



## Unit 3

## Understanding and Improving your Assertiveness

### Learning Outcomes

**By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:**

- ✓ Learn how to self-manage to become more effective and efficient.

## Unit 3

# Understanding and Improving your Assertiveness

### What is Assertiveness?

Assertiveness is a word we tend to use always understanding what it means. **Assertiveness is not** about getting your own way, and it is not a way to manipulate people so you get your own way while you look like you are being considerate. Those are **aggressive traits**. Rather, assertive people express their feelings, needs, and opinions in a forthright manner, while respecting how other people feel and think. Assertive people stop short of the abrasive manner that is the hallmark of the aggressive person.

As we explore the differences among assertive, passive, and aggressive behaviors, you may begin to feel that a little assertiveness is just what you need to cut through many of the interpersonal problems that spring up every day.

Often the best way to understand something is through comparison, so we'll do a little of that here.

People can have difficulty being assertive. They choose **passive** responses to life, perhaps to avoid conflict. They feel helpless, insecure, or resentful, and have a difficult time saying "no." They may feel defensive but are unable to defend themselves.

On the other hand, people may also be arrogant, pompous, and presumptuous to compensate for feelings of inadequacy. They may yell, argue, and cajole to get what they want. They meet life in an **aggressive** way.

The **assertive** person is someone who communicates with others on the best of all possible levels, where there are no losers, fools, or enemies—just two people who are mutually trying to solve their problems.

Assertive behavior allows a person to express honest feelings in a straightforward way, and to exercise personal rights without changing or threatening the rights of others. Assertive people feel positive about themselves and others. They are willing to give others a chance to be reasonable before using less positive tactics. They want to openly discuss problems based on facts and needs. Assertion is based on respect for yourself, and for the other person.

### Aggressive Behavior

#### Definition

- Needs and wants are taken care of in a forceful and self-serving way.

## Characteristics

- Self-serving
- Demanding
- Dogmatic
- Competitive
- Pushy
- Uses intimidation, power, and status
- Insensitive
- Strong need to control and dominate others
- Fears rejection
- Impatient
- Temperamental

## Major Consequences

- May accomplish personal desire and goals.
- Tends to alienate people, create distrust and tension, and undermine the ability to establish lasting and healthy relationships.

## Manipulative or Passive-Aggressive Behavior

### Definition

- Needs and wants are taken care of in an indirect, cunning, deceptive, and crafty way with ulterior motives in mind.

### Characteristics

- Game player (using pouting, looking hurt, silence, dropping hints, flirting, giving or withholding attention or caring, and other indirect methods to manipulate people)
- Uses double messages (say one thing and mean another)
- Hides real feelings and intentions
- Inward feelings and outward expressions often incongruent
- Rebellious
- Gets defensive and angry when caught manipulating
- Strong need for approval and attention
- Insecure but wears façade
- Distrusts others

## Major Consequences

- May be successful in manipulating others in indirect ways.
- Undermines credibility and trust .
- Causes them to lose touch with real self and real feelings.

## Passive Behavior

### Definition

- Needs and wants are taken care of by suppressing them or maneuvering others to take care of them.
- Also use manipulative behaviors to get others to take care of them.

### Characteristics

- Denies needs, subordinates them to others, or manipulates others to take care of them
- Often plays martyr role
- Creates conditions in which others will take the lead or make decisions
- Follower
- Tries to do what they think others expect of them
- Lacks self-confidence
- Easily intimidated and controlled by others
- Indecisive
- Moody
- Occasionally cashes in on stored-up anger and feelings
- Uncertain about who they are

## Major Consequences

- May result in some needs getting met.
- Often results in sacrificing needs, getting them met in inappropriate ways, and the loss of identity and ability to take care of self.

## Assertive Behavior

### Definition

- Needs and wants are taken care of by knowing, accepting, and acting on them in constructive, straightforward, and authentic ways.

## Characteristics

- Caring
- Genuine
- Sensitive to the needs and feelings of others
- Selfless
- Expresses needs and feelings in constructive and straightforward ways
- Persistent without being offensive
- Levels and confronts from caring and reasonable position
- Good sense of timing and judgment about when to assert themselves
- Self-confident
- Calm in a crisis

## Major Consequences

- Able to know and take care of needs in a constructive way without doing so at the expense of others.

