

Seven Keys To Becoming More Assertive

A Guidebook for Personal Development

Seven Keys to Becoming More Assertive

1. Understand the nature of assertive, aggressive, and accommodating behaviour
2. Know your rights – so you recognise when to stand up for them
3. Nurture self-esteem and feel that you deserve to be treated with respect
4. Challenge pessimistic thinking and refute fears that hold you back
5. Resolve to no longer put up with “stuff” that you have tolerated in the past
6. Assertively deal with conflict in your relationships
7. Say “no” to unreasonable requests

This workbook will not be a panacea to resolving all of the difficulties you may be experiencing with non-assertive patterns of behaviour. However you will gain direction in how you can become more assertive over time. Self-respect will grow as you begin to speak up for yourself.

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So, You're Thinking of Making a Change?



If you are reading this, then it's probably because there are too many situations in your life where you feel you are not standing up for yourself.

But you are not alone. There are many people who say they would like to be more assertive than what they are – in fact, some surveys reveal that up to one in three people express this desire.

Perhaps you recognise for example, that there have been too many occasions where work colleagues have taken advantage of your good nature,or too often your boss is overloading you with unreasonable demands,or as a customer you are putting up with rude service,or other people seem to edge in front of you when lining up to get on the train,or your spouse and family are taking you for granted,or so-called friends never seem to return things they have borrowed I

If you find yourself regularly having these types of experiences and you have wanted to shout out loudly "Stop!" to those people who have been pushing you around - then you have probably thought about what it would take to become more assertive.

But can we really change who we are and how we behave? The question of whether our personality is determined by "nature or nurture" has been around for many years. Much research has been undertaken on the issue, and what most of us now seem to accept is that our past experiences and early up-bringing have had some significant degree of influence in shaping our current behavioural patterns.

Whilst we can't do much about the genes and tendencies that we may have inherited, we can become more aware of what we have learned and the patterns with which we may have been conditioned. And this is cause for hope – for whatever negative patterns have been learned can be unlearned - and new, more productive and affirming behaviours can be acquired!

You need to feel the gains will outweigh the cost of change



Let's not kid ourselves achieving personal change is not such an easy thing.

The older we get, the more deeply in-grained our habits and perspectives seem to become. It takes a combination of considerable effort, clarity, motivation, guidance and persistence to break free of long-established patterns. Anyone who's ever tried to stick to a new diet or attempted to actually follow-through on a New Year's resolution to be more patient with their kids, will be able to testify that old habits die hard.

Courage does not always roar like a lion, Sometimes it is a small whisper within that says simply "I'll try again tomorrow"

There must always be a price to be paid if we are to achieve sustained personal change. It definitely requires *persistence*.

if you have weighed up the costs of continued non-assertive behaviour in your life, then you may have already come to

the conclusion that what you stand to gain will more than compensate for the time and energy you will have to expend in your quest for positive personal change.

It will take motivation, determination, self-review, patience and direction – and there will be times of disappointment to overcome. However, like a toddler learning to walk, the key is to take "baby steps" in the beginning of your change process.

From my experience as a psychologist, in having trained and coached thousands of people in developing assertiveness skills over the past twenty years, I firmly believe that the ideas contained in this workbook – when combined with the guided process of structured and honest self-reflection – will provide a firm foundation for you to successfully commence the process of personal transformation.

As you finish reading each short section in the workbook, you are asked to pause and quietly reflect, so as to consider how specific ideas and principles relate to your own personal life circumstances. This will be a very important part of the change process, because it moves this workbook beyond being just an academic exercise, to one where you more deeply digest the principles into your consciousness. So if you are able, print out the workbook so that you can then complete the journal sections – but otherwise, just keep a journal next to the computer, and complete the self-reflection exercises.

Have your pen handy, to record and capture these deeper insights as they flash into your consciousness. So sit back, relax, take a few deep breaths and let's explore together how you can gradually introduce assertive principles and behaviours into your life.



► PAUSE, REFLECT & RECORD

– What does it take to change?

1. Identify some times in your life where you successfully achieved change (eg. gave up smoking, made a healthy change to your diet, started exercising more, cultivated a new quality within yourself, successfully learned a new skill.....).

Try and recall the strategies you applied and what you did that helped you to persist and succeed in changing the old behaviour or habit

2. What do you believe would be the benefits and advantages for you, in developing your assertiveness?

1. Understand the difference between assertive, aggressive and accommodating behaviour

There are many people that confuse assertiveness with aggression, and mistakenly believe that to assert themselves means to stand their ground and steadfastly refuse to compromise.

Assertiveness is certainly about standing up for your rights – but in a way that does not violate the rights or self-esteem of others. Being assertive means communicating your needs, wants, feelings, beliefs and opinions to others in a direct and honest manner - but remaining open to considering the views of others. The intent is to seek a fair outcome.

Some people find it helpful to imagine assertiveness as the middle ground between aggressive and accommodating behaviour. The use of tactics that bully or intimidate others might get someone what they want in the short-term, but that approach will inevitably become destructive to relationships over time.

