

Learn to Communicate Assertively at Work

Healthy communication plays an important part in making your workplace not only effective but also a pleasant place to be. Being a good communicator can assist you in building trust, help to solve differences, and create an environment of respect that promotes problem-solving and builds relationships. In other words, it's important to communicate in ways that clearly assert your needs and wants while still considering the rights and needs of others. Using assertive communication can help you to:

- Communicate your ideas, concerns and wishes
- Have more clarity about what is expected
- Take control of your workload
- Gain respect from others
- Have your needs and wants met
 - ◆ Ask for things you want
 - ◆ Say *no* when appropriate to things you do not want

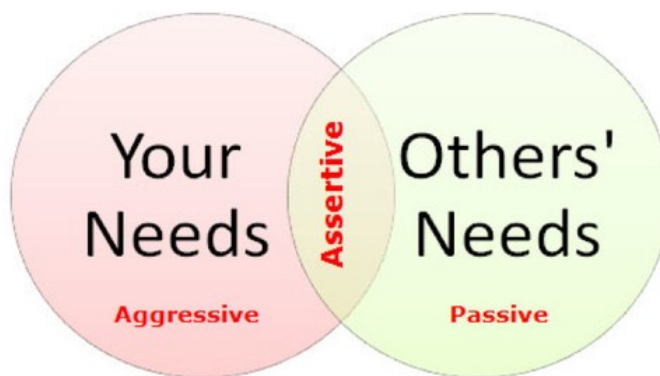
What is assertive communication?

Being assertive means expressing your thoughts, opinions, feelings, attitudes, and rights in an open and honest way. When you're assertive, you stand up for yourself, while still respecting others. At work, assertiveness involves balancing getting what you need with being respectful of the needs and rights of your coworkers, subordinates, and supervisors.

There are three styles of communication that people use: *passive*, *assertive*, and *aggressive*.

Passive

- Tends to give in to other people's wishes while forgetting their own needs and wants
- Has a difficult time saying *no* to people
- Has a hard time making decisions
- Has a hard time maintaining eye contact
- Avoids confrontation at all costs (e.g., not speaking up when a coworker pronounces their name wrong)



Aggressive

- Tends to be concerned only for their needs at the expense of others' needs
- Has a tendency to lose their temper
- May make decisions for other people
- May shout or use bully techniques to get their way
- May continue to argue long after someone has had enough
- When angry, may call others names or even use obscenities
- May openly criticize or find fault with others' ideas, opinions, or behaviors
- Uses confrontation to get what they want

Assertive

- Concerned with both their needs and other people's needs
- Able to express themselves with other people
- Able to respond in a respectful manner when there is a disagreement
- Able to ask for help
- Confident and able to make decisions
- Able to appropriately say *no* to people/places/things they do not want
- Responsible for their own feelings/behaviors/thoughts

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Here's a chart that demonstrates these styles and shows who "wins" in each interaction with others at work.

Communication Style Examples

Communication style	Do I win?	Do others win?	Example
Passive	No	Yes	"I'll take on all these projects, even though I'm already overwhelmed."
Aggressive	Yes	No	"No way I'm taking on all these projects. Can't you see I'm overwhelmed? Do it yourself!"
Assertive	Yes	Yes	"I've evaluated that my workload is close to full. Do you think we could split these projects up or change their due dates?"

Keys to Assertive Communication

- Be aware of your body language.
- Make direct eye contact, but soften your eyes so you're not challenging.
- Speak clearly and calmly.
- Keep your tone of voice even and normal while also being sure not to raise the volume of your voice.
- Keep your physical stance open; uncross arms and legs.
- Use "I statements" to address the issue so that the focus is on your need, "I can't meet that deadline but would like to help you reach your goal."
- Be specific and direct in making your point, such as "I will need more hours to finish that task. Can you approve this?"
- Make your request direct instead of non-direct, such as, "Will you please have that finished by today?" instead of "Do you think it will be done by today?"
- Sum up the main point and your agreement. This helps everyone to be clear about the plan and outcome expected.

Remember, assertiveness doesn't guarantee that you will get what you want or that the other person will understand your concerns or be happy with what you said. It does improve the chances that the other person will understand what you want or how you feel, and thus improve your chances of communicating effectively.

Assertiveness involves respecting your rights and the rights of others.



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