



Being assertive is not just using specific skills in interpersonal interaction. True assertiveness has a philosophical component that demonstrates personal beliefs and values . . .

- . . . every person has worth.
- . . . every person deserves fair and respectful treatment.
- . . . what I say and do has an impact on other people.
- . . . quality of life is enhanced with healthy relationships.
- . . . healthy relationships are built in every interaction.

Translating these beliefs into action brings the values to life. People who are truly assertive work to be more aware of what they say and do. While most folks operate on auto-pilot, assertive individuals choose their behavior – consciously and intentionally.



About the Author

TJ Titcomb has been helping organizations manage change, develop leaders and prevent problems for more than forty years. She holds a master's degree in counseling psychology and a PhD in organizational development. Now mostly retired, Dr. Titcomb is sharing workbooks from presentations she has given at conferences.

Four Styles of Communication

NON ASSERTIVE	AGGRESSIVE	INDIRECTLY AGGRESSIVE	ASSERTIVE
Others before Me	Me before Everyone	Me in Hidden Ways	Others <u>and</u> Me
appears helpless, powerless or inhibited; allows others to make decisions for self; comes across as having little self-confidence; likely to hesitate, speak softly, look away; avoids the issues; agrees regardless of own feelings; does not express opinions; seems to value self "below" others; hurts self to avoid chance of hurting others	typically answers before the other person is through talking; may speak loudly + abusively; glares at the other person; speaks "past" the issue (accusing, blaming, demeaning); makes strong statements of own feelings and opinions while showing little interest or tolerance of others'; seems to value self "above" others; hurts others to avoid hurting self	expresses self in indirect ways; uses trickery and manipulation to reach goals; uses false flattery, flirtation or eliciting sympathy to get own way; likely to use sneaky ways to get revenge when angry; may use guilt, sarcasm, the silent treatment, or cry-as weapons; seems to value self above others while trying to appear not to	answers spontaneously and honestly; speaks in a conversational tone and volume; looks at the other person; speaks to the issue; openly expresses ideas and feelings while also encouraging others to do so; chooses behavior to fit the situation; considers the impact of words and actions on others; values self equal to others; hurts neither self nor others

No one is born assertive. Assertive behavior is a series of **SKILLS** that can be learned and maintained with frequent practice.

The terms *assertive* and *aggressive* are often used interchangeably. They are actually VERY different and the big difference is in the 3 R's:

Rights: I have a right to express my ideas, needs, wants, and feelings – and so does everybody else ... *so part of being assertive is listening to others and helping them speak up*

Respect: I show respect for myself – and the other person ... *by speaking up in a way that is not intentionally hurtful*

Responsibility: I accept responsibility for what I say and do

Take the Steps

Becoming more assertive means facing change. Change is never easy. One expert said the only human who likes change is a baby with a wet diaper. Changing old, comfortable styles of communicating and interacting can be especially challenging. Even if we are not happy with what we are doing, the known always seems better – or safer – than the unknown.

Changing behavior patterns can also feel overwhelming – where in the world do you start? It can help to have a framework to follow. Take the **Steps** to assertiveness ...



Assertiveness is a tool for making your relationships more equal – this approach *honors* everyone, helping underdogs level the playing field and express themselves *while respecting the rights of others*.

– Alberti & Emmons
Your Perfect Right

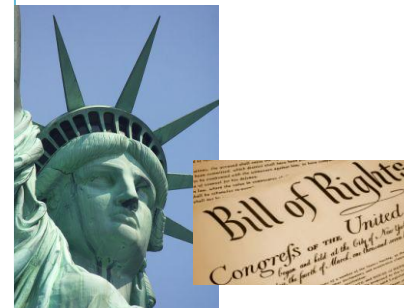
Know your Rights

Assertive behavior involves expressing your legitimate rights as an individual. Just because they are living breathing human beings people have certain rights. Take a few minutes to think about the rights that are important to you.

