

Developing positive assertiveness



Developing assertiveness is more than just learning to speak differently. Being assertive requires thinking assertively, behaving positively and feeling self-confident. We must all make a conscious effort to be consistently assertive. As we learn to become more assertive we reduce our stress, failures, dissatisfactions and conflicts. Developing assertiveness requires effort but the rewards are worth it. Successful behavior change requires thinking and doing. Behavior change is possible once you understand that it is an evolving, ongoing process that can be accomplished by moving through various stages.

This essay discusses and describes the different behavioral types along with recipes to lead to successful behavioral change. It examines the effects of positive mental imagery and the self-fulfilling prophecy towards programming yourself towards success. It explores the four steps for powerful assertiveness along with how to deal and prepare for confrontation. Assertiveness is the antidote to fear, shyness, passivity, and even anger, so there is an astonishingly wide range of situations in which this training is appropriate.

The case study demonstrates how after assertiveness training employees feel empowered with tools and skills to handle any communication situation. All of us should insist on being treated fairly — to stand up for our rights without violating the rights of others. This means tactfully, justly and effectively expressing our preferences, needs, opinions and feelings. We do this through the development of positive assertiveness. Introduction When we hear the word assertive most people think of someone standing their ground refusing to give an inch and pushing to have their own way.

Others think of someone who is stubborn on certain issues but overall a nice individual. Others do not know what assertive behavior really is. Assertive behavior is a natural style while being honest, direct and respectful while interacting with others. Why is there a need for assertiveness training books and courses? They are essential as most people do not understand the importance of using assertive behavior. As more and more people develop assertiveness and start to influence others, the awareness and acceptance of this behavior type will increase.

Everyone should aspire to be assertive - it is a desirable behavior, it is vital for honest, healthy relationships. It is the behavior necessary for positive outcomes in negotiation, normal business dealings, conflict resolution and also in family life. " The assertive individual is a tower of strength with high self-esteem with clear self-knowledge and able to accept their own shortcomings as well as their strengths. " Figure 1: The Assertiveness Triangle.

No one is consistently assertive, we all follow these three basic behavioral types depending on the situation: Passive - this behavior is passive and indirect. It conveys a message of inferiority. By being nonassertive, we allow the needs, wants and rights of others to be more important than our own. It creates a behavior of " win-lose" situations. A nonassertive person loses or is disregarded while allowing others to win. This leads to being a victim not a winner. Aggressive - this behavior is complex, it can be either passive or active.

Aggression can be direct or non-direct, honest or dishonest. It communicates an impression of disrespect and superiority. Assertive - this is when a person

stands up for their legitimate rights in such a way that the rights of others are not violated. It communicates respect for others behavior. It is an honest, direct and appropriate expression of one's beliefs, feelings and opinions.

Figure 2: Assertiveness, graph mode. Figure 3: The different behavioral types. Figure 4: Examples of the different types of behavior.

Successful Change of Behavior Successful behavior change requires thinking and doing. Behavior change is possible once you understand that it is an evolving, ongoing process that can be accomplished by moving through various stages. Real change comes only after persistent action. The more frequently people perform a behavior, the more habitual and automatic it becomes, requiring little effort or conscious attention. Figure 5: Motivation and ability graph. Figure 6: Target behavior graph showing effects of core motivators.

When developing positive assertiveness you will begin to start practicing new ways of expressing yourself and handling yourself. It is a good idea to also practice the technique of positive mental imagery. This is using your imagination to visualize yourself saying and doing things successfully and assertively. Envision situations in which you see yourself being assertive, feel confident, powerful and effective. Only imagine positive outcomes. Think of positive mental imagery as being proactive in the journey of developing positive assertiveness.

Four P's of Successful Change Any type of change whether big or small can be challenging. For many, large scale change only occurs when after a traumatic experience. However, one does not need a traumatic upset to prompt change. To make a successful change, you do need to be prepared.

There are 4 rules which help to retain these changes. 1. Protection - Change is often very scary. One of the reasons we do not change is because of fear. Our fear can be vague but enough to sabotage successful change. Having protection can help to stick with a commitment to change.

It may be best to start your successful assertiveness in an environment which feels very safe. Change one thing at a time - slow and steady wins the race. 2. Potency - Change is an active process not a passive process. It is necessary to put in some mental effort, emotional involvement and physical activity. To tap into your potency: define your goal in simple, active, positive words. Write down your change goal and display it where you can see it every day. Imagine practicing your goal of positive assertiveness and visualize yourself doing this with ease. . Permission - Each of us requires permission of change ourselves. Be sure to give yourself permission to change. 4. Practice - To become skillful with any behavior requires practice. A large amount of practice may be needed before your new behavior becomes natural and integrated into daily life. Develop a practice schedule, be specific about how often, when and where. Record your efforts and successes. Self-Fulfilling Prophecy The self-fulfilling prophecy is a statement that alters actions and therefore comes true.

For example, a person stating " I'm probably going to have a lousy day," might alter his actions so that such a prediction is fulfilled by his actions. This may be an unconscious gesture. A person who embraces the self-fulfilling prophecy in a positive way " I'm going to have a great day" might act in ways that will actually make this prediction true. Programming Yourself for Success If you want to program yourself for success you will need to

understand that if you only put rubbish into your head, you will only ever get trashy results in your life!

