



# Book The 5 Essential People Skills

## How to Assert Yourself, Listen to Others, and Resolve Conflicts

Dale Carnegie Training  
Touchstone, 2009

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### Recommendation

Dale Carnegie was the original self-help guru. His book *How to Win Friends and Influence People* is a classic. First published in 1936, it has sold 15 million copies and remains popular. Carnegie's ability to inspire people is legendary. This contemporary bestseller from the Dale Carnegie Training organization distills Carnegie's teachings about business relationships into five common-sense principles for creating positive, persuasive interactions. *BooksInShort* recommends it to up-and-comers who want to learn how to be assertive in an effective way. You can use this book's clear "action steps" to change how you relate to others, win their cooperation and approval, and build your assertiveness and self-confidence.

### Take-Aways

- Learn to be assertive, and you will improve your interactions with others.
- You assert yourself when you tell people how you feel and what matters to you.
- Develop five basic interpersonal skills: "rapport building, curiosity, communication, ambition [and] conflict resolution."
- People who have trouble asserting themselves often are shy, but they can learn deliberate tactics for dealing with others, like citing facts to silence a bully.
- To make people feel good about you, show interest in them. Ask questions to draw them out and listen to the answers.
- Demonstrating such "assertive curiosity" is very important if you manage people.
- Build rapport with others by being friendly and communicating positively.
- Plan what you will say. Be smart when you talk and mind your manners.
- Showing others how they benefit from your ideas will help you fulfill your ambitions. Don't brag or get too stressed.
- To resolve conflicts, respect both sides. Offer mutually beneficial solutions, but have a Plan B.

### Summary

#### Assertive Ways to Improve Your Life

To assert yourself effectively enough to influence others, develop the "five essential people skills": "rapport building, curiosity, communication, ambition" and "conflict resolution." Empower yourself by applying the recommendations that follow and carrying out the "action steps."

"Assertiveness, the ability to speak and act in ways that naturally cause people to respond attentively and positively...is the basic core element that is at the center of each of the five essential people skills."

Begin by developing "assertive interactions" with others. This involves getting people to respond "attentively and positively" to you. Failing to assert yourself blocks your ability to improve your personal interactions. To stand up for yourself, clearly state your "preferences, needs, opinions, grievances and other feelings." Assertiveness is not aggressiveness. It involves getting in touch with your true feelings through self-reflection and self-assessment, and then expressing these feelings in an appropriate, mature, nonemotional, effective way. If you find it difficult to stand up for yourself, try it in the situations that are least stressful, then move to more troublesome ones. Set deadlines for yourself. Don't try to win while someone else loses. Aim for a "win-win." Action step: Grade how assertive you are on a one-to-10 scale. To become more assertive, follow these three steps:

1. Summarize the event or interaction that is happening.
2. Express how you feel.
3. Detail your needs, which include how you want the other party to benefit.

“Building self-confidence and assertiveness is probably a lot easier than you think.”

To see how these steps work, note how Nicole, the owner of a Web site design company, used them when one of her designers failed to meet his deadlines. First, she described the situation to him, saying, “I remember that you agreed to complete your current job within 10 days. It is now over two weeks, and you are still working on it.” Then, she expressed her feelings: “This delay angers the client and creates problems for us.” Finally, she explained her needs: “I don’t want you to set unrealistic deadlines for yourself in the future. This will be better for you and for our firm.” Throughout the interaction, Nicole was assertive, not aggressive. Action step: Assess your skills as a communicator. Do you order people around? Can you change your tactic to a more effective approach?

“The importance of effective people skills has not diminished and it never will.”

To assert yourself – which means standing up to aggressive individuals and maintaining your equanimity at all times – you must be able to connect positively. This requires self-confidence and the ability to develop rapport with others. Since fending off domineering people plays such a large role in being assertive, understanding them is helpful. Often, such individuals are bullies who act aggressively because of their own insecurities.

“Most of us are either too passive or too aggressive in our business life.”

Being nonassertive in response to a bully can connote strength of character. It can show that you don’t have to act out against others to make yourself feel good. Yet, you should be able to stand up for yourself when necessary.