Being accommodating and acquiescent may help you to avoid conflict, but the price paid can include feelings of helplessness, reduced self-esteem and a lack of control.

Direct assertive communication has the potential to reduce conflict through avoiding misunderstandings, as well as building your self-confidence, and it will more likely improve the quality of both your personal and work relationships over time.

The aggressive person tends to be quite demanding and will focus solely upon the pursuit of their own goals, disregarding the desires of others. They often have a short fuse and can become quick to anger. They tend to attack the person in an argument, rather than the issue. The aggressive person will typically end up taking advantage of other people who cannot assert themselves and those who are unable to set boundaries.

Aggressive behaviour comprises verbal language that is dogmatic, and may contain threats and put-downs. Typically, the aggressive person refuses to listen to or consider any views or concerns that are different to their own. The non-verbal language might include clenched hands, abrupt gestures, finger pointing, invasion of other's personal space, interrupting, and often speaking with a loud voice – often designed to control or intimidate others and to dominate a situation.

► PAUSE, REFLECT & RECORD

Is there an aggressive person in your life with whom you need to be more assertive – someone who is bossing you around, overly critical, not treating you fairly, or perhaps making unreasonable demands of you What is it that you would like to say to them?

The assertive person will speak up and confidently express their needs, ideas or concerns without apology. But they are equally willing to listen to the other person's views – and are willing to engage in co-operative problem solving to seek a fair resolution if there is an issue in dispute. They have found the right balance between concern for self, and concern for others. Assertive behaviour is characterized by verbal language that is both clear and direct, and yet polite. But assertiveness is not just about being willing to confront others rude behaviour; it is also about comfortably expressing appreciation to others, and being able to both give and graciously receive compliments for example.

The assertive person insists upon being treated fairly and with respect by others, and in turn seeks to treat others with respect and courtesy. Assertive body language includes active listening, a relaxed open posture, a firm and steady voice, with direct eye contact.

► PAUSE, REFLECT & RECORD

Identify a person in either your work or personal life, whom you admire for their typically assertive behaviour. What are some of the positive behaviours they display ...?

The accommodating, passive or acquiescent person is typically motivated by a desire to avoid conflict, "keep the peace" and to please and appease others.

Although there are occasions when we may wisely judge that a concern or issue is not worth pursuing, the problem is when this avoidance becomes a chronic pattern. The overly accommodating person tends to use soft verbal language that can be apologetic with veiled meanings, hinting at any issues rather than voicing them directly. Their manner is often hesitant, using a soft voice that seems designed to avoid bringing attention to themselves. This behaviour pattern, based upon the concept of "don't rock the boat" can often attempt to rationalize their conflict-avoidance by saying an issue is "not really that important anyway". The accommodating person has trouble saying no to others, often seeming to place the needs and interests of others ahead of their own

► PAUSE, REFLECT & RECORD

In what types of situations, or with what people in your life, do you currently feel you are being too accommodating

Assertive language

Imagine a situation where you have an arrangement to regularly meet with a friend at lunchtime during the working week, and you have been finding that they have been arriving let's say ten minutes late each day for the lunchtime get-together. You've not been saying anything so far, but it is now starting to irritate you, particularly because you are on a fixed time for your lunch-break.

An aggressive reaction to the situation would be to tell the person they are being inconsiderate and to get themselves organised so they can honour their commitments. The aggressive style tends to attack the person rather than the issue – and will often over-generalise and make sweeping negative statements.

An accommodating reaction to the issue is to continue to put up with the situation, rationalising it away as a trivial issue. Or maybe, just hinting at a concern

The assertive response will require you to be honest, direct and yet respectful – with a focus upon the issue and stating your concern in a positive way. Assertive verbal language, which is supported by a steady voice and eye contact, might include

- i) Expressing that you feel concerned
- ii) Describing what the other person is doing, that you would like them to change
- iii) Explaining how their current actions are creating a problem for you
- iv) Expressing your request i.e. what you are asking them to do differently in future
- v) Checking if they accept that what you have asked seems reasonable



So, assertively addressing the issue might perhaps sound like

"Sam, I've been feeling concerned about what's been happening recently with our lunchtime catch-ups *(raising the issue, describing your feeling)*

You know, I really enjoy catching up with you *(being positive)*

But the past few days you've been getting here at least ten minutes later than what we agreed *(describing their actions)*

And waiting for you like that means that I have less time for lunch, because I'm on a fixed break *(describing the problem it creates for you)*

So, what I'd prefer in future is to see if we can find a catch-up time that can work for us both, and that we can both get to on time *(expressing your request)*

What do you think? *(showing a willingness to listen and find a workable compromise)*

2. Know your rights, so you can stand up for them

What Are Your Personal Rights?

If assertive behaviour is based upon standing up for your rights, then you need an awareness of what you are reasonably entitled to expect. Some would say their rights include

- ✓ To be treated with honesty and respect
- ✓ To have and express your own opinions, as long as this is done constructively
- ✓ To say 'no' to unreasonable requests
- ✓ To ask for what you need
- ✓ To make unintentional mistakes, on occasion
- ✓ To take time to slow down, so as to think clearly when necessary

What Are Your Rights At Work?

