

This workbook will help you to be assertive without damaging your working relationships.

Whether you find that you are not assertive enough, or come across as too assertive, the following exercises will guide you through what high quality assertiveness looks like and how you can apply these skills in your personal and professional relationships

HEE

Assertiveness Workbook

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What does it mean to be “assertive”?

How do you react in tricky situations? What is assertiveness?

Consider the following 4 ways to react to any given situation.

1. **Aggressive** (confrontational)
2. **Passive** (non-confrontational)
3. **Indirectly aggressive** (indirect resistance to the demands of others and an avoidance of direct confrontation)
4. **Assertive** – definitions of assertiveness all share very similar traits. Here are 3 definitions
 - a. Confidence and directness in claiming your rights or putting forward your views.
 - b. Direct, open communication that balances your needs with the needs of others.
 - c. Standing up for yourself, but not at the disadvantage of other people.

REFLECTION 1: Which of the 4 communication styles tends to be your default behaviour when you find yourself in a challenging situation? Jot down your initial reaction, and we will look at how to move to a more effective response further into the workbook.

REFLECTION 2: Look again at definition 4b above. Consider the image below, which shows different attitudes towards valuing your own and others’ needs.

Assertiveness and needs

I value my needs
I don't value your needs

I don't value my needs
I don't value your needs

I value my needs
I value your needs

I value your needs
I don't value my needs

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- a) Which of the 4 reactions (Aggressive/Passive/Indirectly Aggressive/Assertive) do you think is represented in each box? Write it in the matching box.
- b) What could be the **impact** of each of the 4 value statements in the 'Assertiveness and Needs' image on you and on the other person? You might want to consider a real situation that you find difficult and consider the 4 possible outcomes.

1. I value my needs, I don't value your needs

Impact on you:

Impact on the other person:

2. I don't value my needs, I don't value your needs

Impact on you:

Impact on the other person:

3. I value my needs, I value your needs

Impact on you:

Impact on the other person:

4. I value your needs, I don't value my needs

Impact on you:

Impact on the other person:

I value my needs, I don't value your needs. This is typically associated with aggressive behaviour. It takes no consideration for the other person in the interaction. It is about getting what you want without considering the impact on others and other consequences. You may recognise that this could also be a safety risk. Be careful not to confuse aggressiveness with assertiveness. They are not the same.

I don't value my needs, I don't value your needs. This is typically associated with indirectly aggressive behaviour. The resistance and avoidance of confrontation means that neither side is understood and less than ideal behaviour continues on both sides of the interaction, often without the clarity of why there is such difficulty.

I value my needs, I value your needs. This is typically associated with assertive behaviour. It takes into account that no-one wakes up in the morning looking to give other people a hard time. It involves understanding both sides of a situation with a view to creating an interaction that recognises both positions and tries to get to an agreeable place for both parties.

I value your needs, I don't value my needs. This is typically associated with passive behaviour. Not valuing your own needs, can lead to you being increasingly upset or frustrated in a situation. There is also a risk of it leading to a learned helplessness.

Assertiveness — where are you comfortable?

REFLECTION 3: It is useful to understand specific areas which you might need to work on rather than working on “assertiveness” generally - which is more abstract!

Look at the differences in the groups of people at the top of the table below .

Rate how comfortable you would feel performing each of the listed activities with each group.

Use the following rating scale:

1 I would feel very uncomfortable and would probably never do this	2 I would feel uncomfortable, but I would do this if it was important	3 I would feel some discomfort, but I would do this fairly regularly	4 I would feel comfortable doing this in most situations
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Friends and family	Colleagues in junior roles	Colleagues at a similar level	Colleagues in senior roles	Strangers in service roles (e.g waiters/shop assistants, etc.)	Strangers in authority roles (e.g. officials, dignitaries, etc.)	Patients
Saying 'no' to requests that are unwelcome, impractical or unreasonable						
Giving praise and compliments to others on their performance and behaviour						
Giving critical feedback to others on their performance and behaviour						
Receiving praise and compliments						
Receiving critical feedback and acknowledging mistakes						
Expressing your opinions on a subject even if others have different opinions						
Asking for help, advice or opinions from others						
Expressing negative emotions (anger, frustration, dissatisfaction, disappointment, disapproval)						
Expressing positive emotions (warmth, happiness, delight, gratitude, joy, pride)						
Stating your needs, expressing your preferences and claiming your rights						
Initiating a conversation						