One way to assert yourself is to have all the facts. Bullies are blowhards who try to control others with bluster. If you have the facts on your side and are willing to state them, often the bully will have no comeback. To use the facts, first prepare yourself to deal with the bully. Anticipate what he or she will say. Know what your rejoinder will be and prepare to ask questions that will enable you to seize the initiative, like, “What is your evidence?” Have faith that these tactics, which are very effective against bullies, will work for you.

## Skill #1: Rapport Building

To develop rapport with strangers, smile and be friendly. Don’t volunteer your personal opinions. Ask open-ended questions so that other people get to talk. During discussions, speak clearly, not softly. If you are hesitant, write down what you plan to say in advance. Don’t be boastful. Don’t yammer away. Silence speaks volumes. Monitor your body language and behavior. Action step: List your major business relationships. How can you make them better?

“Instead of worrying about what people say of you, why not spend time trying to accomplish something they will admire.”

Nonassertive people often are shy, but even shy people must assert themselves now and then. This requires learning to deal with certain personalities, such as:

- **“Ultradivers”** – These people always want to win. To them, “life is a zero-sum game.” They cannot triumph unless others lose. Such folks often have ego problems. The best way to deal with them is to make them feel valued. Praise will go a long way.
- **“Secret agents”** – These people are just as ambitious as ultradivers, but less obvious. They often are good at playing office politics. Establish rapport with secret agents by getting them to trust you. Show that you have no hidden agendas.
- **“Eager beavers”** – Often these energetic individuals don’t know when to “put on the brakes.” Be aware of their strengths and limitations, and help them by teaching them to network and to set a realistic pace.
- **“Burnouts”** – These depressed people have lost enthusiasm. Avoid criticizing them and be positive. Try to help them feel hopeful.

“Any fool can criticize, condemn and complain – and most fools do.”

To build rapport with any personality type, have a clear idea of what “you want to accomplish.” Work toward those specific results. Action step: List the things you could do to become more comfortable with certain individuals and to make them more relaxed with you. Take those steps.

## Skill #2: Curiosity

If you are not curious, you should be. Seeking knowledge about the world and about the people around you is important. Show others that you are interested in understanding more about them. When you meet people, demonstrate that you find them intriguing. Use “assertive curiosity” to get them to talk about themselves. Ask questions that will draw them out, such as, “What do you like and dislike about the kind of work you’re doing?” or “What is the history of your family name?” Action step: Assertive curiosity requires a genuine interest in others and their needs. Each day for a week, focus on a single individual. Try to identify his or her most important needs.

“The ability to express yourself clearly, powerfully, diplomatically and tactfully is essential to building rapport in an assertive way.”

Assertive curiosity is a particularly valuable trait for a manager. Demonstrate your interest in the people who report to you. Hold weekly meetings, perhaps first thing in the morning, to get updated and to show that you care about your team members. When you discuss a task or project, routinely ask, “How much time do you need?” Get your staffers to create and use time logs so they (and you) will know exactly how long specific jobs take. Assertive curiosity spurs new ideas, so make sure that your organization puts a premium on innovation and creative thinking. Encourage new approaches. Action step: Set up weekly meetings with your direct reports.

## Skill #3: Communication

Being able to speak well is an essential skill, especially for managers. In order to communicate better, apply some proven guidelines to the way you converse with other people. First, always use a person's name. No other word carries the same emotional weight than someone's name. If you make a mistake, say so. That demonstrates honor. Praise people freely, but be specific about their accomplishments. Talk candidly about what matters to you, and what you need your employees to deliver. Encourage your staff members to speak about issues that are on their minds. Listening carefully and effectively is extremely important. Action steps: Identify your biggest challenge as a communicator. Do you fail to let others have their say? Are you argumentative or disrespectful? Commit to improving your conversational patterns.

“Silence can be a great rapport-building tool. Just as what you say can help you develop rapport, what you don't say can also be of great importance.”

Speaking effectively requires planning. Don't open your mouth without first thinking about what you are going to say – and why. Control your conversations so they do not wander aimlessly. Always deal solely in facts. In business, convey your emotions only as they relate to these facts and limit your expressed feelings to a fairly “narrow range.” Know precisely what you want to achieve from a discussion. Conclude by citing some benefit the other party is receiving.

