



The Power of

Assertive behaviour in the workplace

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We may have worked with a manager and feel fearful because he is hostile and demeaning and makes us feel undervalued. Or, seen a hardworking and capable colleague who is overlooked because she lacks the courage to communicate her achievements.

What is Assertive Behaviour?

Assertive behaviour is a balance between being aggressive and submissive. It is expressing your feelings, needs and ideas, and standing up for your legitimate rights in ways that do not violate the rights of others. Assertive behaviour respects oneself and values our personal opinions and needs, while respecting the rights, values and beliefs of others.

Assertiveness is:

- Open and honest communication
- Being able to express your feelings, thoughts and emotions, without experiencing a lot of anxiety or guilt, and without violating the rights of others
- Taking responsibility for what happens to you in life, making more decisions and free choices
- Recognising that you have certain rights that need not be sacrificed
- Being able to protect yourself from being taken advantage of by others

Assertion theory is based on the premise that every individual possesses basic rights. Examples of rights include:

1. The right to act in ways that promotes your dignity and self-respect as long as others' rights are not violated in the process.
2. The right to be treated with respect.
3. The right to say no and not feel guilty.
4. The right to experience and express your feelings.
5. The right to take your time to slow down and think.
6. The right to change your mind.
7. The right to ask for what you need.
8. The right to work at your human capacity.
9. The right to ask for information.
10. The right to make (non-deliberate) mistakes (if others are not harmed).
11. The right to feel good about yourself.

Many people do not believe that they have the right to be assertive. Or if they are assertive in some situations, they may feel anxious and fearful. Whenever you find it difficult to assert yourself, chances are there are mistaken traditional assumptions and an outdated belief system operating. These myths may have been learnt in our childhood which we are carrying into the present.

Almost every minute of our conscious life we are engaged in self-talk in our internal world. If this self-talk is accurate and realistic to the situation, we function well. If it is irrational and untrue, then we can experience stress and emotional disturbance such as anxiety, depression, rage, guilt or a sense of worthlessness.

These myths may need to be reframed to take into account the situation and our needs. Examples of how we may convert myths into our legitimate rights.

- **Myth** - It is essential and selfish to put your needs before that of others.

Our legitimate right - We have the right to place our needs before those of others (in appropriate situations). We have the right to say 'No,' setting limits on our time and energy.

- **Myth** – It is shameful to make mistakes. We should have an appropriate response for every occasion.

Our legitimate rights - We have the right to make *non-deliberate* mistakes. It takes time to process our thoughts and feelings.

Tips to become more assertive in the workplace.

- Commit to being assertive, maintain your needs and respect. It requires a willingness to examine ourselves and be open to new ways of thinking and handling situations.
- Consider in what situation you want to assert yourself, and the benefit of assertive behaviour.
- Set personal boundaries about what is right for you. These are your limits to review what is uncomfortable, and to say no.
- Watch your self talk, and reframe your thoughts to enable you to act assertively. Our self-talk can make it *easier* or *harder* to manage a problem.
- Ask for what you want, and state your needs, opinions or feelings. Use assertive techniques to guide you such as an '*I* statement' or '*Broken record*.'
- A willingness to take risks. Assertive behaviour requires letting go of fear that can hold you back, and worrying about what others think.

No one is assertive all the time. We choose assertive behaviour based on the person, time and situation.

Assertive behaviour is a positive self affirmation, which also values the other person in your life. Assertive behaviour enriches life, and leads to authentic and satisfying personal relationships.



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