is a summary of some of the key elements that I have shared with you.

- **Let Go of the Apple.** I shared the lovely Buddhist story of the hunter's cunning trick to capturing monkeys by using an enticing apple held in a jar. This tale illustrates the ease at which we attach ourselves to inappropriate events or concerns, stripping us of our energy. When we hold onto things that are not important, our assertiveness suffers. Learn to let go.
- **Broken Record Technique.** This communication strategy encourages us to use the same refusal phrase to demonstrate a strength of opinion to a given situation. Rather than sounding indecisive with a range of different excuses, the broken record shows tenacity.
- **Transformational Interactions.** Develop engaging, involving and meaningful conversations by putting others in the forefront of our minds. When we communicate with the intention of creating meaning and purpose, our conversations are so much clearer and action oriented.
- **Learn the Art of NLP.** Neuro Linguist Programming is the art of speaking mindfully. Using specific techniques of mirroring, matching and sensory-based language we can engage with people at a much more profound level.
- **Be Fascinated by People.** When we put people at the heart of our communication and leadership, we develop much more transparent conversations that are empathic, compassionate and valued. When we invest in listening, understanding and observing, our approach becomes based on respect, which is at the heart of any assertive strategy.
- **Ask more Questions.** Questioning is an art for any leader, communicator, coach and indeed anyone who is determined to succeed. Open questions are the key to opening up conversations and exploring the root-cause of a situation or issue.
- **Be Outcome-focused.** The clearer we are on what we hope to achieve from an interaction, meeting or event, the more successful the result. People need structure, clarity and direction and so in our assertive development we can provide these by being clear in our own minds first.
- **Fogging.** When involved in a conflict or confrontation, learn to use the fogging technique that initially demonstrates an agreement with the protagonist, before then adding the assertion phrase. This element of surprise unstabilises them and creates an opening for discussion.
- **Use the Appreciation Frame.** During the course of any conflict or confrontation, the use of the Appreciation Frame can come in very handy. Be careful not to follow the chosen verb with BUT or HOWEVER as these negate the sentiment of the phrase. The options are:
 - I agree
 - I understand
 - I appreciate.

Not every strategy listed here will suit each situation we are faced with. We must apply the discipline of considering the most appropriate approach if we are going to succeed in our assertion.

Through practise we soon learn which of these strategies deliver the best and most collaborative result. Over the coming weeks/months, experiment with these techniques and review the success of each interaction, adapting the approach each time. The more we apply, learn and alter our interactions, the more comfortable we become.

4.4 Summary of Assertive Skills

Finally, here is a list of all the subtleties that lie within the assertive spectrum that open the door to a more positive outcome.

• Let people know what you are thinking	• Take the initiative
• Breathe to stay calm during anxiety	• Use the Appreciation Frame
• Ask for clarification	• Aim for collaboration
• Solve problems with people	• Timing is everything
• Adopt new internal dialogue	• Think before speaking
• Use open questions and listen more	• Use positive communication
• Maintain good eye contact and smile more	• Take responsibility
• Choose behaviour according to the person and the situation	• Be sensitive to and respect ours and other's feelings
• Reframe negative inner dialogue	• Deal with behaviour not personalities
• Learn to compromise rather than say 'No'	• Discuss options in conflict
• Focus on others when communicating	• Be factual
• Let go of negative beliefs and emotions	• Avoid making judgements
• Make statements of personal reference: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is the way I see it • In my opinion • This is how I feel • This is what it means to me 	• Avoid exaggerations such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You are never on time • You always leave your shirts on the floor • You never listen to me
• Understand other's points of view and acknowledge others more.	• Use a language formula such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I feel (state your feeling) • When (describe the behaviour) • Because (concrete effect) • I'd prefer it if (offer compromise)

"He who desires but acts not, breeds pestilence."

Bacon

"In everything, the ends well defined, are the secret of durable success."