“Assertive silence means purposefully choosing to be quiet, listening with full attention and making the decision not to speak unless you know the purpose for doing so.”

Always expect questions when you conclude your remarks. The absence of questions may indicate that your colleagues fear being open with you. A sales prospect who asks no questions may create a problem later with buyer's remorse. Action step: People often assume they have communicated clearly, when in fact they have not. For a week, ask your cohorts to repeat what you have told them about salient business issues. This will help you see if you are being clear.

“Shake yourself awake. Develop a hobby. Let the winds of enthusiasm sweep through you.”

Asking questions properly goes to the “heart of effective communications.” Start with open queries that prompt expansive answers (“Please tell me how you feel about...”), then move to highly specific “funnel questions” (“Who was present at the meeting?”). Probing questions clarify issues (“Why is our client unhappy?”). Asking people their opinions is a good way to build better relationships. Action step: Develop five questions that will help you create a positive relationship with someone else.

“You can make more friends in a month by trying to get interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you.”

Being able to influence people is essential in business. Persuade others by treating them with respect and establishing trust and common ground. To convince people of the benefits they will garner by supporting your proposal, make your argument cogent, structured, interesting and original. Include expert opinion and explain the benefits. Openly weigh both sides of an issue to ensure credibility. Demonstrate that your position is reasonable and has consensus support. Speak diplomatically. Show humility. Use good timing. Don't try to persuade people too often or you'll wear out your welcome. Action step: Think of a time when someone persuaded you to do something that you initially opposed. How did he or she do that?

“One of the surest ways of making a friend and influencing the opinion of another is to give consideration to his opinion, to let him sustain his feeling of importance.”

To win people over, particularly in business, you must use good manners and appropriate etiquette. Stay away from topics that provoke debate and rancor. In neutral or business settings, stick to safe topics, such as “sports, current events, your personal background” and work details. Don't ramble or interrupt. Answer your colleagues' questions in 60 seconds or less.

“No matter what your line of work...your degree of success depends on your ability to interact effectively with other people.” (Dale Carnegie)

Be aware of financial etiquette. For example, if someone buys you dinner in a restaurant, but doesn't leave a tip that you think is appropriate, don't just tuck something extra on the table for the server unless you know your dinner companion well – and then, only if you ask him or her first. Return all calls promptly, certainly within 24 hours. Don't engage in long cellphone conversations while you are with other people. Action step: Note when you have been rude or inconsiderate, or violated any rules of personal or business decorum. Vow to do better next time.

## Skill #4: Ambition

You cannot get anywhere without ambition, which comes in two forms: extrinsic, in which you strive to achieve an external goal, and intrinsic, which involves satisfying yourself internally. Often, ambition comes with a fear of failing to accomplish certain goals. People who fear that they will not succeed in reaching an extrinsic goal tend to become very tense and stressed. They may feel the need to brag to get attention. Don't make this mistake. If you are bright and are succeeding at something, others will see it. Action step: List the actions and activities you engage in because they make you feel good, not because you receive some external reward. Relish these ways to fulfill yourself so you can focus optimistically on your intrinsic and extrinsic goals.

## Skill #5: Conflict Resolution

When people congregate, conflicts emerge. To defuse them, first identify the disputed variables. Can you suggest some adjustment in an attitude or position? Assess what the parties want as opposed to what they require. Examine your position. You can't resolve a conflict if it becomes personal. Avoid name-calling and harmful rhetoric. Don't assume the worst about anyone.

If you are part of a dispute, try to resolve it yourself. Treat the other people and their positions with respect. Watch your body language. Don't focus on past events or get into exchanges about who did or said what. Stick to “the present or the future.” Bargain by explaining what you could do or say to resolve things. Present an optimistic outcome based on a scenario that would satisfy those involved. Aim for a “win-win.” Prepare a “walkaway position” you can turn to if you cannot resolve things as you hope. Action step: List any current conflicts that affect you and identify steps you can take to solve them.

# About the Author

Dale Carnegie wrote the bestseller *How to Win Friends and Influence People* in 1936. The famous **Dale Carnegie Training** program started to take shape during the 1950s; today, 400 of the *Fortune* 500 companies are its clients.

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