Your Scenarios

Using the previous exercise as inspiration, think about three specific scenarios that you would like to work on.

They can be...

- Examples where you would have liked to have reacted differently in the past
- Scenarios that you think you might face in the future

Make some notes in the boxes below so you can remember the scenarios. As you have any thoughts on what you can try or do differently – add them to the boxes.

Scenario 1

Scenario 2

Scenario 3

Understanding Reactions: Feelings

Showing your feelings or becoming emotional can attract criticism. You may have heard comments such as “crazy”, “childish”, “irrational” or have been told that showing emotion means you are not in control. As a result you may have tried to hold this back. This is denying feelings and it doesn’t work. It can lead to physical illness or build-up of stress amongst other possible outcomes.

Being aware of emotions and feelings is an important part of improving your assertiveness. Emotions drive your reactions and they are a completely normal part of being a human! BUT you should be aware of HOW you react to them. The aim is to get yourself to a place where you give yourself a CHOICE. This comes from your awareness of the situation you are in and being able to identify how you are feeling.

REFLECTION 4: Add (to the scenario boxes) how the difficult scenarios you identified earlier make you feel, and how those feelings might have influenced how you reacted to that situation or might react to a future situation. Some of the words below might help:

Helpless	Scornful	Isolated	Anxious	Grumpy
Defeated	Amused	Alienated	Hopeless	Afraid
Scared	Disturbed	Calm	Angry	Disgraced
Powerless	Shocked	Stunned	Worried	Awkward
Outraged	Overwhelmed	Apprehensive	Uncertain	Nervous
Rejected	Uncomfortable	Tense	Annoyed	Uncomfortable
Hostile	Isolated	Bitter	Disappointed	Exasperated
Distrusting	Dismayed	Depressed	Humiliated	Disoriented
Disillusioned	Guilty	Insecure	Self-conscious	Neglected
Bitter	Numb	Insulted	Irritated	Frustrated
Suspicious	Resentful	Indifferent	Alarmed	Confused
Inferior	Amazed	Hesitant	Embarrassed	Regretful
Cautious	Hurt	Fearful	Unsettled	Depressed
				Panicked

Three bits of advice for helping you create more choice when you need to react in an emotional situation:

(a) **Name it.** When you can acknowledge your feelings, you can trust your body and your perception of the situation and express yourself assertively. The more you are able to identify how you are feeling, the more control you will have over the reactions that feeling will trigger.

- You could acknowledge to yourself
- You can acknowledge the feelings out loud
 - “When you x I feel y”
 - “I feel *nervous* about asking this...”
 - “When you drive like that, I feel really *scared*...”
- You can release physical expressions of feelings in private

(b) **Detect** what your body is telling you and acknowledge it. Your bodily sensations can be an excellent indicator of what you are feeling.

What are the physical clues (personal to you) that suggest that you are feeling ... (write them next to the emotion)

- Angry?
- Envious?
- Frustrated?
- Helpless?

(c) **Take a time out!** Sometimes, you recognise a feeling and you might also be aware that you don't make the best choices or responses when this emotion is triggered. You may need some time to think first. So, consider giving a default response of something along the lines of:

"I will need some time think about that, can I come back to you in 10 minutes?"

"I am not sure that I can give you my best response at the moment, I'll get back to you this afternoon. How does that sound?"