- ✓ To be clear about what is expected of you
- ✓ To know how your manager sees your performance
- ✓ To work in a safe working environment, free of harassment or bullying of any kind
- ✓ To refuse unreasonable demands without feeling guilt
- ✓ To choose to avoid damaging confrontation
- ✓ To make occasional mistakes but be held fairly accountable
- ✓ To be listened to and taken seriously
- ✓ To get on with your job once the objectives and constraints have been agreed

► PAUSE, REFLECT & RECORD

(i) What have been some of the situations you have encountered recently, where you believe you did not sufficiently stand up for your rights?

(ii) Can you think of a situation in which you did successfully stand up for your rights?

(iii) What factors made the difference in how you responded in those two situations?

3. Nurture your self-esteem and the feeling that you deserve to be treated with respect

Self-esteem refers to the extent to which you feel you are inherently a person of value and worth. The person with low self-esteem carries deep feelings of inadequacy and being "not quite good enough". They will quite often have a strong need to gain acceptance and approval from other people, as a means of compensating for their lack of self-acceptance.

Having low self esteem can take an enormous toll on the quality of a person's life. They will take fewer risks, which in turn can limit the opportunities available to them, both personally and professionally. They can be reluctant to voice or acknowledge their needs, for fear of losing the acceptance of others. They will often dwell too much on past mistakes, which can feed the fear of making future ones.

As you can imagine, it is more likely the person with low self-esteem will continue to tolerate a situation in which they are being unfairly treated, because of a mistaken belief that the needs of other people are more important than their own. You may even know of someone with low self-esteem who has suffered from an abusive relationship, again because of a mistaken feeling that they don't deserve better anyhow.

Much of the foundation for our self-esteem has been formed by our early childhood experiences, and the sorts of messages we were given as children. If we were constantly berated for our mistakes, criticised for our shortcomings, and received little if any encouragement for our efforts from authority figures around us, then our self-esteem will not have a strong foundation. We will likely continue the pattern of self-chastisement.

People with a poor self-esteem will also quite often find a way to sabotage their happiness – because of a deep seated erroneous belief that they are not deserving of it!

"No-one can make you feel inferior, without your consent"
Eleanor Roosevelt

However, it doesn't have to continue to be like this. With self-awareness comes greater capacity to exercise free choice. We can elect to stop the self "put-downs" and decide to commence the creation of new healthy patterns for ourselves.

We need to recognise that we can't develop a robust self esteem if we constantly repeat negative comments about our skills and abilities. Other people will often pick up on it and take on board the negative way that we are viewing ourselves. Too often, other people will end up treating us the way we are treating ourselves.



So right now, this very moment, why not make a commitment to be kinder and gentler to yourself – and wholeheartedly accept the notion that you do indeed deserve to be abundantly happy. Start to focus more upon your positive qualities!

When you are connected to the feeling that you are a worthwhile person, and that you deserve to be treated with respect, you will be much more willing to assert yourself.



► PAUSE, REFLECT & RECORD

"You are a capable and worthwhile person"

(i) List some of the qualities that make you a good friend

(ii) List some of your achievements, or times where you have made a positive difference (these could be occasions where you have overcome some adversity, or shown some initiative a problem solved, a process improved, a person you helped, a goal accomplished, etc).

Also reflect upon the qualities and strengths that you displayed in these situations.

4. Challenge pessimistic thinking and question assumptions that hold you back



Not only does pessimistic thinking make you less capable and more likely to be non-assertive, but the thoughts themselves are quite often in error.

When a pessimistic thought makes you feel disheartened, discouraged, or helpless, it will likely prevent you from taking action. If your mind's thinking fools you into falsely believing that you can do nothing about a difficulty you are experiencing then you will do nothing. So if assertiveness is about taking some control of your life, then one of the first places to start is in your own mind – and controlling the thought processes and “self-talk” that have restrained your willingness to assert yourself in the past!

“If you think you can or think you can't, you're usually right” Henry Ford

The goal is to make fewer mistakes in your thinking and to no longer allow false assumptions and invalid beliefs to rule your world. Begin to question and challenge the validity of any self-limiting thought.

For example, imagine a situation where your friends are all saying they want to go to a particular movie that you do not want to see.

If you were to think to yourself that your friends had already made up their minds and that there was no point in you expressing a different opinion, believing it would just make for an uncomfortable situation for everyone if there was an argument – then you would probably end up agreeing and going to a movie that you did not want to see. Your thought process would have been based upon an assumption, which constrained your willingness to speak up.

We said earlier that assertiveness was based upon being honest and open with others, in expressing your ideas, needs or concerns. In the above example, you have been neither honest nor open. You were unwilling to challenge your assumption and ended up allowing it to control your behaviour. In electing to believe (or more accurately, assume) firstly that your friends would not listen and secondly, that there would be an unhealthy conflict if you disagreed,

You could have challenged the self-limiting thought by reminding yourself that it was OK for friends to have differences of opinion, that such a discussion does not necessarily

become heated, and that the others would very likely listen to you in the same way that you listened to them (if they are genuine friends).