The human mind works just like a computer- when it comes to basic programming the same basic rules apply: if only negative stuff goes in then only negativity will come out. If you want to program yourself for success then you need to lock your mind against every single thought that is not coloured with success and covered with positivity. Many people struggle with reprogramming themselves for success because although they practice positive thinking, they visualize and say their affirmations, negativity is still the predominant factor in their lives.

It is not the affirmations and the visualizations that are getting in the way, but rather the thoughts and the feelings that are active the rest of the time! The only way you are going to program yourself for success is to go on the offensive, and to make a conscious effort to not only have a constant intake of positive, success-filled thoughts and feelings, but to also avoid any thoughts and feelings that cancel out your success-driven mentality. The Four Steps for Powerful Assertiveness There are four basic steps that can help you to become more assertive in everyday dealings with others.

Step 1: Repeat the Question or Statement To add power to your assertiveness the first thing to do is to repeat the question. Ensure that you have good eye contact and speak with confident, assertive voice tones. It may be necessary to emphasize certain words the second time to increase the chances of getting your point across. Step 2: Command, don't ask If the person continues to refuse to co-operate, switch from asking to

commanding. Being directive tends to sound more powerful than a request to most.

Learn to use the request for the majority of people, the average person will hear your request as polite and appropriate, there is less risk of sounding pushy. If the request does not produce results then change the request to a command. Step 3: Add Some Emotion If your efforts are still unsuccessful you can add emotion as another way to add power to your assertiveness. People are unaccustomed to open emotions and honesty and by using these you can add significant power to your communication. Step 4: Introduce Consequences By introducing consequences it is a final way to add power to your assertiveness.

They are not threats, they are simply statements of what your intentions are if you do not get co-operation. Consequences need to be stated in advance to give the other person a chance to change their behavior. Consequences need to be strong and believable, the action needs to be something undesirable. You must be willing to follow through on the consequence if necessary. If you are tested by the other person and you do not take the action you said you would, you will lose all credibility and power not just with that person but perhaps also with others.

Case Study Assertiveness training helps administrative assistants forge positive relationships with internal and external customers. Situation: A college recognised that its administrative assistants work with a range of internal and external customers and assertiveness training with these employees could have a positive impact throughout the organisation. This group also tends to be passive. Challenge: The administrative assistants

report to multiple faculty members, and they felt powerless to effectively juggle the assignments of multiple bosses.

As the university's face to the customer (students), polished communication skills would enable them to more effectively communicate with these customers. Solution: The college hired Mary to present a communication workshop for this group. Mary customised training focused on assertive communication skills and how to work with difficult people. Also, the group participated in a personality assessment to gain insight into their individual communication style and, with role playing, learned how to communicate with people who have different communication styles.

Results: The college invites Mary to conduct a communication workshop for this group every year, focusing on various communication aspects. Participants rave that the workshops are interactive and relevant to their job. They feel empowered with tools and skills to handle any communication situation. Dealing with Confrontations Many people cannot handle confrontation and start to shake, they lose control of their voice pitch and cannot control their thoughts. It is frustrating when someone is putting you down and you cannot argue back as you have a touch of confrontation jitters.

It is the 'Flight or Fight' syndrome kicking in as it pumps adrenaline through your body in readiness of getting your body prepared to either 'Flight' or 'Fight'. Some tips to deal with confrontation: * Take a deep breath, this lowers your heartbeat and blood pressure. * If you can, take five minutes to rehearse what you will say. Make key points for your argument. * Realise what triggers your anger and prepare a response to that trigger. By doing

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this you are aware of what buttons others can push to provoke a certain response.

When you know your own triggers it is less likely that someone can push these buttons as you are prepared. * Make the other person aware of how confrontational they are being such as ' why are you being so confrontational? ' this turns the energy back on them and lets them reflect on themselves. This may calm them down as most people get lost in the moment and do not realise they are being aggressive. * Don't get sucked into other people's arguments where the purpose is to manipulate you into losing and thereby showing the other person that they are superior.

If you don't get sucked in there is no argument to win and you will come out looking the better person. Figure 7: Conflict Management Model. Conclusion This essay has examined the positive effects that assertiveness can have on your social and business interactions. It is an ongoing development process where you need to be actively involved in modifying your behavior patterns. Assertiveness includes the right to choose not to assert yourself. There is no rule saying that you have to assert yourself all the time and in some situations you may feel it is better not to say anything.

Generally, though, you are likely to find that being more assertive has a significant positive impact on your life. Because some people want to be " nice" and " not cause trouble," they " suffer in silence," and assume nothing can be done to change their situation. We appreciate pleasant, accommodating people but whenever a nice person allows a greedy, dominant person to take advantage of them, the passive person is not

only cheating themselves but also reinforcing unfair, self-centered behavior in the aggressive person.

True assertiveness means without aggression, guilt or fear. It is far more effective in the long run and infinitely more satisfying. Winning others to your way of thinking, the legitimate way, is much more fun. By choosing to be assertive and by following the steps outlined in this essay, you will know that you have the power over any situation, over your own feelings and stress levels. Recommendations Being assertive is being able to express yourself with confidence, without resorting to passiveness, aggressiveness or manipulative.

By developing assertiveness and being aware of your strengths and weaknesses you can learn how to modify your behavior in both social and work interactions, therefore enhancing your career prospects and improving your social life. Practice your skills on someone you are unlikely to meet again. If you fail, realise where you have gone wrong and try again. Attending workshops and seminars can be extremely valuable especially when given the opportunity to use role-play to uncover your response in various interpersonal situations. Assertiveness is closely linked to self-esteem and body language so it is important to build on these ideas too.