(note: At the end of this statement, an open-ended question is used instead of closed (yes or no) type question. This will likely increase the quality of the response you get back in order to aid your understanding of the other person's thinking. This is useful in a range of situations where more information would be helpful.)

"That request makes me feel anxious, so I will need a few minutes to give it the appropriate attention so I can give you the best possible response. I could come back to you in 5 minutes or this afternoon, which would you prefer?"

(note: in this example, giving an either or response minimises the chance that you will get pushed for a "now" response).

Self-Esteem

Behaving assertively can be easier if you have a strong sense of your own key strengths and values. It is at the heart of **valuing your own needs** - you recognise the value you bring to your work, specific situations and the people around you.

REFLECTION 5: ROLES

Identifying roles that are important to you could indicate your strengths and point towards key aspects of your sense of identity. Here are some common roles that people take in various situations. This list is not exhaustive, and you may be able to think of other roles that are important to you.

- **Adviser** — consultant – guide – counsellor
- **Connector** — team-builder – networker – resource finder
- **Creator** — inventor – designer – innovator
- **Influencer** — persuader – salesperson – campaigner
- **Pioneer** — entrepreneur – trailblazer – risk-taker
- **Researcher** — investigator – explorer – enquirer
- **Inspirer** — visionary – motivator – leader
- **Communicator** — educator – explainer – spokesperson
- **Problem-solver** — trouble-shooter – analyst – fixer
- **Implementer** — achiever – worker – pragmatist
- **Strategist** — decision-maker – goal-setter – navigator
- **Organiser** — planner – anticipator – coordinator
- **Mediator** — negotiator – agent – intermediary
- **Nurturer** — developer – carer – helper
- **Evaluator** — auditor – judge – monitor

- Which roles do you find yourself taking again and again? Which do you find yourself avoiding?
- Which roles feel most comfortable to you? Which feel most unnatural?
- Which roles would you like to develop or spend more time in? Which would you like to reduce?

Choose three roles that you have identified as being important. Please write 100 words on why each role is important to you and how you have developed the qualities needed to fulfil it. Consider experiences inside and outside of work, they can all be examples of the roles that are most important to you.

The important thing that we want you to appreciate is that we are all valuable and have something beneficial to bring to our work.

Role 1

Role 2

Role 3

Top Tip: Capture your successes and things that go well on a regular basis, small and large. Write them in a notebook or electronic document so that you don't forget. It can be difficult to remember what happened a few weeks ago, never mind a few months ago! Re-read these successes when your confidence needs a boost, or you need to remind yourself that you are valuable. One nice bonus from doing this is that research shows that individuals who practised valuing themselves before meeting new people are deemed more likeable and are found to be more influential.

Boundaries

In this section we are going to look at understanding where your boundaries lie. You can consider these to be the point at which assertive action is required. For example, if you are asked to do something by being shouted at, this could be considered unprofessional (unless perhaps it is an absolute emergency situation), and you might feel that an assertive response is called for.

You don't always have to react immediately, you can consider a time out, and if you do simply accept the situation, you can still address it later on.

Identifying that a boundary has been crossed is important, otherwise, there is the danger that we could find excuses for the other person's behaviour. This is effectively not valuing ourselves or our own needs. Even if you do not feel that you can respond assertively in a particular situation, knowing that your boundary has been crossed is a great first step. It means that you could try a response, the next time the boundary is crossed, or seek help.

One element that can help you is to look at what is important to you – your goals and needs. They can help you identify whether a situation is moving you towards or away from what is important to you. You may recognise that difficult situations are often an indicator of not being in alignment with your goals and this needs to be addressed. Additionally, a challenging situation may give you a clue to things that are important to you that you have not yet identified.

REFLECTION 6: GOALS

It is important to be clear with yourself about your needs and priorities. What are the goals that motivate you?