For another example of faulty thinking and self-limiting assumptions, you might imagine yourself as a customer just presented with the bill in a restaurant – and you find that you have been overcharged by a few dollars.

You might perhaps think to yourself that you don't want to make a scene, because other people in the restaurant might think you are "cheap". And yet, it could have been just as likely that if you did dispute the bill, those other people, if they were watching at all, might well have been admiring your assertiveness. The point here is that the thoughts and perspectives you choose to adopt in a situation can become either empowering or disempowering. Flush out the self-limiting beliefs that have held you back in the past and learn to question their truth. Replace them with positive thoughts that support your willingness to assert your needs and preferences.



For example, imagine at a restaurant you wanted to ask for something not listed on the menu, but you were reluctant because you initially thought that it would be too much trouble, and too inconvenient for the kitchen. Instead however, you replace the initial thought and alternatively think to yourself"There's no harm in asking – they've probably had unusual requests before, and if it's too inconvenient for them, the worst thing that can happen is that they'll just politely decline – it's really no big deal to ask"

► PAUSE, REFLECT & RECORD

Can you think of a current situation where you may be making some assumptions in your thinking – and in doing so, you may be unnecessarily holding yourself back from pursuing your needs or interests?



Take control of your thinking

Imagine another situation in which you are frequently non-assertive with a particular co-worker, very often going along with their views on many issues even though you hold different views. You do not feel at all comfortable expressing any disagreement with them in your team meetings at work. The process of adjusting your thinking to support the adoption of a more assertive approach might go something like this

Step 1 Identify the fears and self-limiting beliefs that are holding you back from achieving greater assertiveness. Ask yourself what is stopping you from being assertive...
e.g. If I disagree with my co-worker, s/he won't like me and it would be terrible

Step 2 Dispute and critically challenge the fear. Question whether there is any real evidence that supports it as a valid belief. Identify if there is a fundamental error in the thought process.

e.g. I have observed that other people such as John disagree with them at times, and yet they are still able to maintain a friendly and workable relationship with them.

Step 3 Replace the negative belief with more positive and self-affirming self-talk
e.g. For one thing, it is of course nice to be liked by them, but I don't think that my happiness needs to depend on whether they like me or not. For another thing, often their views are not well-considered and by having seemed to agree with them, my own reputation as a professional may suffer. And finally, I think as long as I express my view in a constructive and positive manner, there is a real likelihood s/he will listen to them.

Some of the common fears / beliefs that can cause non-assertiveness

1. Fear of saying the wrong thing, or possibly damaging the relationship
i.e. hurting or upsetting the other person, making it worse
2. Lack of self-confidence and not wanting to bring undue attention to myself
i.e. doubting my ability to handle the situation
3. Intimidated by an "authority" figure (fearing a loss of their approval?)
4. Fear of the other person getting angry, and perhaps fearing possible future reprisals (i.e. they may try and get even with me)
5. Fear of being seen as selfish or dominating
6. Fear of failure
eg. I'd be embarrassed if it doesn't work, so I won't try my hardest
7. Lack of self-esteem eg. I don't deserve better than this anyway
8. Fear of rejection or not being liked
e.g. If I disagree with them, they won't like me as much in future
9. Fear of intimacy
e.g. If I open up too much and confide how I really feel, I'll just get hurt
10. Assuming it won't make a difference – so why bother anyhow

5. Decide to no longer put up with stuff that you have in the past

Now is the time to make a renewed commitment to yourself that you will no longer tolerate rude or unfair treatment from others. Decide that you will give voice to your needs and concerns, being as firm as might be necessary, having respect for yourself – whilst still showing due respect to others.

“In order to be walked over, you have to first be lying down”

Brian Weir

The snide remarks of a work colleague, or the unrelenting criticism of a family member – which you might have let go in the past out of a fear of confrontation, you will now be willing to face, and perhaps say something like “I don’t appreciate your comments, and would prefer in future that you be more constructive in what you say to me”

The fears which may have held you back in the past will no longer go unchallenged. You will flush out disabling thought processes and dispute them. You will recognise the wrong thinking that may have caused you in the past to be non-assertive, caused you to avoid saying no, and caused you to reluctantly agree to things that you did not really want to do (agreed to go and see that movie, or agreed to go to that party, or agreed to lend them some money) Disempowering thoughts that we listed earlier, such as

- They might not like me, if I were to disagree with them
- They’ll think I’m just being difficult
- They’ll get upset and offended if I don’t agree to go with them
- They’ll think that I don’t care about them, unless I agree to it
- They’ll think I’m being selfish if I don’t say yes

I spent too many years of my life worrying about what others thought of me. Too much time was wasted in wanting to be accepted by my peer-groups. It’s taken me more than forty years to learn the difference between liking to be liked, and needing to be liked.

“The person who genuinely likes himself will never be lonely”

Wayne Dyer

As soon as I realised that by being true to myself, by being willing to speak up and say what I really thought – and not fearing what others might think of me well, the funny thing was that others then actually seemed to be more impressed and influenced by what I had to say!!!

