

ASSERTIVENESS

THE MOST RARELY USED SKILL

When I take my vehicle in for an oil change and simple service, the workshop mechanics are frequently interested in selling me more than the basic oil change and simple service. After I learned this, now I don't even allow them to start their speech to convince me. As the salesperson approaches me saying, "Sir, you should let us do the super luxurious service etc." I try to hear him as if he was simply making noise. I smile and say, "All I need today is the basic oil change and simple service."

Usually he/she has evidence to support what I should do to my vehicle - a fluid stick with a certain color that means nothing to me, an air filter that has varying degrees of darkness in different areas. I don't know enough for any of it to mean anything to me, so occasionally I may actually need what the mechanic is pushing. However, if I am clear that my budget today only supports an oil change and simple service, then I continue to smile and say, "All I need today is the basic oil change." If holding the line would be difficult for you, maybe you need a coach to help you accomplish this limit setting.

The skill I displayed in the above situation is assertiveness.

Assertiveness is standing up for your right to be treated fairly. It is expressing your opinions, needs, and feelings, without ignoring or hurting the opinions, needs, and feelings of others. Being assertive means respecting yourself and other people; seeing people as equal to you, not better than you or less important than you.

Because people want to be liked and thought of as 'nice' or 'easy to get along with', they often keep their opinions to themselves, especially if those opinions conflict with other people. But this sometimes leads to being taken advantage of by people who are not as nice or considerate. Asserting yourself will stop others from cheating you and you from cheating yourself out of what you deserve.

You need to make your mind strong enough not to get it manipulated by weaklings in our society, who thrive on stronger people and behave like parasites taking strength and stamina from the host. **Assertiveness can bring you success, happiness and contentment.** Knowing to stand by your beliefs is sometimes called fanaticism and stubbornness. But a personal belief, which is formed on fair and just grounds, can never be called fanaticism or obstinacy.

Why is Assertiveness Important?

If you don't know how to be assertive, you might experience ---

- Depression. From anger turned inward, a sense of being helpless, hopeless, with no control over your life.
- Resentment. Anger at others for manipulating or taking advantage of me.
- Frustration. How could I be such a wimp? Why did I let someone victimize me?
- Temper/violence. If you can't express anger appropriately, it builds up until it blows
- Anxiety, which leads to avoidance. If you begin to avoid situations or people that you know will make you uncomfortable, you may miss out on fun activities, job opportunities, relationships, and lots of other good stuff.
- Poor relationships of all kinds. Non-assertive people are often unable to express emotions of any kind, negative OR positive. It's murder for a relationship when the partners can't tell each other what they want and need and how the other person affects them. No one is a mind reader. The same is true for friendships and work relationships.
- Physical complaints. Headaches, ulcers, high blood pressure. We all know what stress does to our bodies, and assertiveness, when it becomes a habit, is a great stress reliever.
- Parenting problems. Kids are born knowing how to test the limits their parents set for them. If parents aren't assertive and firm, their kids will walk all over them!

Assertiveness plays a strong role when you are fighting for a cause. Be it for your own promotion, suggesting a new strategy to your company, making a sales presentation to customers, giving a lecture on any topic which you are an expert on, or whatever. In all these situations, where you want to make your audience believe you and follow your recommended action steps, your assertive skills would make things happen your way. Assertiveness is not just limited to making confident and well-written speeches. It comes from an innate sense of confidence and enthusiasm which you emanate, from your gait and postures, from your body language and capability of maintaining relevant eye contact.

Being assertive means many things to many people. Most people believe it is the power to say no at the right time to the right person, having strategic skills to make a situation turn to his favor, making a point most effectively and convincingly, but **I believe assertiveness is mastering the art of making a point without hurting any sentiment whatsoever.** You can do this when you have supreme level of self-confidence and know what you are talking better than anyone else in the room.

Remember, one of the greatest gifts God gave us is **the ability to choose.** And we can choose to manage ourselves appropriately and according to our priorities. As we do, we will find ourselves feeling less and less of the personal pain and frustration that we feel when we are out of control.

