

Staff Development Services

building strong businesses one employee at a time.

Assertiveness -- The tenth in our series discussing the 13 job related character tendencies.

If you missed, or would like to review, the first nine articles of this series, please click on the newsletter of your choice. These newsletters cover Emotional Energy (18), Stress (19), Self-Esteem (20), Optimism (21), Work (22), Detail (23), Change (24), Courage (25), and Direction (26) .

Assertiveness

A friend of mine, who happens to be a very mild mannered man, is married to a woman who likes bossing him around. So, he decided to talk with a psychiatrist about how he could stand up to his wife. After discussing his situation, the psychiatrist recommended a book on assertiveness.

By the time my friend reached home, he had finished the book and decided he would show his wife that he had become a very different person. He walked up to his wife, pointed a finger at her face, and said, "From now on, I want you to know that I am the man of the house and my word is law! I want you to prepare me a gourmet meal tonight and, when I am finished eating my meal, I expect a sumptuous dessert. Then, after dinner, you are going to draw my bath so I can relax. After I have finished my bath, guess who is going to dress me and comb my hair?"

His wife replied, "The funeral director."

I guess we could say my friend may have become more assertive but he certainly was not very emotionally intelligent!

Assertiveness is a core verbal communication skill and being an effective communicator is a key trait in developing successful relationships in both the workplace and at home. Unfortunately, many of us do not do a good job in this area, making it difficult for others to understand what we mean and possibly resulting in miscommunication and a lot of problems. People with a low level of assertiveness can have difficulty expressing themselves effectively, but people with too much assertiveness may not be effective either.

As we have stated many times before, no one character trait stands alone. In other words, there is not a perfect level of assertiveness because it is affected by a person's other character traits, especially their tolerance and consideration. Although being able to express one's feelings is important in all areas of someone's life, a person with low assertiveness can still be very successful in the workplace, depending on the rest of their character make-up and the job they are doing. Many people who are considered 'worker bees' and are the 'backbone' of many companies often have a low level of assertiveness and they are often also rather considerate and tolerant people.

But, this person can sometimes actually be harder to manage because of their inability to express how they really feel. They often simply agree with anything that is said, even when they are in total disagreement or when it makes them very angry. Over time, this can result in pent up anger and stress, which can eventually manifest itself in different ways. This person may choose to get away from the stress by seeking a new job, or they could develop health issues over time if they do not find some way to vent their anger. Some, especially those who have lower optimism, may learn to manage their stress by complaining to everyone but the people who could actually solve the problem. Or, the most extreme result could be someone who explodes in an emotional rage—think 'going postal'.

On the other end of the spectrum is the highly assertive person who uses their verbal skills to push people to do what they want. If this person is also somewhat tolerant and considerate of others, they can use their verbal skills to effectively deal with others and to be successful in the work force. Often these people handle others using a 'steel fist in a velvet glove' that allows them to schmooze people in order to get what they want from them.



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However, often those who are highly assertive lack tolerance and consideration and use aggressive behaviors to get what they want. The biggest difference between highly skilled sales people and some criminals is how they feel about people. A successful sales person uses his verbal and people skills to achieve their objectives and to get what they need from others.

But, consider Ponzi king, Bernie Madoff. This man is likely someone who is very assertive (very strong verbal skills) but cared little about people (very low consideration) so it did not bother him to bilk people out of billions of dollars as long as it provided the lifestyle he wanted. While he used his verbal skills to rob people, someone else who lacks that ability may, instead, use a gun.

The highly assertive person with poor people skills can make life difficult for those working around them and can have a hard time fitting into the work environment. But, those who do have good people skills are able to be more diplomatic and a more effective leader.

“The basic difference between being assertive and being aggressive is how our words and behavior affect the rights and well being of others.” Sharon Anthony Bower

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Health and Happiness!

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