You might just find that if you release the need to be liked by others, and worry less about what they think of you – and instead re-focus your energy upon building strong foundations of self-acceptance – then what you may have chased for so long, will end up coming to you so much more easily.

Asserting yourself will become a more natural way of managing your interactions and relationships with others. And you will feel a deeper level of true self-respect.

► PAUSE, REFLECT & RECORD

What is some of the "stuff" that you have tolerated in the past, that you are now no longer prepared to put up with?



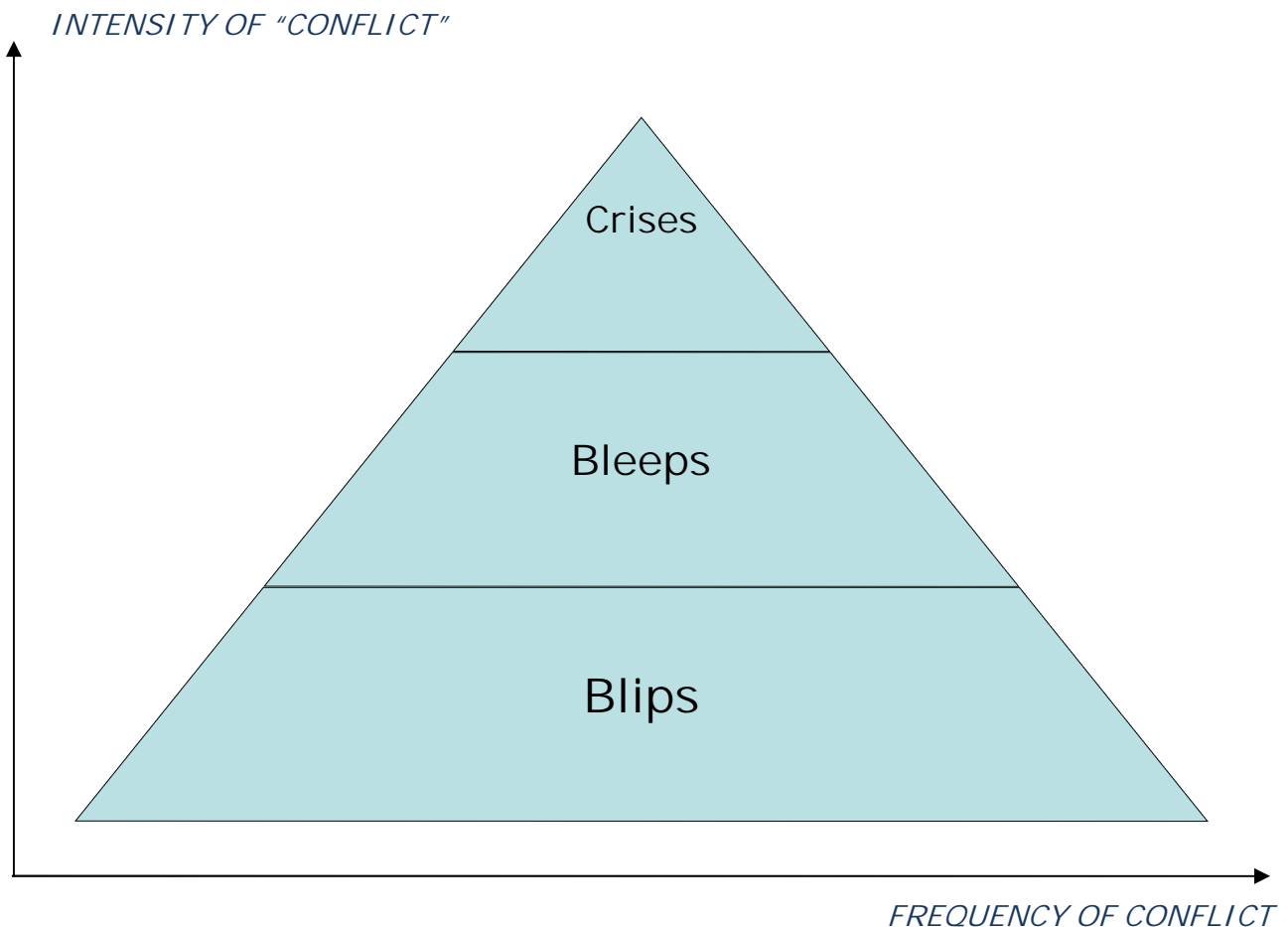
6. Assertively dealing with conflict in your relationships

In any relationship there will be issues, conflicts and difficulties that will occasionally arise. One measure of the health of a relationship will be how these difficulties are dealt with, and whether they are dealt with in a timely manner.

You might imagine that these conflicts vary in terms of how often (frequency) and how intense (intensity) they are when they do arise. The diagram below describes three different types of conflicts that can arise in a relationship: Blips, Bleeps and Crises.

The blip issue is the most common form of mild conflict we tend to experience, that registers on the relationship radar. These are of themselves small issues that can never-the-less cause annoyance. It could be for example your co-worker borrowing a pen and not returning it; or the shop attendant serving someone else even though you were there first; or it could be your spouse not hanging up their towel in the bathroom. They are not earth-shattering issues but they can certainly cause irritation.