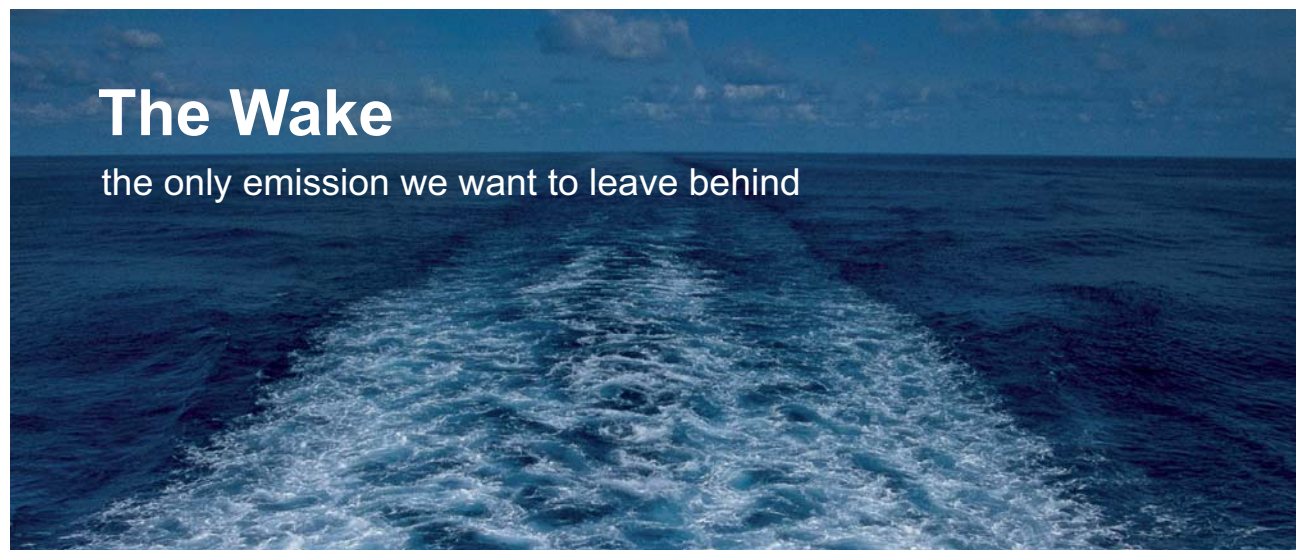
Victor Cousins, Philosopher

5 Action Planning

If you have read my first two eBooks in this Assertive Trilogy, this closing approach will be familiar, as I focus on goal setting and action planning. Many books we read uplift us, perhaps even motivate us, although if they don't inspire action and change, then the reading investment may be thwarted.

Change comes about when we are inspired to take action to doing, thinking or feeling something different. Although we must be proactive, courageous and initiate change otherwise our status quo remains the same.

I believe when there is enough desire to change, then this creates a momentum that needs no pressure, forcing or pushing. Desire creates an innate propulsion that carries us forward. Armed with a clear focus on what you want to be different, commitment to see it through and diligent application, you can turn your goals into reality.




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Having read this eBook, what do you feel determined to change, inspired to do differently? Thinking these two questions through is so important if you really want to revel in the positive results awaiting you.

This chapter, albeit short and sweet, gives us a chance to think about how we convert our learning into something tangible that can make a difference to us, to our relationships and to our business outputs.

5.1 Six Steps to Making Change Happen

For consistency, I have repeated the *Six Steps to Making Change Happen* from my first book, because altering the process would dilute its results. So you may be familiar with this.

5.1.1 Step 1 – Review your Learning

Reflecting back on the exercises, think about what stood out, resonated or meant something. There has been plenty to contemplate, so collecting your thoughts and gathering up what have been the most useful discoveries is an important step before you begin translating those into goals.

5.1.2 Step 2 – Review your Goals

Learning Review

Return to each chapter, noting down the elements that have struck a chord with you.

Then go back to chapter 1, where I asked you to consider what your assertive vision and based on that information, record what have you learned and discovered.

As you review your vision, you may feel that it needs reworking or that it is too woolly, especially given your discoveries. This is natural. Visions and goals need to be flexible and adaptive, so use them as a reference point. If you believe your vision need to change, carry on to the Goal Review exercise below, otherwise move on to Step 3.

Goal Review

If your vision needs to change, rewrite what you want to achieve based on your learning. Consider what you want to look, sound and feel like one year from now.

With your vision revised, you can now return to your learning review notes and identify which discoveries most help you achieve that vision over the coming year.