Every person has a **RIGHT** to:

Because of the way many of us were raised, it may be difficult to accept that we have rights. We've been trained to put others' needs first and ignore our own. We believe that standing up for our rights somehow takes away from the rights of others. Assertiveness does not focus on one person being more important or winning over another. It emphasizes equal treatment, equal respect, equal dignity, equal opportunity.

I have rights ... but as an assertive person,
I recognize every other human being
has the same rights.



Accept Responsibility

Respect in a team, a family, or a community doesn't just happen by deciding one day, *We're going to start being respectful of each other.* It develops over time as each person works on becoming assertive communicator. Respect grows out of the two components of assertiveness: rights and responsibilities.

We've already looked at rights. With these rights also come responsibilities. Mutual respect is more likely in work groups where these rights and responsibilities are recognized and consistently translated into specific actions on the job.

Most people operate on auto-pilot, paying little attention to how they behave and communicate. A major assertive responsibility is constantly considering and assessing the **impact** of your words and actions. What you say and do affects others. Being assertive means being more aware and intentional in your interactions. Nothing happens to you – you **choose**.

There's another aspect of choice. Assertiveness is not about speaking up. It is about **choosing your behavior** to fit the situation. There may be times when you choose not to speak up because the issue is not that important or the relationship is taking priority.



Start Small

Too often people are unsuccessful in changing behavior because they start too big. It isn't easy for you to change old patterns ... and it's not easy for your friends and family to accept the changes in you. The best road to success is to start small.

Set yourself up to succeed by trying assertive behavior first in relatively easy situations where you have a high chance of both positive results and positive response from others. You can then move on to slightly harder situations that have some risk. Move slowly up to your most difficult situations.

It is usually easier to be assertive with strangers who have little lasting impact on our lives (such as store clerks) and with close friends who will accept us and help us in our change efforts.

Save the really tough situations for when you feel stronger and confident in your assertiveness.

LEVEL V.
My Toughest
Challenge

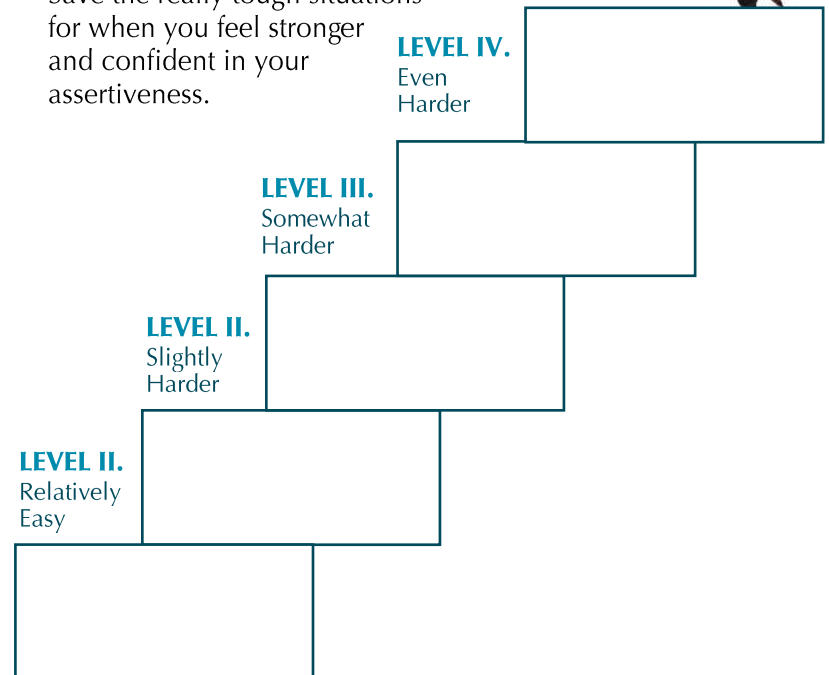


LEVEL IV.
Even
Harder

LEVEL III.
Somewhat
Harder

LEVEL II.
Slightly
Harder

LEVEL I.
Relatively
Easy



Act AS IF

Think of people you know who come across as calm, secure and assertive. They may not actually *feel* confident on the inside but they have learned some of the techniques below to tell the world they are self-assured. They've learned to **act as if** they are assertive and confident.