This is where some assertiveness on your part is needed. Because the solution to these issues can sometimes be as simple as speaking up and asking for what you want. And even though you may not at first feel very confident in doing this, as long as you sound and appear confident, then the other person will very often respect your wishes.



We have to remind ourselves that our spouse or co-worker are not mind-readers and they may not be aware that what they are doing (or not doing) is actually causing us some frustration. Even though we think they should be more naturally considerate, there are plenty of times when people simply need to be reminded of what we require of them.

So, attempting to deal with blip-level issues is about asserting our needs and clearly and calmly explaining to those people what we are asking or expecting of them. There will be times when, if what we are asking is reasonable, others may even respond with an apology and say that they hadn't realised that it was important to us. Just try and remember to be gracious if a person apologises, but avoid feeling guilty in any way.

The issues that can carry a bit more emotion are those that register as a blip on the relationship radar. These are situations that will require more dialogue and will often require some problem-solving and further discussion in order to find a resolution. An issue may have escalated into a blip that began as an unaddressed blip.

The blip issue can be a reflection of a lack of communication in a relationship, with the parties sometimes allowing small issues to accumulate, because they have been reluctant to address them at an earlier stage. If the issue is a blip one, then often the other person will be feeling discomforted by what is going on as well. (Although maybe not as troubled as you)



Allowing too many "irritators" to accumulate, will add up eventually to a person feeling troubled, discontented and maybe even angry. Obviously, it is unlikely that anything constructive will be achieved through discussion with another person, if you are not able to control your anger. Unrestrained anger can cause you to become aggressive in your communication, which can spiral down into a destructive situation.

- Six strategies for attempting to deal with a blip issue include
1. Take some time to prepare your thoughts and plan how you will present the issue that is causing you concern. Be careful with the words you choose, because they will have a major influence on how receptive the other person will be towards you.
 2. Avoid any hint of blame or tendency for point scoring – your aim is to come to an understanding with the person about how things can be improved for the future
 3. Select an appropriate time to raise the issue with the other person
 4. Explain how you are feeling and what you are asking of the person (i.e. what you want them to do differently). Help them understand why the situation troubles you.
 5. Listen with an open mind to their views of the situation and try and understand how they may have been affected.
 6. Together, discuss what options could help improve the situation for you both

Your relationship could be nearing crisis when there are issues that seem to be causing intense anger, even fury – a place where the fabric of the relationship is in jeopardy and is close to being torn apart. A situation of this nature often requires an independent third party to help mediate (eg. a counsellor), in order to help encourage a more constructive exchange of views and to explore whether a resolution can be found.

“Facing a problem does not guarantee a resolution – but one thing’s for sure, until a problem is faced, no solution will be found”

Wayne Dyer

When anger has escalated to rage and fury, then a cycle of accusation, blame and counter-allegations will be triggered – the parties are too often more concerned with hurting and vengeance, rather than resolving.

If the parties are able to agree to have a mediator or counsellor to guide their discussions, and both come to recognise that dwelling upon the rights and wrongs of past events will not help find a solution to what is causing current conflicts – then there may be some hope of resolving the issues.

Take a break if a discussion gets too heated – this is a lot better than saying something in the heat-of-the-moment that just inflames the situation further, making it unlikely a solution will be found. If the relationship is in crisis, and you want it to continue, then you must be prepared to make some reasonable compromises if a solution is to be found.

One final point on building healthy relationships. Assertive communication is not just about being willing to raise issues; it is equally about being willing to express positive sentiments to others – voicing your appreciation and showing that you value others. Do not underestimate this aspect of assertiveness in building rewarding relationships!

► PAUSE, REFLECT & RECORD

i) Evaluating a conflict – is it a blip, bleep or crisis?

Think of some relationships, either at work in your personal life, in which you feel there might be some underlying conflicts / concerns causing some degree of tension or strain Assess each of these situations, and identify whether you regard them as blips, bleeps or crises - and what action you might need to take to address them.

ii) Expressing appreciation and giving positive feedback

Think of some important relationships in your life (both work and family) – are there people with whom you need to be expressing more appreciation and positive feedback?

A time to be assertive and a time to adapt

Although this workbook is dedicated to offering you guidance in further developing your assertiveness, it is also important to acknowledge that there may be occasions where you judge that an issue is not worth pursuing.

Even though there may have been inequity and unfairness in a situation, never-the-less there can be times when the wiser course of action is to adapt and simply make the best of an unpleasant situation – particularly if the situation is but a temporary one.

It may be because the issue would cost you too much in the way of time and energy to address, or possibly it really is beyond your ability to have any influence, nor make an impact. Knowing when to admit that there's not much likelihood of changing the situation, means that we can then start formulating sensible plans to cope with the situation.

But I am not talking about passively accepting a situation because of a fear of confrontation. I am suggesting you might sometimes choose to respond to a situation by accepting and adapting to it, because of a rational assessment of what you stand to gain versus lose if you attempt to address the issue and there is conflict. It is chronic patterns of regular conflict-avoidance driven by fear that does the damage - not the cool, measured assessment that you will be better served by patiently biding your time and waiting for the right opportunity to arise, before you assert yourself.