- **Entertainment** — experiencing excitement, avoiding boredom
- **Tranquillity** — feeling relaxed, avoiding stress
- **Happiness** — experiencing joy, avoiding distress
- **Bodily sensation** — experiencing pleasurable bodily sensations, avoiding pain or discomfort
- **Physical well-being** — feeling healthy, avoiding illness
- **Exploration** — satisfying curiosity, avoiding ignorance
- **Understanding** — gaining knowledge and making sense, avoiding misconceptions, errors and confusions
- **Intellectual creativity** — engaging in original thinking and novelty, avoiding familiarity
- **Positive self-evaluation** — maintaining self-confidence or self-worth, avoiding feelings of failure and guilt
- **Unity** — experiencing connectedness or harmony with people, nature or a greater power, avoiding feelings of psychological disunity and lack of meaning
- **Transcendence** — experiencing peak states of functioning, avoiding feelings of ordinariness
- **Individuality** — Feeling unique, avoiding conformity
- **Self-determination** — experiencing freedom to act or choose, avoiding feelings of pressure or coercion
- **Superiority** — winning status or success compared to others, avoiding unfavourable comparisons
- **Resource acquisition** — obtaining support and approval from others, avoiding social rejection
- **Belongingness** — building and maintaining attachments and intimacy, avoiding isolation
- **Social responsibility** — meeting social obligations and conforming to moral conventions, avoiding unethical social conduct
- **Equity** — promoting fairness and justice, avoiding inequality or injustice
- **Resource provision** — giving approval or support to others, avoiding selfish or uncaring behaviour
- **Mastery** — meeting challenging standards for achievement, avoiding incompetence
- **Task creativity** — engaging in tasks involving artistry or creative expression, avoiding the mundane or repetitive
- **Management** — maintaining order or productivity, avoiding inefficiency or chaos
- **Material gain** — increasing possession of money or material goods, avoiding poverty or material loss
- **Safety** — being physically secure, avoiding threats

- Which motivations have been consistently important to you throughout your life?
- Which goals do you want to hold on to?

Identify your top three goals that you feel are most important to you.

Please write 100 words on why that motivation is important to you and how you have acted to prioritise that goal in the past.

Goal 1
Goal 2
Goal 3

TOP TIP: Think about how you could let people know about your goals and needs. Ideally, try to get agreement from others to value those needs – the science of influencing shows that people don't like to go back on agreements that they make. If you start small, it makes it easier to upgrade those agreements in the future. Charities who ask for a small initial donation, find that you are more likely to donate larger sums in the future when asked. Now that you know this, use this knowledge for good! ;-)

Lastly, the earlier you set expectations or get agreement the better, as the consequences of agreement are lower and less emotionally charged. If you want to read more about influencing, then take a look at 'Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion' by Dr. Robert B. Cialdini.

Another way to look at this area is to consider a set of 'rights'. The statements embedded within your daily life can help you realise when someone is not taking your needs into account and that an assertive response is required. The following are examples of what these rights might look like, but you should consider a set of rights that are appropriate to you or your own situation.

1. I have the right to state my own needs and set my own priorities as a person independent of any roles that I may assume in my life.
2. I have the right to be treated with respect as an intelligent, capable and equal human being.
3. I have the right to express my feelings.
4. I have the right to express my opinions and values.
5. I have the right to say 'yes' or 'no' for myself.

6. I have the right to make mistakes.
7. I have the right to change my mind.
8. I have the right to say “I don’t understand”.
9. I have the right to ask for what I want.
10. I have the right to decline responsibility for other peoples’ problems.
11. I have the right to deal with others without being dependent on them for approval.

(from: ‘Assertiveness and You’ by Anne Dickson)

Important: What is a right for you, is also a right for others. So, if you want others to respect a right for you, then you must offer them the same right in return.

Techniques 1: BEAR

This technique is an adaption of a range of models aimed at responding to a boundary crossed, or where a 'redirection' of behaviour is needed. They are all very similar and the version here covers the most common elements.