- ❖ **Eye Contact** – comfortably direct eye contact – not robotlike staring – occasionally looking away
- ❖ **Facial Expression** – **congruent**, which means their expression fits the message they're sending – serious if it's a serious one – smiling and upbeat for positive messages
- ❖ **Voice** (*tone, volume, rate, inflection*) – a firm, strong tone with "Goldilocks" volume – loud enough to be heard in the space you're in – moderate rate – use ups and downs to add life but beware of ending a statement by going up ("Uptalk") – end by going up only for questions
- ❖ **Posture** – stand or sit tall and upright – avoid slumping or slouching in situations where you need to be taken seriously
- ❖ **Gestures** – natural to again add "life" to the conversation except when dealing with someone who is upset, angry or unstable – in those situations, keep your gestures very small, close to the body and never raise your arms above your waist

Too often people are overly concerned with finding the "right" words. Assertive communication is not just about the words you use with other people. The way it is delivered may actually be more important. Psychologist Albert Mehrabian found that, when expressing ideas, opinions and feelings, only 7% of communication is the words you use – 38% is your voice and 55% is your body movement, mostly facial expression.

Acting as if you are assertive is an important step to feeling and being more assertive. It not only increases your feelings of confidence but also adds impact to your message. Use the **PRINCIPLE of AS IF**. Don't wait for when you *feel* confident – **act** confidently and the feelings will follow.

Use the Rule of the Five Ps

Once you know your rights and accept your responsibilities AND you have decided to become more assertive by starting small and acting "as if," you are ready for the next step. Assertive people remember the "Rule of the Five P's"

P practice

P practice

P practice

P practice

P practice

Becoming more assertive is a life-long project. You need to make the commitment to continually **practice** the skills of speaking up for yourself and showing respect for others. Constantly seek out opportunities to try out your skills.

If you are truly committed to change, keep an Assertiveness Log. Write down incidents where you practiced your skills.

where were you? who was involved? what did you say or do? what was the other person's response? what was the outcome? how hard or easy was the assertion? what did you learn from the situation? what did you like about what you did? what would you do differently next time?



Expand your Skills

Becoming more assertive involves a number of behaviors. Take a few minutes to evaluate your assertive skills on the behaviors listed below. Make a "SOC" (Subjective Overall Classification) Rating of each skill using a 1 to 10 scale.

1

I don't do this often,
I lack skill and/or
confidence

10

I do this well and
often with skill
and confidence

Thinking & Talking Positively	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Choosing my Behavior	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Listening	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Expressing Thoughts & Feelings	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Making Simple Requests	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Saying No	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Giving Feedback	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Accepting Feedback	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Asking for Behavior Change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Remember that being assertive is acting on your right to express yourself, to make requests, to say no, to give feedback, and to ask for change. But assertiveness also means demonstrating your acceptance of the responsibility to think and talk positively, to consciously choose your behavior to fit the situation, to listen and work to understand others, and to accept feedback from others.



Two assertive areas I plan to focus on . . .

1. _____
2. _____

Resources to Learn More

- Alberti & Emmons, *Your Perfect Right*
- Bower & Bower, *Asserting Yourself*
- Burley-Allen, *Listening: The Forgotten Skill*
- McKay et al, *Messages: The Communication Skills Book*
- Patterson, *The Assertiveness Workbook*
- Taylor, *The Power of Assertive Kindness*
- cci.health.wa.gov.au/resources/looking-after-yourself/assertiveness
- psychologytools.com/professional/problems/assertiveness
- How to Be Assertive – 10 Tips – *Brainy Dose*
- The Art of Listening – *Simon Sinek*
- The Art of Active Listening – *The Harvard Business Review Guide*
- 5 Tips to Make Assertive Communication Easier – *Jessica McCabe*
- Being Well, Dr Rick Hanson – *How to Assert Yourself Effectively*
- The Happiness Lab, Dr Laurie Santos – *Stop Negative Self-Talk*
- The Art of Speaking Up, Jessica Guzik, JD



**Whether you think
you can or you can't
you're right.**

– Henry Ford