

Going For A Win-Win Result - A Guide To Being Assertive

The basic difference between being assertive and being aggressive is how our words and behavior affect the rights and well being of others." - Sharon Anthony Bower

It is interesting that many people still confuse being assertive with being aggressive. How about you? Have you learnt the difference? Forgive me if you have, but for those of you who still aren't quite clear, here is a quick guide to assertiveness - going for the win-win result.

Assertiveness is a behavior or skill that helps you to communicate, clearly and with confidence, your feelings, needs, wants and thoughts, whilst acknowledging the needs of others. It means that you are able to state your opinions without feeling self-conscious, as well as being able to express your emotions openly. Being assertive will enable you to make clear to others how you wish to proceed in all aspects of your life. At the same time you will value others, respecting their right to an opinion as well. Through effective, assertive communication you will be able to express how you wish to move forward.

Is there an issue that needs to be resolved? Before confronting someone, why not write down what you are going to say? Be polite, concise and include the following elements: the nature of the problem; how it affects you; how you feel about it; what you want to change. Be prepared to negotiate if necessary to bring resolution. By using tact and foresight and by making the effort to see the other point of view and acknowledging it you will place yourself in a position of strength. Be prepared to offer a compromise if that fits in with what you are aiming to achieve. Assertiveness does not mean digging your heels in for the sake of it!

Are you behaving passively? Do you think it is selfish to say what you want? Do you worry that if you refuse to do something, then people won't like you? Or do you think that other people should know what you want? Sorry. Most people are so wound up with their own thoughts and worries that they usually haven't time to be second-guessing you. By being clear and prepared to defend your own position if necessary, you will be able to build better relationships with those around you.

Feeling aggressive? Take it out in the gym, on a punch ball or on the running track rather than at work or at home. Aggression is emotion out of control and can be very destructive. A physical activity can help you to diffuse the aggression.

One of the great skills of an assertive person is the ability to say "no". Be brief and to the point. Be honest. If you know an unwelcome request is coming your way practice saying "no" in advance. What are you going to say and do? If necessary, use the 'Broken Record Technique' where you just keep repeating your statement softly, calmly and persistently. Don't confuse rejecting a request with rejecting the person making the request. Most people are happy to accept an honest "no" if it is expressed appropriately. The first time will be the hardest!

Practice the body movements of an assertive person. When standing, be upright and relaxed with open hand gestures. Relax your facial features and make firm and direct eye contact with whoever you are communicating with. This does not mean that you spend the day grinning! Your facial expression needs to be appropriate to how you are feeling, so that you don't give out any mixed messages. If you are pleased, smile, but if you aren't so happy with the way things are, feel free to frown.

Show a willingness to explore other solutions than your own if necessary. Encourage creativity from all. "How can we solve this problem?" will encourage others to tap into their resourcefulness. Sometimes it just takes a bit of encouragement.

Weigh the costs. Telling other people how you feel also makes it easier for them to communicate their feelings to you. Assertiveness is about acknowledging that all opinions are important - "I matter and so do you". By being passive or aggressive you will lose out. Being assertive costs nothing but brings many benefits. You will be able to communicate better, command respect and be listened to within respectful, negotiating relationships. Win-Win? Definitely!

About the Author

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