- Describe the **BEHAVIOUR** or event causing the problem
(the word behaviour is very important here – people believe that behaviours are changeable. Personal comments which might suggest that THEY are a problem are more likely to promote defensive behaviour)
- Explain the **EFFECT** on you, the team or the department
(people aren't always aware of the impact of their behaviour)
- Specify the **ACTION** you want them to take
(the more specific the better – ambiguity could mean that their interpretation may not be the same as yours)
- Outline the **RESULT** of (not) changing (positive or negative)
(generally, you should look to give people a positive reason/incentive for changing/redirecting their behaviour, however you could consider some kind of loss to be useful here e.g. "if we don't complete this task first, we are at risk of losing funding". People are generally more sensitive to loss than to gain so it can be a more powerful motivator. Be careful not to make this sound like a threat, e.g. "If you don't change this behaviour then I will have to speak to your supervisor". This approach might be best saved for a last resort)

Using a structure such as BEAR can help you make your point without having to worry about how to approach it or not sounding very clear. Practise responding in this way in private so you can hear what it sounds like and adjust your tone/language as necessary. You should remember that you are caring for their needs as well as your needs, so we want the conversation to be an opportunity to improve how we work with one another.

An example might sound like this:

Behaviour: In the last month, I have received 5 last minute requests to work an extra shift, which I have willingly done.

Effect: On each of those occasions I have had to cancel personal engagements which has upset my partner and on one occasion I lost money on a concert ticket that I had booked.

Action: If we can agree to no more than 2 last minute requests in a month and at least 2 days' notice for other requests...

Result: ...then this will mean I won't have to be more protective over my time and continue to make a contribution to the challenges we are facing with staffing, and I know this will be agreeable with my partner.

Top Tip: Start with low stakes situations to get used to using the structure.

REFLECTION 7: Try creating your own response to a situation you feel that might benefit from redirection:

Behaviour

Effect

Action

Result

Questioning

An essential skill to develop that will help you understand the needs of others better is asking questions. While most people understand the difference between closed questions (which invite yes, no or single word answers) and open questions (which usually elicit more information), this can be more difficult to use in practice than you might imagine, as closed questions can be seen as efficient in our time poor environments.

For example, when asked to work an extra shift, you could ask “Am I the only person available?” and the easy answer would be “Yes”. However, you could try saying “Who else have you asked?”. This would open up many more options for you to explore if you were reluctant to agree to the request – perhaps you were simply the first person asked or others had pushed back.

The typical open question starters are Who, What, When, Why, How, Where.

REFLECTION 8: Think about one of your scenarios and how you could use open questions to find out more information.

Write down 2 questions using each question starter.

Check you have not phrased the question in a way that leads to a single word answer.

Who... (e.g. *Who else can we ask for help with this situation?*)

What ... (e.g. *What other options do we have?*)

When ... (e.g. *When are we obliged to get this done by?*)

Why ... (e.g. *Why has this situation occurred?*)

How ... (e.g. *How does this relate to the priority of the work being done right now?*)

Where ... (e.g. *Where are we going to get the resources that we need to complete this?*)

Techniques 2: General and Saying ‘no’

Take a look at the following approaches to communicating your needs in a constructive way, while maintaining a professional and respectful relationship. You can use combinations where you think it will help. For example, rather than simply stating your need using the ‘broken record’ technique, you could repeat ‘empathic assertions’.

REFLECTION 9:

- (a) Think about which ones might work for the scenarios you identified earlier and write them in to the scenario box.
- (b) Pick ONE that you feel comfortable trying and commit to using it the next time it is appropriate.

