



Being Assertive

If passion drives you, let reason hold the reins.

—Benjamin Franklin

Being assertive is a style of communication that allows a person to confidently and directly express his feelings or opinions about a specific topic or situation. Being assertive dictates that you take charge of your own behavior and offers many benefits. One of the most valuable is it prevents others from taking advantage of you. By communicating assertively you show that you are not afraid to express your thoughts, feelings and ideas without equivocation. Being assertive can create more honest relationships and will build self-confidence that, in turn, will help you earn respect from those around you.

Benefits of being assertive:

1. Earn respect
2. Develop trust
3. Foster relationships
4. Establish credibility
5. Manage conflict
6. Control stress
7. Increase confidence
8. Build self-esteem



According to a recent survey, which gender is four times more likely to initiate a negotiation?



There are three styles of communication that we all use at various times during our daily lives: a passive style, an assertive style and an aggressive style. In almost all situations the assertive style is the most effective and yields the best results.

Characteristics of a PASSIVE communicator

- Rarely asks questions
- Never challenges the ideas of others
- Doesn't contribute ideas
- Spends the majority of the time listening
- Low volume when speaking
- Happy with others taking credit
- Constrictive gestures and body language
- Lack of direct or sustained eye contact

Characteristics of an ASSERTIVE communicator

- Asks questions when appropriate
- Not afraid to challenge the ideas of others
- Feels comfortable contributing ideas
- Listens actively
- Facial expressions are open and support intention
- Uses appropriate volume when speaking
- Active gestures and body language
- Direct eye contact
- Listens effectively to others



Characteristics of an **AGGRESSIVE** communicator

- Inflexible when collaborating
- Constantly interrupts others
- Tends to dominate discussion
- Tense or negative facial expressions
- Violates personal space
- Doesn't listen to others
- Loud volume when speaking
- Intimidating gestures and body language
- Direct and sustained eye contact

Are You Assertive?

Consider your own personal style as a communicator. Which style of communication do you generally utilize? Think about the last time you had to deliver feedback or give an opinion to a co-worker or friend. How do you think you were perceived? Would people categorize you as patient or impatient? What about you as a negotiator? Do you usually get what you want, or are you more likely to give in or compromise? Do you voice your opinions or remain silent in meetings? When people pile extra work on you do you say yes even when your plate is full? Are you quick to judge or condemn others? Are people in your life more likely to engage with you or avoid talking to you altogether?

Based on the information above, try to honestly assess your overall skills as a communicator and place yourself on the continuum above when communicating with your boss, your client, your spouse, etc. Where do you think others would place you on the continuum?

While we all use the various styles of communication in our daily interactions with others, the goal is to be assertive in your overall communication. Why? Assertiveness allows for a more open and honest exchange of information in which all parties, opinions and views are being heard and respected. It is very challenging to spend time or do business with someone who communicates entirely from one side of the spectrum.



Ten tips to show assertiveness:

1. **Use “I” statements.** To truly show assertiveness, it is helpful to use “I” statements as much as possible. “I disagree,” sounds less accusatory than “You’re wrong.” By using “I” statements, you are very clearly making your thoughts, feelings and opinions known to others.
2. **Speak up.** People cannot be expected to read your mind. If you have ideas or opinions that you feel should be seriously considered, share them. If you want something, ask for it. If you need assistance, make a request. This means using your voice effectively to command attention so that you can clearly articulate your points.
3. **Challenge respectfully.** If you have a strong and differing opinion about something that is being discussed, raise those concerns openly. State your objections unequivocally and explain the reasons why you disagree. Make your point or state your request confidently, without apology or vacillation.
4. **Learn to say “no”.** If a request is not feasible or realistic, it is perfectly acceptable to say “no.” Acknowledge the person making the request and give a brief and truthful explanation as to why you are refusing. If it is possible to find a compromise or fulfill the request under different circumstances, share those options or offer alternatives to the person making the request.
5. **Be firm, not rigid.** Be open to the ideas of others and listen actively, but be firm in your response. Be willing to defend your idea or push for your request. Be empathetic but don’t give in too easily or without clearly defending your position.
6. **Get comfortable with conflict.** A certain amount of creative conflict can be healthy when brainstorming or trying to reach a consensus as a group. Challenge others if you feel you have better ideas or options to contribute. This does not mean being disagreeable just for the sake of disagreeing. Play devil’s advocate; ask questions and explore ideas from all angles.



7. **Leverage your body language.** As with everything else, your physical cues must support your intention. If your intention is to persuade or excite, your facial expressions and body language must clearly communicate this. An assertive intention must be supported by an assertive delivery. Use appropriate gestures to express your passion for the ideas or positions you are putting forward.
8. **Look others in the eye.** You can't be assertive if you don't make eye contact with the people you are talking to. By looking them in the eye and holding their gaze, you will signal that you are serious and committed to the ideas you are putting forward.
9. **Listen actively.** Assertive communication means listening closely to what is being communicated so that you can respond appropriately. Don't prejudge or make assumptions about what the other people will say; let them complete their thoughts before offering your opinions or ideas.
10. **Own your message.** When putting forth ideas you believe in, it is important that you support those ideas and defend them when challenged or questioned by others. Don't signal a lack of confidence, either verbally or nonverbally, and don't undermine your stance out of fear that others may disagree with you.

Avoiding Passive Word Choices

When projecting confidence and being assertive with communication, words matter. When possible, try to avoid passive or "wishy-washy" words and phrases, such as the ones listed below. These words can often weaken an argument or make a speaker seem less than committed to a particular point or assertion.

- | | |
|---------------------|---------------|
| • "I think" | • "Maybe" |
| • "I would like" | • "I hope" |
| • "I want" | • "Wish" |
| • "Sort of" | • "Fairly" |
| • "Really" | • "Partially" |
| • "I'm pretty sure" | • "Somewhat" |



Being Assertive



EXERCISE: Being Assertive