5.1.3 Step 3 – Your Inspirations

When we are really inspired to do something, nothing stops us. Think back to a time when you have had a real passion, an energy to do, say a marathon, prepare for an interview or work for a charity that is close to your heart. Even though you are busy, you make time for inspirational activities.

Your Inspirations

Albert Einstein said, ‘Genius is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration’. This may be true, although if we don’t have inspiration in the first place, then our perspiration is wasted sweat.

List what you feel most inspired to do differently that will help you towards your newly revised goals in chapter 1. Only list three things so that you keep focused.

5.1.4 Step 4 – Questions are the Answers

Throughout the Trilogy I have discussed the importance of questions and now it is time to employ that skill in setting your action plan.

Taking the three most relevant inspirations that have had the greatest impact on you, formulate each one into a measurable and tangible action using the following six questions:

What: will you specifically do differently and what will it give you?

Why: is this action important to you?

How: will you approach achieving this action, how often, how well?

When: will you do this, over what period?

Who: will need to support you and who is involved?

Where: will this goal take place? At home, at work or socially? Be specific by stating whether it is at meetings, talking to your boss or when handling a difficult customer.

This now gives your actions structure and helps them become meaningful statements of intent.

5.1.5 Step 5 – Do and Review

“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence then, is not an act, but a habit.” Aristotle

It is now time to take action and repeated action at that. Inspired by your commitments, you need to go forth and apply yourself. To help you, here is some guidance about making it a long-lasting change and not just a ‘five minute wonder’.

- **Focus only on three commitments.** If you adopt any more it will become like a shopping list, often overwhelming and soon forgotten. When you have changed those commitments into new habits, then you can identify your next set of actions.
- **Repeat your actions regularly.** The more you repeat, the more you hone and gain in confidence. After all, *‘Repetition is the Mother of skill.’*
- **Involve people in your changes.** Talk to people close to you about your changes, especially family and friends. With their inclusion, you secure their support rather than create fear, suspicion or threat. When I implemented a big change to my language, I asked for my team’s help in spotting when I used negative words and they became a factor of my success.
- **Carry out regular reviews and document your successes.** The more you assess your progress and celebrate what is going well, the more momentum you will experience. You will also be more in tune with what is working less well and be able to make adjustments. During a twelve-month leadership programme, I encouraged participants to produce an Evidence Portfolio that recorded specific examples of their progress. They collected samples of emails, wrote situational summaries, asked colleagues for feedback and copied letters of thanks they received. This review mechanism helped them produce long-lasting behavioural changes.
- **Celebrate your successes.** It is important to acknowledge what is going well. Share those successes with colleagues, friends who will be interested, your partner or boss. The act of sharing itself reinforces the positivity of the action and inspires you to continue.

5.1.6 Step 6 – Commit to Paper

If you like formality and structure, then I encourage you to adopt a form similar to this to help you.

Action Planning Form

Learning event: Creating Authentic Assertion

Date: / /20

Inspired action	What it will give me	Support required	Progress and evidence
1.			
2.			
3.			

With a stronger self-esteem, a newly landscaped garden and a new appreciation for the power of the mind, you are ready to move further forwards towards your authentic assertion.

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Once again, I encourage you to use the next **four to six weeks** to experiment, talk, journalise and reflect on what is going well and what still needs adjusting. Change rarely comes over night, although it will be a swift as you believe it can be.

Mastering assertion is a true journey – one that never truly ends. Like every path, there may seem to be a destination, although there is always another fork you can take and sometimes that might mean treading in the same footprints as before. I encourage you to revisit this book and the previous two and allow the concepts, guidance and learning embed themselves in your mind. The more you want this, the more it will become a way of life.

I have enjoyed travelling with you along the way and I genuinely hope that your discoveries only serve to excite you about the possibilities that self-knowledge, power of the mind and mindful behaviours can offer your life. I wish you success, fulfilment and happiness in all you do.

"When we open our eyes to the infinite possibilities, we realise how much we could be, have and do. It is time to make it so."

Karen Davies, Coach



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Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway

Susan Jeffers

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7 Habits of Highly Effective People

Assert Yourself

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Michael Neill

www.briantracy.com

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