

Being Assertive

Many people find it extremely difficult to be assertive, whether it is in the work place, or in their personal lives. All too often, there is confusion between being assertive and being aggressive. It is my belief that you lose credibility and the moral high ground as soon as you show any signs of aggression. There are some very simple principles to being assertive.

Expectation Expect to be listened to, you'll be amazed at the difference there is when you are mentally prepared. Think about the lion tamer. If he shows fear the animal will know and attack. Set clear expectations of yourselves and others; don't expect other people to read what is in your mind. Articulate exactly what you expect from them and why. Creating positive boundaries is important. We all feel at our most comfortable if we know how far we can go. Take control of the situation and set out your expectations.

Physical Presence How you use body language can make a huge difference to the way others treat us. It is part of the "expect to be listened to." Hold your head up high, be a force to be reckoned with. If you look intimidated others will be intimidating. Be careful not to intimidate others. If you are on home territory think about how you arrange the room and plan your engagement with others. Where you sit, whether you use a desk or sit on comfortable chairs at equal height all have a bearing on how the interaction with others will work. Be careful not to give mixed messages. If you are about to haul someone over the coals keep the situation formal.

Use of Voice When prepared you will speak with more authority... The tone of voice has a major impact on whether you will be heard, take a deep breath so that your voice is sustained. Think about the message you want to give. Be wary of the following: the shout, nag, whine, Uriah Heap (I'm ever so "umble"). You do not need to raise your voice, simply state what you want to say in a matter of fact voice without heat. Try it out in the privacy of your bedroom. Be careful to use a voice which can be heard, is interesting in pitch and delivery. Breathe properly and protect your vocal cords.

Be Prepared If you are prepared you will speak with more authority, be better able to deal with the things that come up. Plan what you want to say, this is particularly important if you are to speaking to a group of people.

Create Rapport During any introduction it is important to connect with the group you work with. Be open, friendly, smile and feel in control. It will have a positive impact on the person or the group.

Think of the Language You Use It can be extremely powerful. If you start with a positive statement it sets the tone. If you constantly ask people to do you a favour they will begin to believe they are doing you a favour rather than it be part of their job. "I would like you to..." is a better style.

Remember to Thank If people have done what was asked it is really important that you acknowledge their effort. They will be far more inclined to put themselves out again in the future.

Use Humour But appropriately. Never at your clients or colleagues expense.

If You Do Not Get What You Want Be calm, be persistent and stay in control. Repeat what you want and why. Ask them to consider the implications of not doing as you request. Don't threaten, bully or shout. Stick to your guns and if you outline a consequence it is important that you carry it out. Those who find being assertive difficult often assume that everyone else finds it easy. The reality is that most people can feel anxious or wrong footed in some situations. I find it fascinating that when you talk to someone who appears supremely confident the reality is often very different. Acting confident is what makes the difference - you can do it too with a little bit of practice.

About the Author

by Gina Gardiner

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