As we live our lives and pursue success, one of the keys to grab on to is the idea that the most important thing we can manage isn't a thing at all – it is our self!

How then can we manage ourselves? Here are some thoughts.

Make sure that the above is firmly engrained in your thinking: **I only manage myself. I can choose how I will act and react in every situation.** Remember “The history of free men is not written by chance, but by choice, their choice.”

Know your priorities. Do you know from top to bottom what your priorities are? Have you decided what the top ten things you want to spend your time on are? How about the same with your money? Only after you know these things can you properly manage yourself into choosing to live your priorities.

Learn to say “no” with a smile on your face. Here is where most of us fail. We do not choose to say “no” to those things that are not a matter of priority (the reason “why” is another newsletter article and probably a few counseling sessions at that!). Someone calls us up and asks us to do something for them (usually because they haven't managed themselves and would like our help picking up the pieces) and we say “Uh, I guess so.” Then what? We usually kick ourselves for the rest of the day. “Why did I ever say yes?” Instead, practice this, “I am really sorry but I am not going to be able to be involved this time. I am sure you will be able to find somebody though.” Go ahead and try it right now. Weird, isn't it? That is because we don't say it very often.

Schedule your priorities into you schedule or budget or whatever structure governs that area of your life. For example, do you have a financial budget that you yourself set? Then do you first and foremost spend your money in that way, say at the beginning of the month? If you do, you will eliminate even the opportunity to blow your money on impulse decisions and expenses because your money has already been committed into your priorities.

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Each of us has the responsibility of protecting our own interests. There are times in life which call for a sacrifice of those interests but it is rare. This should always be the exception and not the rule.

Have you ever noticed that some people have no trouble making requests while other people seem incapable of making direct requests? Yet, one of the principle laws of prosperity is, **"Ask for what you want when you want it and to then be responsible for whatever you get."**

How to Develop Assertive Skills

- **Be direct, honest, and open about your feelings, opinions and needs.** State reasonable requests directly and firmly. State your goals or intentions in a direct and honest manner. State your point of view without being hesitant or apologetic. Being responsible for your own behavior will let you feel good about yourself.
- Do not let your friends, classmates etc. impose or force their behaviors, values and ideas on you. Instead, let them know what you think, feel and want.
- Be honest when giving and receiving compliments. Never put down a compliment and don't feel you must return one.
- Learn to say no to unreasonable requests. Use the word "no" and offer an explanation if you choose to. Do not apologize and do not make up excuses. Paraphrase the other person's point of view. This will let he/she know that you hear and understand the request.
- Avoid "why" questions. "Why" questions allows the listener to be defensive.
- Recognize and respect the rights of your friends, classmates, roommates etc. For example if you are upset with them use "I" and "we" statements to express your feelings, instead of blaming and finger pointing "you" statements.
- When communicating with others use an appropriate tone of voice and body posture. Maintain eye contact. Tone of voice should be appropriate to the situation. Stand or sit at a comfortable distance from the other person. Gestures can be used to emphasize what is being said and the word "I" and "we" should be used in statements to convey your feelings. For example, it is more appropriate to say "I am very disappointed that you didn't show up as plan", instead of saying, "Man, you are a jerk".
- Ask for feedback whenever needed. Be open towards feedbacks.

FINAL WORD:

To frame this development, I put forward the idea of Inner Dialogues: those conversations we have with ourselves before we interact with someone else. Sometimes these Inner Dialogues are subconscious, but if you become more aware of them, you can manage them and become more effective in your dealings with others. By having your Inner Dialogue before you deal with the other person, you can adjust your behaviour to be Assertive. You achieve this by turning your Faulty Inner Dialogue (aggressive or non-assertive) into a Sound Inner Dialogue (assertive). There's something for all of us in this model - it isn't just for leaders and managers. Effective assertive behaviour is an important building block for creating an empowered, involving and learning institution culture. (The institution can be a family, organization etc.) You would do well to develop your assertiveness before embarking on bigger culture changes.

By: NTC Team

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