## Quiz

### Purpose

The purpose of this exercise is to provide an opportunity to assess your individual level of assertiveness through responses to sample situations. This will provide a basis for looking at your beliefs about assertiveness and your use of assertiveness in initiating action or responding to the actions of others.

The term “assertiveness” has been interpreted in many ways. For the purpose of this exercise, assertiveness is defined as declaring your wants, needs, or opinions openly and in good faith; acknowledging your personal responsibility; and respecting the rights of others.

Once current levels of assertiveness are clarified and assertiveness is defined, it is important to identify specific areas where you want to improve.

### Instructions

This exercise will focus on these three areas: assessing your current use of assertiveness; clarifying the definition of assertiveness; and identifying situations where you want to improve.

## Part One

Assuming a personal or social setting, circle one letter (a, b, or c) for each item. Try to be honest in describing yourself rather than trying to pick the “right” answer.

1. If I want something that I’m not getting, I’m likely to:
  - a. Feel helpless and give up
  - b. Concentrate on finding ways to work toward it
  - c. Get angry and insist on having what I want
  
2. I think the best way to relate to close friends is to:
  - a. Accommodate to their needs
  - b. Ask them for what I need and expect them to ask for what they need
  - c. Expect them to accommodate my needs
  
3. I think the best way to relate to new people is to:
  - a. See what kind of people they are before deciding how to relate to them
  - b. Impress them with my skill and knowledge as soon as possible
  - c. Be open and direct from the beginning
  
4. When I feel hurt by something a family member has done, I tend to:
  - a. Tell them my feelings and discuss it with them
  - b. Avoid saying anything to them about it
  - c. Find a way to get back at them
  
5. If I am concerned about how my friend feels about me, I am likely to:
  - a. Tell my friend of my concern
  - b. Ask someone else to find out how my friend feels about me
  - c. Accuse my friend of not caring about me
  
6. When my opinion is questioned, I tend to:
  - a. Back down and wish I hadn’t said anything
  - b. Defend my opinion and prove I’m right
  - c. Explore the question in an active interchange
  
7. If I want a book a friend has borrowed for a long time, I am likely to:
  - a. Tell them I’d like to have it back
  - b. Let them keep it and buy another copy
  - c. Demand it back and refuse to loan them anything else
  
8. When I am asked to do something that I think is inappropriate, I usually:
  - a. Criticize the person for asking me to do such a thing
  - b. Go along with it even though I feel uncomfortable

- c. State my concerns about it
9. When someone calls me by the wrong name, I usually:
- a. Tell them my name immediately
  - b. Ask them why they can't get my name right
  - c. Figure it's not worth saying anything about
10. I think the best way to deal with competition is to:
- a. Try to do my best
  - b. Avoid competition as much as possible
  - c. Try to win no matter what
11. When someone is very demanding, I believe it is best to:
- a. Refuse to be pushed around and tell them to leave me alone
  - b. Tell them how I feel about the demands
  - c. Go along with the demands if I possibly can
12. If I want to go along a path blocked by people talking, I am likely to:
- a. Tell them to get out of my way
  - b. Go some other way
  - c. Ask them to let me through
13. If I disagree with someone else's opinion, I am likely to:
- a. Tell them they are wrong
  - b. Give them my opinion on the subject
  - c. Let it pass and say nothing
14. When someone's kidding at my expense, I tend to:
- a. Retaliate by kidding in the same way
  - b. State my feelings about the kidding
  - c. Let it pass and say nothing
15. When I am asked to volunteer my services for a charity, I tend to:
- a. Tell them I refuse to be imposed on
  - b. Do it whether I want to or not, because I hate to refuse
  - c. Decide on the basis of my time and interest
16. If an unpleasant job has to be done around the house, I think it is best to:
- a. Force someone else to do it
  - b. Do it myself without saying anything
  - c. Discuss it with others involved
17. If I want to end a phone conversation, I am likely to:

- a. Say I have something else to do now and can't talk any longer
  - b. Say I don't have all day to talk on the phone
  - c. Half-heartedly participate in the conversation and hope it will end
- 18.** If the hostess serves a dish I dislike, I think it's best to:
- a. Try to eat it anyway
  - b. Say how much I dislike the dish
  - c. Decline it in favor of something else
- 19.** If I want a certain seat in a restaurant, I am likely to:
- a. Ask for the seat I want before being seated
  - b. Get up and move to the seat I want without asking anyone
  - c. Hope I get it, but accept whatever I get
- 20.** When I don't want to do what my friends plan, I think it is best to:
- a. Do what I want and let them do what they want
  - b. Insist that they do what I want to do
  - c. Go along with the majority
- 21.** When I am asked where I want to go to eat, I usually:
- a. Insist on going to my favorite place
  - b. Decide where I'd like to go and suggest it
  - c. Say it doesn't matter
- 22.** When asking someone for a favor, I feel it is best to:
- a. Feel free to ask without any expectations
  - b. Insist that others do whatever I need
  - c. Ask only if it's absolutely necessary
- 23.** I think the best way to handle a put-down is to:
- a. Ignore it and pretend not to have noticed
  - b. Tell the person how I feel about it
  - c. Retaliate and give it right back
- 24.** When someone cuts in line in front of me, I usually:
- a. Say nothing to them
  - b. Tell them I don't want them to cut in line in front of me
  - c. Demand that they move to the back of the line
- 25.** If I want better service at a restaurant than I am getting, I am likely to:
- a. Gripe about the service to myself but say nothing to anyone else
  - b. Be sarcastic to the waiter and not leave a tip
  - c. Ask for whatever service I need

26. When someone interrupts me in the middle of a sentence, I tend to:
  - a. Ask them to wait a moment until I finish
  - b. Wait until I get another chance to finish what I was saying
  - c. Tell them they're rude to interrupt me
  
27. In giving my opinions, I feel it is best to:
  - a. Present my opinions in an absolute way so that they can't be questioned
  - b. Say that I may be wrong, but that I think "so and so"
  - c. State my opinions without focusing on whether or whether they are seen as wrong
  
28. If I want to leave a party when no one else has left, I am likely to:
  - a. Try to break up the party
  - b. Go ahead and leave when I want to
  - c. Stay until someone else leaves first
  
29. If I want something very badly, I am likely to:
  - a. Hint at what I want and hope to get it
  - b. Ask for it in a very direct way
  - c. Insist that I get it
  
30. When a friend asks me to do a favor that creates a problem for me, I usually:
  - a. Pretend it's no problem and go ahead and do it
  - b. Tell them I refuse to be taken advantage of
  - c. Acknowledge the problem it creates and explore alternatives

## Part Two

Assuming a work setting, circle one letter (a, b, or c) for each item. Try to be honest in describing yourself rather than trying to pick the "right" answer.

31. If I want my superiors to notice my work, I am likely to:
  - a. Demand to be recognized for my work
  - b. Work very hard and hope they recognize it
  - c. Inform them of my work and commitment to the job
  
32. If I am part of a discussion group, I am likely to:
  - a. Leave most of the discussion to others
  - b. Try to control the outcome of the discussion
  - c. Take an active part in the discussion
  
33. I feel the best way to get what I want is to:
  - a. Be patient and hope things work out
  - b. Offer suggestions and assume that others will do the right thing

