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ASSERTIVE BEHAVIOR

There is a lot of confusion regarding the difference between ASSERTIVENESS and AGGRESSIVENESS. Following are some general distinctions.

ASSERTIVE

An honest response: a positive statement; what one wants or does not want.

Behavior that is appropriate to the situation and that assists one reach a particular goal. (Note that one may choose to be "non-assertive" in order to remain uninvolved, to take time to assess a situation, develop trust, or for other reasons; one may choose to be 'aggressive' in order to raise consciousness, cause a shift in power, ward off a threat to one's integrity, or for other reasons.)

An "I" message rather than a "you" message, stating one's feelings rather than one's thoughts (ex: "I feel hurt and attacked!" rather than "You are cruel and thoughtless!")

A Win/Win situation. You may not get what you want; however, both parties leave with their self-confidence, self esteem and self-worth intact.

"Helpful" feedback: specific, well timed, descriptive rather than evaluative, a statement of feelings...

Components of assertive behavior: eye contact, body posture, gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice, word inflection, timing content (honest, spontaneous, sharing feelings...)

Assertive behavior: presumes a high degree of self-confidence and self-respect presumes caring; I care enough to get involved. Allows a maximum degree of self-determination.

AGGRESSIVE

An attack. **A Win/Lose situation.**

A "constant" statement: communicating thoughts, ideas, opinions rather than feeling. "You are insulting and rude!" rather than, "I feel insulted, put down, and not respected."

A "you" message. "Hurtful" feedback. (ex: "You are always late and inconsiderate! You don't care about me or anyone else!" rather than, "I have been waiting an hour. I also waited for you yesterday and last Wednesday. I want to count on you to arrive when you say you will. I feel very angry and I don't want this to keep happening. The next

time we set a date I want to do it carefully so that we can be realistic about the time."

"Aggressive comes from the word "aggrēdi" meaning to go forward or to approach, this could mean to **approach** for advise or council (as we are describing under "assertive" in this paper) or to **move against** with intent to injure or hurt; making contact".*

"Aggressive is necessary when restructuring cannot take place through self-affirmation or self-assertion. It is a thrust toward an adversary with the aim of causing a shift in power toward self or one's cause. It is overt conflict that involves the potentiality of force."*

"Constructive forms of aggression: cutting through barriers to initiate a relationship; confronting another with intent to penetrate his/her consciousness, warding off powers that threaten one's integrity; actualizing one's self in a hostile environment; overcoming barriers to healing."*

* Rollo May; Power & Innocence

NON-ASSERTIVE

A dis-honest response.

Lose/Lose. No contact: lack of involvement between persons or with a situation, problem, organization (could be family, friend(s), church, social cause...)

Non-assertive responses are often an attempt to be polite or to avoid "hurting someone's feelings". Usually this "attempt" backfires; the other person is left puzzled regarding your true feelings and wants. They can misinterpret your evasiveness or lack of honesty. Such Misinterpretation can serve to reduce the person's self confidence, often giving "I'm not ok." messages when not intended.

Signs of non-assertive patterns: feeling guilt or anger after a transaction hearing yourself gossiping about someone rather than dealing with them face to face; collecting "brown stamps" for a free (no guilt) attack; being "poor me" or "the victim"; saying "Why does everything happen to me?!"; abdicating responsibility for your life and actions ("It's his/her fault... allowing yourself to be a "thing" with others "doing to you" rather than "doing with you."

A non-assertive person is: uninvolved: unable/unwilling to risk; separating from others even though their bodies may be in the same room/office/bed. **Doesn't care enough** to get involved, risk, fight (care enough about **self** at the **first** level, **others or the organization, cause, issue** at the **second** level.

CAUTIONS & REMINDERS:

1. **It is important to begin slowly and carefully** (full of care for yourself and others)
Plan experiences that assure a reasonable probability of success and gradually tackle larger problem areas.
2. **It is helpful to keep a journal:** planning an assertive response to a particular problem situation; doing it; critiquing it; listing the learning; doing it again; critiquing it; listing the learning; doing it; repeating the process until satisfied.
3. **Remember that a new style of behavior can upset long established patterns** of interaction, particularly with persons close to you: assertive persons must be willing to pay the consequence for their action (or take responsibility for their behavior). Therefore, consequences should be considered during planning. This makes it important to distinguish between assertive and aggressive, and important to become skilled at bringing about a win/win situation.
4. **We are only free if we have choices.** No one response is "right" or "wrong". The goal is to be free to choose the style that is most appropriate in this particular situation; the style that will assist you reach your objective. You are unfree if you are locked into only one style.