Basic assertions (“I” statements)

- Express your needs, feelings and opinions directly and unambiguously.
 - *“I need to leave on time today.”*
 - *“I would prefer to have this discussion later.”*
 - *“I find it more helpful when you present feedback in the form of suggestions for future action.”*
 - *“I was disappointed that you didn’t acknowledge my contribution to the report in that meeting.”*
- Give reasons for your statements, but do not feel you have to justify everything.
 - *“I would like to go on this training as I feel it would be beneficial to my day-to-day work.”*
- Try to express your needs in a positive and constructive way instead of one that could be perceived as blaming.
 - *“I would prefer to discuss this in our regular meeting” rather than “I don’t want to talk about this now. Can’t it wait?”*
- You can use “I” statements to yourself to acknowledge and take responsibility for your feelings and reactions.
 - *“I feel nervous/angry/undervalued.”*

Empathic assertions

- Demonstrate that you understand the needs, feelings and opinions of others even if you are not able to accommodate them fully.
 - *“I understand that you are uncomfortable with the current working arrangements, but I would like you to persist with them for the moment.”*
 - *“I know you are busy at the moment, but I need you to get that report to me by the end of the week.”*
- The formula “I appreciate... but...” can quickly become meaningless if overused and the word ‘but’ has a tendency to devalue everything that has come before it. A more constructive formula of **{appreciation} + {commitment} + {request}** or **{appreciation} + {request} + {concession}** demonstrates that you are actively considering their needs rather than just pretending to care.
 - *“I know that you are busy at the moment and I’m looking at getting you some help as soon as I can, but I still need you to get that report to me by the end of the week.”*
 - *“I know that you are busy at the moment, but I need you to get that report to me by the end of the week. I would be happy to relax the deadline on this other task to give you some space.”*

Consequence assertions

- These statements make clear the positive and negative implications of complying or not complying with your requests. They are usually expressed as “If... then” statements.
 - *“If I have to work extra hours, then I will need to recover the hours next week.”*
 - *“I am more likely to be able to deal with your request effectively if you send me an e-mail with the details.”*
 - *“If you insist on imposing this way of working on our department, then I will need to review the performance targets we agreed earlier.”*
 - *“If you continue to arrive late for shifts despite my warnings, I will have to start formal disciplinary procedures.”*
- Use them with care as they can easily be interpreted as threats.

Discrepancy observations

- These statements point out any differences between previous agreements and current actions or between words and behaviours. The aim is to remove misunderstandings not to criticise or allocate blame.
 - *“We agreed last week that this task should be my top priority. Now you have said you would like me to focus exclusively on this other task. I would like to clarify whether the priorities have changed.”*
 - *“You have said that you want to improve staff morale, but you have sent this e-mail which openly criticises my team and offers no constructive suggestions for improvement. I would like you to meet my team in person to apologise.”*
- Make sure you include an assertion or request so that you are focusing on moving forward rather than just criticising.

Repeated assertions (broken record)

- This technique involves repeating your assertion calmly throughout a conversation to ensure that you are heard. You can respond to objections with reasoned argument if they have merit, and you can use any of the previous techniques, but always return to your basic assertion.
 - **You:** *“I would like to attend this training course as it is important for my development.”*
 - **Them:** *“It’s going to be really difficult to let you go on it at the moment.”*
 - **You:** *“I understand that it is difficult to release staff for training, however this course will not be available again soon and I would like to attend it.”*
 - **Them:** *“I’m sure we could arrange something similar in-house if you really need it.”*
 - **You:** *“I have looked at the programme and there are a number of benefits that I could not get from in-house training. I would like to attend this training course.”*

Holding statements

- If you are unprepared to respond or not sure you will be able to manage your emotions in the moment, it may be a good idea to see if you can delay the assertive interaction until you have had time to prepare yourself.
 - *“I am unhappy with this situation, but I would like to talk about it when I am feeling calmer.”*
 - *“I need a little time to think about that request, I will get back to you in half an hour.”*

Obstacles

- Similar to the effect of a holding statement, creating a small obstacle for someone to overcome can be a good test of whether they are valuing you, or just looking for the person who will take on the request with the least resistance.
 - *“That sounds like a task for two people, if you can get someone else to commit then I would be happy to contribute. Otherwise, I don’t think I will be effective on my own.”*
 - *“That might be something I can help with, if you can get me this information, I will take a look to see what is possible.”*

Saying “no”

- Being able to say “no” to unreasonable or unwelcome requests is an important part of assertiveness. Be honest and give brief reasons for your refusal, but do not feel that you have to apologise or justify your choice.
- You can use empathic statements and consequences statements alongside saying “no”.
- You may also have to employ the “broken record” technique to deal with objections.
- You can use some alternative constructions for situations in which a blunt “no” might be too confrontational.