Timing is crucial. Sometimes, you might raise an issue with someone, and you do it in the correct assertive manner – but you have simply chosen the wrong time to do it – and hence you get a non-receptive response from them. So, remember to balance your willingness to assert yourself with a sense of patience – and ask yourself “Is it best to wait a little?” But then act boldly when the time is right, and without any guilt or regret.

Serenity prayer

“Lord, grant me the courage to
change the things I can;
the serenity to accept the things
I cannot change ;
and the wisdom to know
the difference”



Cultivate new friendships, if necessary

You may possibly find that it takes a while for your friends, family and co-workers to come to terms with the new assertive you. After all, some of them have probably been quite content to take advantage of the old accommodating you, who would consistently place the interests of others ahead of their own. And you were fairly easily manipulated.

Don't be surprised, and certainly don't be alarmed if some of them make comments that you seem to be acting a little strange, or you're not yourself lately. Do not allow these types of comments to trigger your old desire to please, nor any need for approval – instead, you might simply say with a confident smile, that you are feeling perfectly well.

Continue to self-monitor your behaviour to ensure that you are being assertive and not aggressive – in other words, you are voicing your opinions, but equally showing a willingness to listen and genuinely consider what others might have to say.

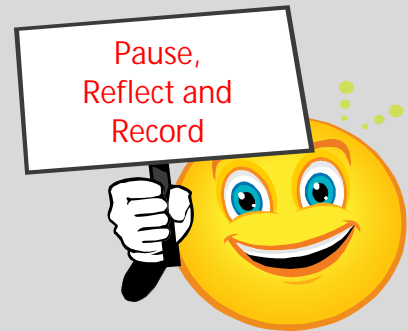
On occasion there are a few people who over-correct their behaviour, and in an over-zealous desire to rid themselves of accommodating patterns, over-shoot the mark and become a little too self-absorbed! However, with on-going self-awareness and review, this should not happen to you.



Remain alert to the “pull” of your environment to have you return to the old passive persona. It may even be necessary to have a chat with some of your friends about what you have been learning and why you are committed to achieving personal change. Your true friends will understand the actions you are taking, and will be both supportive and encouraging of your search to discover more empowerment and self-fulfilment.

If you find there are other so-called friends who seem to resist your growth towards greater self-confidence and self-belief – then it may be time to “prune” these relationships. You may need to deliberately work at cultivating new relationships and friendships that will have as their foundation, an acceptance and respect for the new, assertive you. These are likely to be relationships that will end up contributing additional impetus and momentum to your personal development journey.

“Like attracts like” is an old saying the assertive you will more likely attract other people who share your commitment to balance, fairness, learning and discovery.



► PAUSE, REFLECT & RECORD

Evaluating your friendships and your support network

- (i) Identify the friends and people in your environment, who you know you can count on for support and encouragement in your personal growth and development

- (ii) Who are the people in your environment that seem most resistant to you becoming more assertive?

- (iii) What are some ways that you could seek to broaden your network of friends, and perhaps develop a wider network of relationships with people who share your values, and who will accept you as a confident, assertive person with a right to be happy. Allow yourself to be creative in generating some novel ideas (whether it is joining a sports club, enrolling in a training course, or volunteering to join a community group or committee for example). Allow a free-flow of ideas

7. Say "no" to unreasonable requests

Why we need to learn how to say 'no' in the workplace

Now-days in the workplace, it seems our co-workers, our managers, and our customers are all placing more and more expectations and demands upon us. If we are going to remain productive – and just as importantly retain some sense of well-being – then we have to learn how to say "No" to requests that cannot be reasonably meet.

There is no point in repeatedly burning ourselves out trying to accommodate unrealistic demands.

The inability to say no carries the risk of damaging our credibility, if we end up failing to deliver on something to which we have made a commitment.

Additionally, the inability to say "No" can lead us to feeling fatigued, resentful and stressed if we end up regularly working through lunch breaks, or working long hours, in a feverish attempt to "get it all done".

Do you struggle with the word "no"?

We have already explored in some depth that your self-esteem should not be dependent upon whether other people like you, otherwise you may become a hostage to their opinion of you.

Someone who is assertive, who is aware of both their capabilities and limitations, is able to calmly evaluate requests made of them judge whether to agree or not and communicate their decision in a confident and clear manner. The assertive person does not feel they must appease or please others, but simply do what is fair.

How do we go about saying 'no' without risking our jobs?

We are not talking here about being un-cooperative or unhelpful with people. Our jobs exist to provide some type of service or product to clients – and most of us gain satisfaction from working within a team environment, one in which we exchange help and support with work-mates.

What we are discussing is the ability to say no to demands that either are unfair and unreasonable, or requests that are simply more than what we can do - given our current commitments.

We must try and remember that sometimes, the other person has no idea of what our existing workload might be, or perhaps does not fully appreciate the time involved for us to perform their request. In circumstances such as these, a key is patience and communication. A blunt refusal to help will simply burn bridges and damage goodwill – instead, simply explain your existing commitments – and perhaps propose another way or another time that you could offer assistance.

