

BEING MORE ASSERTIVE – SAY WHAT YOU REALLY THINK!



Are you a poodle or a rottweiler? Do you allow yourself to be railroaded, overworked and taken advantage of? Or do you snap angrily at the slightest provocation? Wouldn't it be better if you could simply stand up for yourself when you realise it is necessary? In any situation human beings respond with one of three basic modes of behaviour: They are either ASSERTIVE, Aggressive or Submissive.

Assertive behaviour is about getting the balance right.

1. A balance of honesty and fairness with yourself and others
2. A balance of self-respect and respect for others
3. A balance of rights and responsibilities towards yourself and others

Everyone is capable of using all three behaviour modes. We do not have to be 'bounced' into these modes by other people - we can **choose** how we behave, so we can use this knowledge to modify our behaviour style, to achieve more assertive outcomes. Follow the three simple rules below and you will never need to say "S/He made me so angry/frustrated/upset ..." ever again!

What are the psychological advantages of being assertive?

Being free to:

1. Be in control of your own behaviour and not be pushed into inappropriate behaviour
2. Be realistic about your own behaviour and capabilities and those of others
3. Be able to take pleasure in your successes and accept your failures with equanimity

THREE TOOLS TOWARDS BEING MORE ASSERTIVE

TOOL NUMBER 1 – SELF-TALK SALVATION

One of the main reasons we feel that our emotions, feelings and behaviour are unacceptable and difficult to deal with is that we constantly tell ourselves that they are!! Whatever we are doing, when the going gets tough we tend to indulge in Negative Self-Talk

It's bound to end in disaster ... I can't cope ... It shouldn't happen to me ...I mustn't make a mistake

This leads to 'CATASTROPHISING' which is painting only negative brain pictures to help us problem solve, concentrating on worst case scenario. Here are three simple steps to self-talk salvation:

1. **Cutting down the Catastrophising** - Accept that the worst is not the most likely reality. By all means *look* at the worst-case scenario **but then halve it – and halve it again!** Recognise that whatever is worrying you is very unlikely to happen – and that even if it did, you would probably be able to cope.

2. Pointing out the Positive – For the future - deliberately remember things that went well last time, or times when you felt comfortable and in control. Look for the possible positives in the up coming event, linger on these for a while. **Thinking positively leads to acting positively.**

3. Substitute Survival Statements – Negative self-talk includes words like can't, shouldn't, must or mustn't – parental reminders. Once they may have saved you from danger or wrongdoing, now they may prevent you from moving forward. Practise Replacing - I *can't*, *mustn't*, *shouldn't* etc with: **I will, I can, and I am able to...** This leads to **Positive Self-Talk (Affirmation)** - It *will* work out, I *can* get through it, it *will* be a learning experience, I *am able (trained)* to ...

TOOL NUMBER 2 - MAKING A REQUEST OR STATEMENT

We all have the right to make a request of someone to help us in a given situation. We have a balancing responsibility to accept the other person may choose not to accede; this should not stop you from voicing your wants, needs or point of view.

1. Make an "I" statement – of your wants, needs, ideas or opinions. "I think this is important ..." "I'd like you to be on time" "I need your co-operation" Make it clear, unapologetic and unambiguous

2. Empathise – appreciate and respect their needs or their point of view. Avoid using the word "understand" it is better to realise, see, appreciate or acknowledge

3. Look for a workable compromise – this is optional and doesn't have to be 50/50. You are exploring the options to look for a WIN/WIN solution to both sets of needs, which helps maintain your working relationship

4. Agree on a joint solution – always check that you both have the same understanding of the outcome and take any actions necessary to accomplish this.

TOOL NUMBER 3 – SAYING NO NICELY!

We all like to be liked. Therefore, one of the hardest things to do is to say 'NO' to a colleague. We tend to believe it means we are being awkward, unhelpful, and uncooperative, so we don't say it. ***In other words, how often do we say yes and mean no?*** Would it not be better to say honestly and directly that we cannot accept a task? Saying no is a direct and speedy answer which does not waste either your or the other person's time by unnecessary prevarication. It is kinder, more honest and unequivocal.

Always remember – you are not rejecting the person, you are merely refusing this particular request.

1. Just say no – you do not have to preface it with any tentative language, plunge in – far better to have five minutes of discomfort now than hours of bitterness later!

2. Because ... give one clear, genuine reason – don't waffle, be honest, don't make an excuse, or even worse – several excuses! Do include your feelings if they are relevant.

3. Thank or acknowledge - the other where appropriate. It is good to *thank* them if they are asking you to take part in something they think will benefit you, such as an interesting project. *Acknowledge* the difficulties they may have if you cannot help them. It softens the blow to show empathy and proves that you are listening to them.

4. Look for the win/win - is there anything you can say yes to? Even if what you can help them with is only a fraction of what you can't help them with, it still helps to end on a positive note. It also demonstrates that you genuinely want to help and are not simply being awkward.

CONCLUSION

We have three simple tools to help us be more assertive. Remember that behaviour breeds behaviour – being honestly assertive to another often helps them to be honest, fair and assertive with you! Being assertive may not always give you the answer that you want – nothing will guarantee that! But it does give you the best chance of getting something of what you want, whilst maintaining or even improving the relationship you have with the receiver.

Sonya O'Sullivan

If you are interested in finding out more about Sonya O'Sullivan and how she can help the people in your organisation become more effective communicators, please contact her at:

sonya@stratusassociates.co.uk

www.stratusassociates.co.uk

Telephone: 0161 904 7060

