

GUIDANCE ASSOCIATES OF PENNSYLVANIA

412 Erford Road, Camp Hill, PA 17011 (717) 732-2917; FAX: (717) 732-5375
Suite 205, 20 Briarcrest Square, Hershey, PA 17033, (717) 533-4312

Stanley E. Schneider, Ed.D.
Director

Learn to Stand Up for Yourself

Do you feel ignored, overworked, under-appreciated, misunderstood? If so, you may benefit from becoming more assertive.

"Assertiveness" means standing up for yourself and expressing your rights and feelings without denying the rights and feelings of others.

The nonassertive person lets bothersome things go by without speaking up. Nonassertive people do not get what they want, and often, the unhappiness that follows such disappointments can contribute to other problems such as depression, anger, substance abuse or family conflict.

Some people fear that assertiveness will meet with rejection, anger, dislike, disapproval or even a physical attack from another person. On the job, employees worry about alienating coworkers or getting fired.

But assertiveness is not "aggression". Nor does assertiveness mean being impolite, pushy or selfish. In fact, when handled correctly, assertiveness considers the other person and conveys respect for oneself and for others.

Assertiveness conveys emotion. It means being able to say "no" when you can't or don't want to do something, or being able to say "yes" when you want to be included or considered for something. It may mean to disagree, express an unpopular opinion, resist pressure applied against you, register feelings of disapproval or anger, work to change things, express feelings of love and support, or pay compliments.

It is true that assertiveness may not always be the most effective response. Sometimes it may be more effective to be accepting, supportive, agreeable or tolerant of a situation or another person. But it is also important to know how to be assertive when you need be.

If you wish to be assertive but fail to speak up for yourself, self-esteem takes a beating. On the contrary, when you are appropriately assertive, an increase in self-esteem, feelings of social competence, self-respect and respect from others will follow.

Assertive people make life easier for others by taking the guesswork out of relationships and making communications clearer and easier to understand. By helping things to run more efficiently, assertive individuals become assets to themselves and to the group to which they belong.

These tips can help you become more assertive:

Think through your position before you present it. If you are well prepared, others will be more willing to listen than if your ideas are presented in a haphazard, disorganized manner.

State your full position. Avoid the "drop a hint" approach to communication.

Keep your voice firm. Neither an apologetic nor demanding tone will do.

Be fair. Don't give in or agree to something you don't want, but do consider the opinions of others involved.

Be specific in your requests. Ask for what you want. Request a specific outcome.

Don't mix messages. Body language and verbal language should convey the same emotional message.

Natural eye contact conveys self-assurance. Don't stare, but don't avoid eye contact either.

Refer to self-help books in your bookstore or library for more information on assertiveness training.

For more information on learning to be assertive, contact your EAP at 717-732-2917.

Source: Paul Rappaport, Ph.D.