- **Not now** — refuse on this occasion but keep open the possibility of a “yes” in the future.
 - *“I can’t do that now, but do ask me again next month.”*
- **Not unless** — make clear what conditions would make it possible for you to agree.
 - *“I will have to say ‘no’ unless you could take this other responsibility off me.”*
- **Not that, but this** — offer an alternative to the other person’s request.
 - *“I won’t be able to complete the full research report by that date, but I could give you a brief note of my initial findings.”*

Minimising the risk of conflict

REFLECTION 10: What sort of conflict situations have you been in? How did you handle them? What could have gone better?

Here are a few simple techniques to help keep the risk of conflict to a minimum.

- Objective descriptions: *You said... You did... (NOT You are... You were...)*
You said, you did is about behaviours not identity – less damaging. Much the same as in the BEAR model.
- Own your reactions: *I felt... (NOT You made me feel...)*
Taking responsibility for own emotions is appropriate because the other person cannot take responsibility for how you might react to any given situation.
- Questions: *Could you help me understand...?*
Put yourself in the position of a learner and you reduce the chance that someone might perceive you to be aggressive (however unintentional).
- Affirmation: *I can see why...
I completely understand why you say that* (you might not have all the facts, it's not your fault). Watch out of the tendency to add a “but” to your statement. This can be seen to cancel out your understanding statement that came before it! When people feel they have been understood, they are more likely to take a co-operative position.
- Solution focus: *How could we move forward?*
If things feel like they could be getting stuck, come back to “*what can we do to move forward*”. The use of ‘we’ also invites them to join you in that solution focus. Again, this increases the chance of co-operation.

Unhelpful Language

Watch out for the words below creeping into your language or thoughts. They can introduce obstacles to rapport that may increase the chance of conflict or a defensive response from another person and move you away from an assertive (win-win) mindset.

REFLECTION 11: Using words from each of the areas below, write a statement that might be unhelpful in your current situation, and then attempt a better way to say the same thing.

Example: A statement suggesting generalisation could be “You **always** ask me to stay late and I would like to discuss changing that”. A better approach might be: “It seems that I am **normally** the person that gets asked to stay late, could we look at spreading the load more evenly”.

- **Compulsion** — should, ought, must

A statement suggesting compulsion:

A better version:

- **Barrier** — can't, impossible, hopeless

A statement that creates a barrier:

A better version:

- **Generalisation** — always, never

A generalised statement:

A better version:

- **Exclusion** — just, only

A sentence suggesting exclusion:

A better version:

- **Labelling** — unfair, stupid, obstructive, etc.

A labelling statement:

A better version:

Top Tip: If you hear these words in an interaction, it is a strong clue that something isn't going well. Resolve what is going wrong before progressing further as it can negatively influence all further interactions.

Advice from Negotiation Theory

The book “Getting to Yes” by Fisher and Ury, is considered to be one of the most authoritative books on negotiation and has useful principles that can be applied to assertiveness.

Their model is described as principled (“win-win”) negotiation - “hard on the problem, soft on the people”. This is a very simple explanation of the key points, and if you are interested in finding out more, the book is strongly recommended. It is deliberately written to be accessible and it is not too long!

