



How To Be Assertive (Without Being Viewed As Pushy)

Why we care: Most people are too passive (“He/she is more important than me” a lose-win) or too aggressive (“I’m more important than he/she is” a win-lose) instead of partnering in an assertive win-win (“We’re all equals here who deserve to be heard”). Overriding our default responses and acting on the belief that “What I need is every bit as important as what everyone else needs” can be a tricky skill to master.

What we can do: Leadership IQ’s 10-question Assertiveness Assessment (found on the slides). Helps you identify whether you’re too passive or too aggressive so you can make the correct adjustments. If you’re already doing a good job at asserting yourself, focus on strengthening that skill.

Reframe our self-limiting beliefs: Anticipatory beliefs like: “If I say no, he/she won’t be my friend anymore,” are rarely grounded in reality, yet we let them stop us from asserting ourselves. Disprove self-limiting beliefs with a quick self-audit that asks: “Is there a structurally sound counter argument to this belief?” A good counter argument might sound like: “If this person is pressuring me into doing something I don’t want to do, are they even my friend in the first place?” Great salespeople believe: “My call will solve this person’s pain and make them happy” and not “My call will make this person angry.”

3 Common situations that require assertiveness and what to say and do:

#1: Just Say “No”: Meet the challenge of saying “No” to other people’s requests:

- 1. Preempt the question:** deliver your “No” as an observation or directive before a request is made. Example: “You know you have to work late Friday night.” 8 out of 10 times this is all that’s needed. If it doesn’t work, establish a delay:
- 2. Count to 3 or postpone:** a temporary delay will keep you from feeling pressured to say “Yes” and makes you appear strong and thoughtful. Count to 3 for quick decisions and delay involved decisions by saying: “I’m not prepared to make a decision right now; I’ll get back to you by the end of the day” or even “I need some time to think about that.” Don’t make decisions when you’re Hungry, Angry, Lonely or Tired (HALT). Next, acknowledge their request:
- 3. Acknowledge their request:** lead into saying “No” with: “I hear this request is important to you; however...” Use “however” instead of “but” as no one remembers what came before “but.”
- 4. Say the word “No”:** and not: “I don’t think so.” Don’t say: “I’m sorry.” A one-sentence explanation of why you’re saying “No” is all that’s required and is more effective than a long-winded explanation. Be definitive:
- 5. Own your decision:** say the words: “I won’t” or “I’ve decided not to” rather than “I can’t” or “I shouldn’t” to emphasize you’ve made a choice.
- 6. Sync your nonverbal message:** your body language should match your words (example: don’t nod your head “Yes” while saying “No”). Practice in the mirror.

7. **Use the Broken Record:** you may have to decline several times. Just repeat your “No” and your original reason for declining. If this doesn’t work, end the conversation:
8. **End the conversation:** Be the one to end the conversation. You can soften the blow by saying: “I know this will be a disappointment to you” (not “I’m sorry”), but I won’t be able to...”
9. **Practice:** be prepared to have this conversation at a moment’s notice in a way that is fluid and fluent. Anticipate and rehearse answers to various comebacks (see slides for examples).

#2: Making a Request: Overcome the fears frequently associated with making a request like: “They might say “No”” or “I don’t have a right to ask” and unfounded assumptions like: “They should know what I want without me having to ask” by breaking requests into three simple parts that help others feel an emotional investment in meeting your request.

1. **Define the situation:** “I noticed we’re behind on sending out billing statements.”
2. **Be specific:** “I’d like you to go through the files, print a list of the patients that haven’t been billed yet, and put those statements together by Friday.”
3. **Define the benefits:** “This will put us in a better position for next month, and we will all feel less rushed.”

#3: Expressing Displeasure: Different from constructive feedback (given to protect others: “Stop doing X or you may lose your job”) expressing displeasure protects you (“Stop doing X because I don’t like it”). Follow these rules:

1. **Use factual descriptions:** by separating the facts from the interpretations/judgments you make about the facts. Example: “The pages in this report are out of order” (assertive) instead of “This is sloppy work” (aggressive).
2. **Avoid exaggerations:** they’re not factual. Example: “You were 15 minutes late today” (assertive) instead of “You’re never on time!” (aggressive).
3. **Express thoughts, feelings, and opinions reflecting ownership for your feelings:** Example: “I get angry when he breaks his promises” (takes ownership of feelings, assertive) instead of “He makes me angry” (denies ownership of feelings).
4. **Use "I" not "You":** Example: “I would like to tell my story without being interrupted” (assertive) instead of “You always interrupt my stories” (aggressive).

“I” Statements: allow you to ease into expressing displeasure: “I feel ___ (a certain way) in response to your behavior.” Make sure you include **1) Behavior:** what it is, exactly, that the other person has done or is doing. **2) Effect:** what is happening because of their behavior. **3) Feelings:** what effect does their behavior have on your feelings? Example: “When you come late to the meeting (behavior) I feel angry (feelings) because we have to repeat information the rest of us have already heard (effect).”

Summary: Asserting yourself creates a win-win scenario where you take positive action to protect your needs. However, asserting yourself requires practice. Create a script and work from it until you are fluid and fluent with your words and body language. Find counter arguments to eliminate self-limiting beliefs. Practice the steps to saying “No” and don’t let the fear of “No” prevent you from making requests of others. When expressing displeasure, stick to the facts and take ownership of your feelings to help the other person understand why their behavior has to stop.

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