COMPARISON OF ALTERNATIVE BEHAVIOR STYLES

Characteristics

Passive

Allow others to choose for you. Emotionally dishonest. Indirect, self-denying, inhibited. In win/lose situations you lose. If you do get your own way, it is indirect.

Assertive

Choose for self. Appropriately honest. Direct, self-respecting, self-expressing, straight forward. Convert win/lose to win/win.

Aggressive

Choose for others. Inappropriately honest (tactless). Direct, self-enhancing. Self-expressive, derogatory. Win/Lose situation which you win.

Your own feelings in the exchange

Passive

Anxious, ignored, helpless, manipulated. Angry at yourself and/or others.

Assertive

Confident, self-respecting, goal oriented, valued. Later: accomplished.

Aggressive

Righteous, superior, depreciatory, controlling. Later: possibly guilty.

Others' feelings in the exchange

Passive

Guilty or superior. Frustrated with you.

Assertive

Valued, respected.

Aggressive

Humiliated, defensive, resentful, hurt.

Others' view of you in the exchange

Passive

Lack of respect. Distrust. Can be considered a pushover. Do not know where you stand.

Assertive

Respect, trust, know where you stand.

Aggressive

Vengeful, angry, distrustful, fearful.

Outcome

Passive

Others achieve their goals at your expense. Your rights are violated.

Assertive

Outcome determined by above-board negotiation. Yours and others rights respected.

Aggressive

You achieve your goal at others' expense. Your rights upheld; others violated.

Underlying relief system

Passive

I should never make anyone uncomfortable or displeased... except myself.

Assertive

I have a responsibility to protect my own rights: I respect others but not necessarily their behavior.

Aggressive

I have to put others down to protect myself.

From: "**Managing Stress Before It manages You**", by Steinmetz, Blankenship, Brown, Hall, and Miller, 1980.

TEST FOR ASSERTIVE BEHAVIOR

1. When you are angry with someone do you usually not say anything directly because you don't want to hurt their feelings or because what you want to say might sound aggressive and they won't like you anymore?
2. When someone gets angry with you do you usually feel angry in return, back off, or make a joke out of it and try to forget the flare-up?
3. If someone asks a favor from you and you refuse do you think he probably will think you don't like him, think he will hesitate to ask you again, or think he'll act as though he doesn't mind but will secretly resent you?
4. When you need something from someone do you usually feel as though you shouldn't bother him by asking, afraid to ask because he might say no, or as though he should do what you want?
5. Do you feel angry or hurt when;
 - a) Your parents or spouse tell you that you are stupid and can't do anything right?
 - b) In a group you make an important statement which is ignored?
 - c) Someone criticizes you for an act that you know without a doubt doesn't apply to you and is ridiculous?
 - d) Someone has put you down in an indirect way; there may be some truth to the putdown, but it's basically unfair?
6. Can you initiate a conversation just about anywhere with someone you don't know?
7. When you need time and information from a busy professional do you usually think he will resent you taking up his valuable time or make you feel inferior?

If you answered yes to any one of these questions or any part of a question assertive training could be helpful to you.

GLOSSARY OF SYSTEMATIC ASSERTIVE SKILLS

BROKEN RECORD

Calm repetition--saying what you want over and over again. This teaches you to use persistence without you having to rehearse arguments or angry feelings beforehand, in order to be "up for dealing with manipulative verbal side traps, argumentative baiting, irrelevant logic, while sticking to your desired point.

FOGGING

Accept manipulative criticism by calmly acknowledging to your critic the probability that there may be some truth in what he/she says, yet allows you to remain your own judge of what you do. Once learned you can receive criticism comfortably without becoming anxious or defensive, while giving no reward to those using manipulative criticism.

FREE INFORMATION

Recognize simple cues given by a social partner in everyday conversation to indicate what is interesting or important to that person. Once you learn to recognize free information when you perceive it, it allows you to feel less shy in entering into conversation while at the same time prompting social partners to talk more easily about themselves.

NEGATIVE ASSERTION

Accepting your errors and faults (without having to apologize) by strongly and sympathetically agreeing with hostile or constructive criticism of your negative qualities. Once learned this allows you to look more comfortably at negatives in your own behavior or personality without feeling defensive and anxious, or resorting to denial of real error while at the same time reducing your critic's anger or hostility.

NEGATIVE INQUIRY

Actively prompting criticism in order to use the information (if helpful) or exhaust it (if manipulative) while prompting your critic to be more assertive, less dependant on manipulative ploys. Once in close relationships while prompting the other person to express honest negative feelings and improve communication.

SELF-DISCLOSURE

Accepting and initiating discussion of both the positive and negative aspects of your personality, behavior, lifestyle, intelligence, to enhance social communication and reduce manipulation. This allows you comfortably to disclose aspects of yourself and your life that previously caused feeling of ignorance, anxiety, or guilt.