- c. Tell others precisely what they must do and how to do it
- 34.** In being responsible for other people, I think it is best to:
- a. Give them clear guidelines to follow
  - b. Offer suggestions and assume they will do the right thing
  - c. Tell them precisely what they must do and how to do it
- 35.** If I have authority over others, I am likely to:
- a. Exercise my authority as needed
  - b. Try to avoid using my authority
  - c. Relish the authority and use it at every opportunity
- 36.** If I am proud of a job I've done, I am likely to:
- a. Share it with those who are interested in my work
  - b. Make a point of bragging about it at every opportunity
  - c. Say nothing about it, but hope people will notice it
- 37.** When I am pressured to hurry with my work, I tend to:
- a. Feel overwhelmed and just give up
  - b. Take it out on anyone or anything that interferes with me
  - c. Work as diligently as possible
- 38.** If I want more challenging work to do, I am likely to:
- a. Hint that I am caught up and could take on something else
  - b. Say that I want more challenging work and believe I can handle it
  - c. Gripe about the boring job I have and insist on something challenging
- 39.** If I want to know what my boss thinks of my work, I am likely to:
- a. Complain to my boss that I never get any feedback on my work
  - b. Ask my boss for a performance evaluation
  - c. Ask a co-worker to find out what my boss thinks of my work
- 40.** When someone points out a mistake to me, I usually:
- a. Feel embarrassed and try to keep others from knowing
  - b. Appreciate their pointing it out and focus on correcting it
  - c. Get angry and accuse them of being too critical
- 41.** If I want to present my position on question to others, I am likely to:
- a. Try to justify my position
  - b. State what my position is and how I reached it
  - c. Insist that they accept my position
- 42.** When I am asked a question and don't know the answer, I tend to:

- a. Say I don't know
  - b. Apologize for being so dumb
  - c. Blame someone else for not telling me
- 43.** If I hear that someone has told lies about me, I think it is best to:
- a. Tell them what I heard and ask them about it
  - b. Tell some lies about them too
  - c. Say nothing to them, but avoid them in the future
- 44.** When it comes to getting a job done right, I think it is best to:
- a. Rely on others to lead the way
  - b. Trust no one but myself to do it
  - c. Join with others in sharing responsibility for getting it done
- 45.** In sharing new ideas with others, I think it best to:
- a. Offer the ideas: "Don't you think..."
  - b. State the ideas: "I think..."
  - c. Strongly present the ideas: "The best way is..."
- 46.** When my judgment is questioned, I usually:
- a. Say I resent this attack on my ability
  - b. Deal with the questions to the best of my ability
  - c. Go blank and don't know what to say
- 47.** If I make a mistake, I think it is best to:
- a. Hide it and hope no one finds out
  - b. Try to learn from it
  - c. Blame it on someone else
- 48.** When the boss doesn't take my suggestions seriously, I usually:
- a. Wish I hadn't made the suggestion and not make any more
  - b. Demand to be taken seriously
  - c. Restate my suggestion and my seriousness in making it
- 49.** I think the best way to deal with difficult people is to:
- a. Interact with them in a straightforward way
  - b. Be just as difficult as they are
  - c. Stay away from them as much as possible
- 50.** I believe the best way to handle a problem is to:
- a. Insist that it be settled immediately
  - b. Ignore it as much as possible

- c. Get as much information about it as possible
- 51.** When my boss asks me to tell a story I'm uncomfortable with, I usually:
- a. Refuse to do it and say I shouldn't have been asked
  - b. Feel I have no choice but to do it without question
  - c. Acknowledge my discomfort with the situation
- 52.** If I want a day off work for some personal business, I am likely to:
- a. Take off and say I was sick
  - b. Explain my need and request the day off
  - c. Mean to ask, but never find a good time to ask
- 53.** When decisions are to be made, I believe it is best to:
- a. Make the decisions alone and dare anyone to challenge them
  - b. Share the responsibility for making them
  - c. Wait for someone else to make them
- 54.** If I want a group to listen to my ideas, I am likely to:
- a. Clearly state my ideas as often as necessary
  - b. Insist upon being heard because I know best
  - c. Try once, but not again if they don't listen
- 55.** When my authority is questioned, I tend to:
- a. Not take it personally
  - b. Take the offensive and set out to attack the other person
  - c. Get flustered and back off my position
- 56.** When I am asked my opinion about a new idea, I tend to:
- a. Challenge the idea to show how smart I am
  - b. Wait and see what others think of it before giving my opinion
  - c. Ask questions to get more information about it
- 57.** I think the best way to get a raise is to:
- a. Insist on my right to a raise
  - b. Do good work and wait to be rewarded
  - c. Do good work and ask for a raise based on the work
- 58.** When a person asks my opinion and I know what opinion they want, I usually:
- a. Give my honest opinion
  - b. Say what I'm expected to say
  - c. Accuse the person of not really wanting my opinion
- 59.** When I disagree with something I have been asked to do, I usually:
- a. Demand to do it my own way

