

Be Assertive, Not Aggressive

People often ask me, what's the difference between assertive and aggressive communication. Typically, most people think they are just being bold or exercising their right to be heard, but usually they are communicating a little stronger than intended. In both personal and professional settings, this leads to hurt feelings and misunderstandings that could easily be avoided.

So basically, here's the difference.

Assertive behavior involves expressing needs and opinions clearly and respectfully.

Aggressive behavior disregards others' feelings and rights, often using hostility or intimidation.

Training yourself to communicate your thoughts, feelings, and needs effectively and respectfully, is a great way to boost your confidence and ensure your voice is heard. Assertive individuals, as opposed to aggressive or passive individuals, are seen as more credible and likeable.

Ah, the delicate dance of communication styles! To understand the nuances, let's break them down:

Assertive Communication

This is the sweet spot of communication. You express your thoughts, feelings, and needs clearly and respectfully, while also considering others' perspectives.

Assertive Example: If a coworker is consistently interrupting you during meetings, you might say, "I appreciate your input, but I'd like to finish my thought before we move on".

Aggressive Communication

This style involves expressing needs and desires forcefully, often at the expense of others' feelings or rights. It can come off as hostile or demanding.

Aggressive Example: Using the same scenario, you might respond by yelling, "Can you just stop talking for a minute and let me finish?"

Though here it may seem obvious, to those using this style it seems normal and acceptable.

Learning to communicate assertively can be a real game-changer! Here are some ways it can positively impact your life:

- 1. Improved Relationships:** Assertiveness fosters open, honest, and respectful communication. This can lead to stronger relationships with family, friends, and colleagues.
- 2. Increased Self-Confidence:** Speaking your mind in a clear and respectful manner can boost your self-esteem and help you feel more confident in various situations.
- 3. Reduced Stress:** When you express your needs and boundaries clearly, you're less likely to feel overwhelmed or taken advantage of. This can lead to lower stress levels and a greater sense of control over your life.
- 4. Better Problem-Solving:** Assertive communication encourages constructive feedback and collaboration, which can lead to more effective problem-solving and decision-making.
- 5. Enhanced Professional Success:** Being assertive in the workplace can help you navigate challenging situations, advocate for yourself, and advance your career.
- 6. Greater Respect from Others:** People tend to respect those who communicate assertively because it demonstrates self-respect and respect for others.
- 7. Personal Fulfillment:** Assertive communication helps you live more authentically, aligning your actions with your values and desires. Learning to be assertive can lead to a more balanced and fulfilling life. Plus, it can open up opportunities for deeper connections

Passive-Aggressive Communication

You can't discuss aggressive without also mentioning the verbal sneak attack. In this case, the person uses a seemingly innocent passive approach and indirectly expresses negative feelings instead of addressing them openly. It's often marked by sarcasm, denial, or subtle digs.

Passive Example: Instead of directly saying you want your co-worker to stop interrupting, you might say, "Wow, you have so many great ideas maybe you should just take over the meeting."

It's not easy to quickly change your way of speaking, but being aware of these three styles can help improve interactions and make communication more effective and respectful.

"If you overcome your fear of asking someone for a date, a raise, or help with a project, that is an act of self-assertiveness. You are moving out into life rather than contracting and withdrawing." ~ Nathaniel Branden

Here are some basic tips of assertiveness you can practice:

Accept individual differences. This is crucial for meaningful conversations. It means recognizing and valuing the diverse perspectives, experiences, and communication styles that people bring to the table.

Relax your body before engaging in a difficult conflict. This is often referred to as "calm preparedness" or "composed readiness." The idea is to reduce physical tension and mental stress. This can help you think more clearly and respond more effectively during challenging situations. As you relax your body, it becomes easier to handle conflicts.

Rehearse your message before you engage. This simple act can make a world of difference: It helps you clarify your thoughts and identify key points you may want to communicate. Over time, you be more confident and will better manage your emotions by anticipating how you might feel and consider how the other person may feel. It gives you a chance to avoid missteps and avoid saying something you may regret or using harmful confrontational language.



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