WORKABLE COMPROMISE

In using your verbal assertive skills, it is practical, whenever you feel that your self-respect is not in question to offer a workable compromise to the other person. You can always bargain for your material goals unless the compromise affects your personal feelings of self-respect. If the end goal involves a matter of you self-worth, however, there can be no compromise.

*** A BILL OF ASSERTIVE RIGHTS ***

1. You have the right to judge your own behavior, thoughts, and emotions, and to take the responsibility for their initiation and consequences upon yourself.
2. You have the right to offer no reasons or excuses for justifying your behavior.
3. You have the right to judge if you are responsible for finding solutions to other people's problems.
4. You have the right to change your mind.
5. You have the right to make mistakes and be responsible for them.
6. You have the right to say " I don't know."
7. You have the right to be independent of the goodwill of others before coping with them.
8. You have the right to be illogical in making decisions.
9. You have the right to say " I don't understand."
10. You have the right to say " I don't care."

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO SAY NO, WITHOUT FEELING GUILTY.

* Taken from: "**When I Say No, I Feel Guilty**", by Manuel J. Smith, Ph.D.

WAYS TO BECOME ASSERTIVE

If you don't like your answers to the assertive test, if you're interested in assertive behavior, or if you would like to put into practice The Bill of Assertive Rights read:

1. "When I Say No, I Feel Guilty" pub: Bantam by: Manuel J. Smith, Ph.D.
2. "Your Perfect Right" pub: Impact and "Stand Up, Speak Out, Talk Back!" both by: Robert E. Alberte, Ph.D. and Michael L. Emmons, Ph.D.
3. "Don't Say Yes When You Want To Say No" pub: Dell Publishing Co., Inc. by: Herbert Fensterheim, Ph.D. and Jean Baer.
4. "Why Am I Afraid To Tell You Who I Am" pub: Argus Communication Co. by: John Powell.

Intervention Techniques for Supervisors

Constructive confrontation can develop employee problem-solving skills and enhance the boss-employee relationship.

It's a big managerial mistake to avoid the unpleasant task of confronting a problem employee. Silence shows approval. It allows the employee to continue self-destructive behavior and poor work performance. The morale of an entire work area may be lowered. Positive intervention techniques can help a supervisor confront this unpleasant problem.

1. State the specific problem behavior in concrete terms.
2. Ask open-ended questions to get responses and increase accountability.
3. Request that an employee devise a strategy to correct behavior.
4. Monitor the employee's progress weekly.

Constructive Confrontation

A manager has a greater chance of success by confronting the employee as soon as work performance declines. One company found that constructive confrontation was 75 percent successful with alcoholic employees and 55 percent successful with other problem employees. They made performance reviews a continual process in order to keep the employee aware of improving or declining performance.

Confront an employee privately and with documented evidence. Prepare your case mentally. Concentrate on remaining calm. It helps to rehearse the confrontation in your mind beforehand. You want to minimize the person's denial so you can move on to a solution. Focus on future performance and don't dwell on past mistakes.

Present the problems as unacceptable behavior rather than incompetence. This helps preserve the employee's self-esteem and also quells any anger. Show how the present

Listen to the employee's problems, but remain firm that job performance needs to improve. If there is a reasonable cause for any problem, help find a resolution or refer the employee to an employee assistance program.

If you see no improvement, try "crisis precipitation." This involves formal discipline. A written warning or a day of suspension is given in order for the person to rethink priorities. This can jolt an employee back into reality. Avoid using formal discipline on an

Because denial is part of the disease, you will often have to confront drug-dependent employees. A calm, nonjudgmental, professional approach works best. Show any documentation you have of work-related problems such as absenteeism, tardiness or decreased work output. The employee is accountable for his job performance and should be reminded of this. Show genuine concern, but don't try to counsel. Avoid being personal and don't let denial deter you. Reassure the employee of confidentiality and be ready to offer assistance through an EAP. Let a professional assess the severity of the problem.

If the employee admits to a need for help, arrange time off from work, if necessary, for treatment. If he doesn't, and his performance continues to be substandard, have a second meeting. Follow company policy on such details as documentation and when disciplinary action begins. Continue to emphasize that help is available and will offset the need for discipline.

behavior affects co-workers, the department, and the company.

employee who is trying to turn things around. Give him time to improve and praise him for positive steps forward.

Confronting Drug Abusers

Start by establishing trust within the department, so that employees can come to you with job-related or personal problems. If they know you will treat them respectfully and confidentially, they won't fear disciplinary action when they seek help. This kind of work environment encourages employees to ask for help on their own.