- b. State my opinion about it and discuss it further
- c. Do it anyway rather than get into a discussion

60. If I plan to tell someone they are doing something wrong, I am likely to:
- a. Tell them as clearly and quickly as possible
  - b. Dread it and postpone it as long as possible
  - c. Use it as an opportunity to tell them everything I don't like

### Group Evaluation

Number of Passive Answers: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Assertive Answers: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Aggressive Answers: \_\_\_\_\_

### Ideas for Change

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## Improving Your Assertiveness Skills

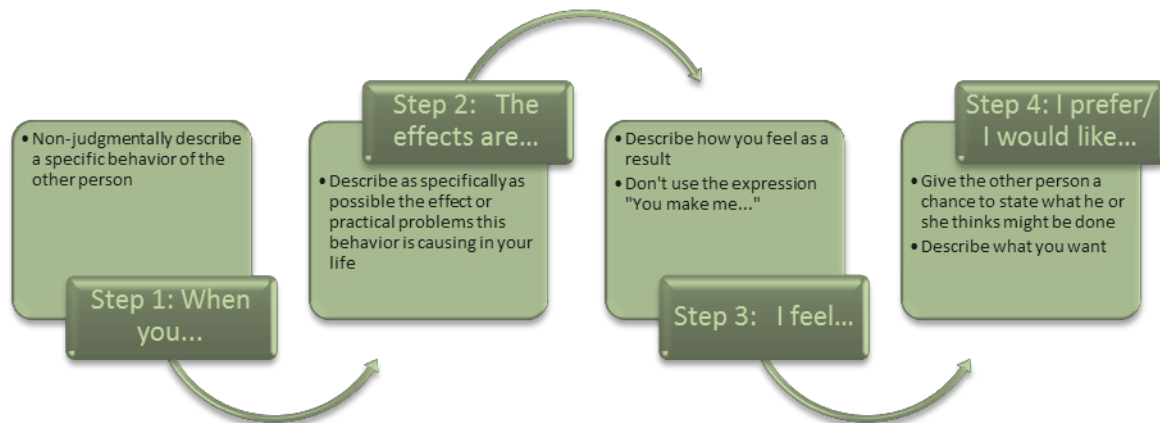
### Dealing with Tough Issues

We are most likely to retain the goodwill of the person we're standing up to if we stick with our own thoughts, feelings, and beliefs, and avoid direct or implied criticism of the other person. One way to do that is to stick with "I" messages expressed in a matter-of-fact, non-judgmental tone of voice.

"You" Message	Reworded as an "I" Message
You talk too loudly.	I have sensitive hearing.
You should send out an agenda.	I'd like to know what we're going to discuss in the meeting tomorrow, so I can bring the necessary information with me.

You can use this same type of message when you are giving feedback about someone else's behavior. Again, the feedback should be non-judgmental, but it should be specific.

There are four steps to this message.



#### Example:

1. "When you leave your papers scattered all over the office..."
2. "Both of us have a hard time finding them when you need them again."
3. "I feel like I'm responsible for tracking them down, but sometimes I don't even know where to start."
4. "I'd like you to put all those papers in one big pile in that basket on my desk. I could file them at the end of the day, and we would have them when we need them. Would that work for you?"

**Remember:** When you are stating feelings, state feelings directly, not evaluations or solutions.

Now that you have the tools to improve your assertiveness level, you may be pleasantly surprised at how readily others accept and respect your assertiveness. You must be prepared, however, for the occasional tough cookie who responds aggressively with verbal attacks, put-downs, or demands. When this happens, here are some techniques you can use to respond to the situation:

- Speak assertively, but with empathy, to show the other person you have received their message.
- Repeat your assertion by repeating your original response, while also responding to legitimate points made by the other person.
- Use active listening and open questions to clarify your understanding of the other person's position.

**Think of situations where you could use this formula. Practice the wording to yourself and then try it out in a fairly non-stressful situation and see how it works. Like most things, it gets easier with practice.**

