

CORPORATED MANAGEMENT / HUMAN RESOURCES

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PAGE: 1

Stand up for yourself

By being assertive, you can get what you want while respecting others' feelings.

DO you ever find yourself saying "Yes" when you would rather say "No"? Do you sometimes feel that you are drowning in work and stress, yet are unable to speak up about it? Have you ever been in a group of confident people and struggled to express your views, as you doubted the merit of your contribution?

If you said "Yes!" to any of these questions, you are not alone. Recent studies show that leaders who come across as low or high in assertiveness tend to be seen as less effective, according to a study in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* published by the American Psychological Association.

Leaders in the middle may have an "optimal" level of assertiveness, but the majority of leaders are on the extremes. The research suggests that being seen as under- or over-assertive may be the most common weakness among aspiring leaders.

There are many benefits of behaving assertively:

- You let others know what you want and don't want in a confident way;
- You are realistic about what you can commit to, and therefore confident you can deliver;
- You can say "no" to tasks yet still retain respectful relationships;
- You can give and receive constructive criticism;



To become more assertive, choose someone you admire for his assertive behaviour, observe and learn from him. - AFP

- You are straightforward and honest in your communication, yet also respectful of other people's needs, wants and rights;
- You perform better at work and have higher prospects for career growth; and

- You build strong relationships with colleagues and superiors.

So what is assertiveness?

Assertiveness means asking for what you want while showing respect for the other person's rights and feelings.

Assertive vs aggressive

There is often confusion between assertiveness and aggressiveness. These are very different. Assertiveness is based on balance: you are forthright about what you want and need, yet you still consider the rights, needs and feelings

of others. Aggressive behaviour is based on winning. You do what is in your own best interest without regard for the rights, needs and feelings of others.

The assertive person is respectful and fair, never demeaning. Conversation is professional, not personal. An assertive person tackles the problem not the person. He states what he wants to see happen as opposed to wasting time blaming and fault finding.

Do assertive people ever feel anxious about expressing their needs and wishes? Of course they do, but they still act and take responsibility for the outcome.

Rather than focusing on how much fear and anxiety they feel, they deal with other people and situations despite their fears or worries.

There are many pay-offs from being assertive. It means getting your priorities right, negotiating with other people rather than arguing.

It allows you to be authentic and true to yourself, knowing who you are and what you believe in. Being assertive leads to a more empowered life with greater prospects for personal and professional growth. - Singapore Straits Times/Asia News Network

■ ARTICLE by Maria Kassova.

Steps to help you become more assertive at work

- Decide you want to be an assertive person. Choose someone that you admire for his assertive behaviour, observe and learn from him.
- Develop a belief system that allows you to assert yourself. This means you give yourself permission to be angry, to say "No", to ask for help, and to make mistakes.
- Start the journey. Remember that building a new skill is not always easy and quick, yet

the results are rewarding.

- Communicate with calmness and clarity. Use language that is direct but respectful.
- Communicate your feedback by summarising the other person's behaviour, letting him know how you feel about it, using an "I feel" statement (instead of "you make me feel ..." or "you are ...") and showing him how he can specifically change that behaviour.
- Ensure you are allowed to complete your

thoughts. If the other person interrupts, you may say, "Just a moment, I haven't finished yet."

- Maintain good eye contact, keep your posture open and relaxed, make sure your facial expression agrees with the message, and keep a level, well-modulated tone of voice.
- Listen and let people know you have heard what they said by paraphrasing and summarising. Ask questions for clarification.

- Practise what you have to say in the mirror or with a friend until you feel comfortable. Build up your assertiveness muscle gradually. Don't get discouraged if you behave non-assertively. Few people like confrontation, but it's important to stand up for yourself. It will become easier.
- Celebrate every time you push yourself to be assertive, regardless of whether or not you achieved the desired results.