

## Assertiveness

It is very important in business to maintain an assertive communication. This is easy when things are going well, but more difficult when under pressure or in conflict. It is at these times when we are more likely to become passive or aggressive. To ensure our communication remains assertive, we need to understand the elements of assertive communication. Assertiveness is based on personal responsibility and the rights of others. Assertive means:

- Being honest
- The ability to say what it is you want, you need or you feel, but not at the expense of others
- Having confidence in yourself and being positive whilst at the same time understanding other people's points of view
- Being able to behave in a rational way
- Being assertive means self respect and respect for other people

No matter what our job or position is at work, we have the rights to:

- Communicate how we feel or what we think
- Be listened to
- Be treated with respect and make requests of others
- Change our mind
- Make mistakes
- Say 'no'

When you are assertive you are more likely to get more of you want, however, even with the ability to be assertive, you won't always be one hundred per cent successful in getting all that you want. Being assertive will help you feel good about yourself. It is when difficult situations arise that we tend react by being aggressive or passive, this can soon lead to a lack of self-respect.

## Aggressive and Passive Behaviour

Being aggressive shows a lack of respect for others and their rights. Eventually aggressive behaviour is unproductive and will lead to ill feeling and resentment. There is lot of stress when dealing with aggressive behaviour. This type of behaviour may include:

- Giving orders loudly
- Shouting, thumping the table
- Refusing to listen to others' points of view
- Attacking or humiliating others
- Getting your own way at any cost

If you are passive you give up your rights and show a lack of respect for yourself. Although passive behaviour may appear to be 'easy going' and an easy option, it can often cause long term stress. Passive behaviour may include:

- Not stating your opinions, ideas, feelings and needs
- Agreeing to things that you don't want or go against your own view
- Taking the 'easy path'
- Being manipulated

### **Assertive Behaviour**

If you are assertive you exercise your personal right whilst appreciating and considering the rights of others. When you are assertive you will not get pushed or manoeuvred into impossible or difficult situations and you will be able to influence and meet the needs of others.

Being assertive is about being able to state your own feelings and needs in a calm and confident manner. To be assertive, you must have confidence in your own opinions and needs. True assertion is always underpinned by feelings of self-esteem and self-worth. So it is important to be assertive not only to get more of what you want but also to feel better about yourself and your behaviour. Effective employees will develop assertiveness and use assertive behaviours when interacting with colleagues and customers.

If we had all learned how to be assertive when we were young, it would make things both simpler and easier. The reality is that we all have both cultural and natural behaviours that mould us into particular reactions and types of behaviour.

### **Developing Assertion**

There are several steps to take to use basic assertion in your communication:

- We need to ensure that we listen to the views of others and demonstrate that we have listened
- To ensure that we acknowledge the needs of others and empathise
- To be able to express own feelings and opinions
- To be clear of our own needs and wants and to be able to communicate those to others

Doing all of this may involve using the following communication behaviours:

- Being positive and using friendly body language
- Listening & expressing understanding, appreciation and empathy
- Speaking quietly and calmly
- Stating your opinions and needs explicitly and clearly
- Maintaining your position through repetition and reasoning
- Negotiating and trying to seek a workable compromise

Verbal assertion often consists of 'I' and 'you' statements.

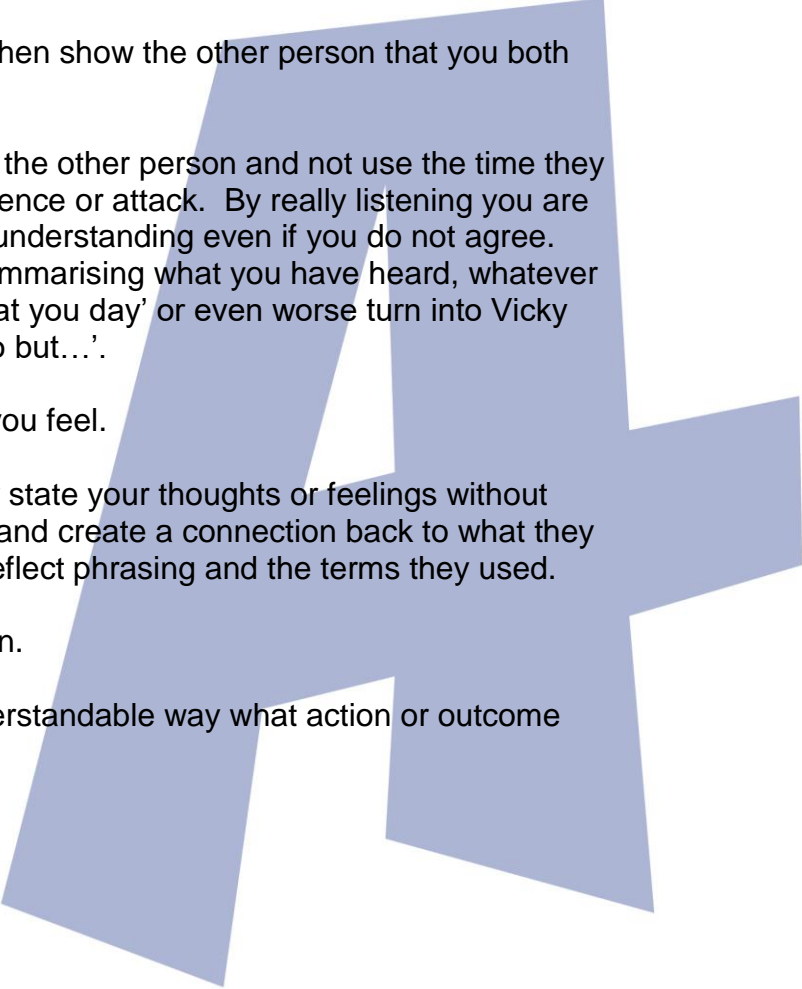
For example – 'I feel that we will be running into problems if we don't take immediate action. I would like to...'

'I feel nervous about this situation and that I would like to discuss it further. I want you to ...'

### **Assertiveness Steps**

To ensure that your communication remains truly assertive, there are four simple steps you can use to achieve assertiveness:

1. Listen to what is being said then show the other person that you both hear and understand them.

This forces you to focus on the other person and not use the time they are talking to build up a defence or attack. By really listening you are able to demonstrate some understanding even if you do not agree. This means reflecting or summarising what you have heard, whatever you do don't say 'I hear what you say' or even worse turn into Vicky Pollard and say 'yes but, no but...'.

2. Say what you think or what you feel.

This enables you to directly state your thoughts or feelings without insistence or apology. Try and create a connection back to what they said. Use words that link, reflect phrasing and the terms they used.

3. Say what you want to happen.

Indicate in a clear and understandable way what action or outcome you want.

4. Ask for feedback

Let the other person then contribute their ideas and feelings and to respond to respond to your suggestion. Remember to listen attentively to their answer.

Assertiveness takes practise and isn't easy but the more you use it the easier it becomes and the more you gain both for yourself and others.