- **People:** separate the people from the problem
Focusing on the problem will minimise the risk that emotions will damage the chances of reaching an agreement.
- **Interests:** focus on interests, not positions
A position tends to be ‘what’ you want, and the interest is ‘why’ you want it.
- **Options:** generate a range of options for mutual gain
The more options you generate, the more likely you are to find something that maximises the outcome for both of you. Don’t choose an option too prematurely.
- **Criteria:** use objective criteria (e.g. legislation or organisational policies) to evaluate possible outcomes
An example of an objective criteria would be the GMC guidelines. It helps avoid the “I’m right” positioning that could damage the negotiation.

And finally, the concept of BATNA – the **B**est **A**lternative **T**o a **N**egotiated **A**greement. Knowing/planning what you will do if you cannot reach agreement, has the potential effect of increasing your negotiation power, but can also help you be less defensive as it lowers the stakes if you can’t reach agreement. These can then in turn increase the chances of you getting a better return in the negotiation.

REFLECTION 12: Pick one of your scenarios and focus on the following points that may help you see a different way to approach the problem.

Do be aware that while it is valuable to do this thinking in advance, when you eventually have the conversation there will be someone else involved and their views and opinions will need to be taken into account.

(People) What is the problem we are dealing with:
(Interests) What are my interests in the problem and what might be their interest?
(Options) What are the possible choices in this scenario?
(Criteria) Are there any objective criteria that can help you evaluate the solutions?
What could your BATNA be?

Summary: Key Principles

Commit yourself to certain key principles.

I will value myself and others

- Remind yourself of your core strengths and values. This will bolster your sense of identity and increase your ability to face difficult social interactions.
- Seek to understand and appreciate the strengths and values of others. People are more likely to respond to you expressing your needs if you show that you understand their needs.
- Know your rights and your responsibilities. Remember that you have a right to respectful treatment and a responsibility to treat others with respect.

I will be increasingly aware of my reactions and my choices

- Maintain a mindful awareness of your emotional responses to situations. Notice patterns in how you react in various circumstances.
- Take responsibility for your emotional states and reactions and learn to manage your emotions by becoming aware of the choices you have in any situation.
- Do not be afraid to express your feelings if it helps someone to understand the impact of their words and actions on you.
- Question any of your beliefs and assumptions that might limit the choices you have in particular situations.
- Do your best to respect other people's feelings but do not take responsibility for their emotional states and reactions.

I will focus on solutions and learning

- Concentrate on finding ways forward that balance the valid needs of all concerned whenever possible (win-win solutions).
- Avoid blame and guilt as these are rarely constructive.
- Look at what you can learn from every situation, even if it goes badly. Remember that assertiveness is something that you can improve on over time as you practise it.
- Allow yourself to make mistakes and do not be afraid to ask for help if you need it.
- Give a positive response to constructive feedback both positive and negative, but also be prepared to disagree with unhelpful comments.

Action Planning

REFLECTION 13: Write down what you will try next and make a commitment. This has a tendency to improve success rate and even more so if you can put a date against it.

What are you going to try?

When and how are you going to do it?

Why is it important?

How will you track progress?

What could stop you and how will you deal with that?

Who can help you?

Reading List

If you would like to read more about the subject, the following books are popular reads in and around the subject:

- The Assertiveness Workbook – Randy J. Paterson
- Face to Face in the Workplace – Julie Cooper
- Your Brain at Work – David Rock
- Mindfulness – Mark Williams & Danny Penman
- Overcoming Low Self Esteem – Melanie Fennel
- When I Say No I Feel Guilty – Manuel J Smith
- Assertiveness and You: A Woman in Your Own Right - Anne Dickson
- Getting to Yes – Fisher and Ury
- Assert Yourself - Gael Lindenfield
- Self Esteem - Gael Lindenfield
- Games People Play - Eric Berne
- What Do You Say After You Say Hello? - Eric Berne
- I'm Ok, You're Ok - Thomas A Harris
- Feel The Fear And Do It Anyway - Susan Jeffers
- Inward Bound - Sam Keen
- 'Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion' by Dr. Robert B. Cialdini