However, there are others in the workplace who will take advantage of people who cannot establish limits and assertively set boundaries. When dealing with these sorts of people, we need to be firm, yet polite.

Some of the steps to try and remember in assertively saying "No" – particularly if this is not something that comes comfortably to you, include.....

Saying NO : Graciously, But Assertively

1. Clarify the other person's request – so you are quite clear about what exactly is being asked of you
2. Pause, and take some time to think, rather than reacting immediately – this will enable you to exercise some self-control, rather than react impulsively.
3. Consider the request against your other existing commitments Calmly assess its relative priority for you and what might be impacted by agreeing to the request.
4. Explain your other commitments, politely but firmly saying "No" without feeling guilty – yet still showing some empathy for their difficulty
5. You might then offer them an alternative, or perhaps indicate the part of their request that you would be able to accommodate

Finally, there is the matter of what do you say to your boss, if s/he is asking you to complete something in a timeline that you believe is unreasonable and unachievable.

Naturally, your boss has the right to determine priorities – s/he can say "I want this done by the end of the day" You can't just say No to this – you will definitely run the risk of losing your job.

But what you can reasonably say is "As much as I would like to, as things stand at present, I wouldn't be able to get this task completed by the end of the day – but if you're prepared to wait until tomorrow for that sales report, then I could get this thing done today"or perhaps, "If someone else could do the client presentation tomorrow – then I'd be able to get this done today"

In other words, you need to project a desire to be helpful; after all, most relationships are based upon healthy "give and take". But don't let yourself become anyone's door-mat!

► PAUSE, REFLECT & RECORD

Can you think of any situations currently in your life in which you need to be saying no to unreasonable demands on you?



What Next



Having completed your reading and reflections now is the time to plan for the application of ideas and insights into concrete actions. As was discussed earlier in the book, personal change is not easy, and it will require a combination of supporting factors such as

1. Keep a focus upon the benefits and advantages of becoming more assertive
2. Introduce changes into your life on a slow and steady basis, not too quickly A few small changes at first (low risk, baby steps), and after a week or so, then working on a couple more changes and bedding them down ...
3. Ask for help and encouragement from a trusted friend, sibling or co-worker. You might even practice and rehearse with them your assertive responses to a forthcoming situation which is causing you some anxiety
4. Be patient with yourself, and appreciate that a lifetime of habits will not be changed in just a few days, or weeks. Do however; remain positive and optimistic in your belief that you will achieve your personal development goals over time.
5. Celebrate when you see that you are making some progress – no matter how small the steps may be, at least you are moving forward. Congratulate yourself when you do succeed in handling a situation with assertiveness.

You will need persistence!

There is a lovely parable on the theme of persistence told by Will Edwards, the inspirational U.K author. There is a young man who is on a quest to find Success. He seeks out a famous guru, an old man with long white hair and a small smile radiating from a deeply serene demeanour. He asks the guru, "What is the way to success?". The old man does not speak, but points calmly to a place in the distance.

The young man sets off in the direction to which he was pointed, motivated by the prospect of achieving success. However, he does not get far before he seems to hit a "wall" of some sort that stops him, and there is a loud "Splat"! The man is stunned and somewhat bruised, and limps back to the guru feeling disappointed, thinking that he must have misunderstood the message. He repeats his question to the old sage, who again silently points in the same direction.

The man sets off again in the direction pointed and this time gets a little further – but he again crashes into another seemingly invisible wall and a deafening "Splat" is heard. The man trudges back to the old teacher, feeling disheartened, frustrated and angry. He yells to the old man "I asked you which way to *Success* and I followed your directions But all that I got was *splattered*, Now speak to me this time, *which way is it to Success!!*"

The sage replied "Success IS that way, but you need go a little further, just past "Splat".



Your Personal Development Action Plan

Go back through this workbook and look at some of the notes you have recorded. With the ideas, insights and principles you have gained, what are three specific things you will do differently over the next few weeks

What further actions do you intend to take - although not immediately, but over the next few months

In conclusion - dare to follow your dreams

In closing, let me thank you for taking the time to consider the ideas in this workbook,

My wish for you is that in developing your assertiveness, you will also discover within you the daring to wholeheartedly follow your dreams. Believe that there are indeed vast reserves of capability that lie "still sleeping" within you, and harness both your courage and your faith, so you find that place in the world where your heart will sing with joy!

Embracing the timeless principles in this book, you will no longer allow yourself to be held back by a fear of what others may think! You will discover a composure that comes from having cultivated self-acceptance and self-belief. And in considering the qualities of courage and daring, we might conclude with a few words from Theodore Roosevelt.

"It is not the critic in life who counts, not the one who points out how the strong man stumbled or how the doer of deeds might have done them better.

The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena; whose face is marred with sweat and dust and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs and comes up short again and again; yet who knows persistence and dedicates himself to a worthy cause and who, at best knows the triumph of high achievement and who at worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly - so that his place shall never be with those timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat."

Theodore Roosevelt, 1858-1919,
26th US President and 1906 Nobel Peace Prize-winner.

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