

Negotiation & Assertiveness

People Skills for Managers

Samuel A. Malone



SAMUEL A. MALONE

NEGOTIATION & ASSERTIVENESS

PEOPLE SKILLS FOR MANAGERS

Negotiation & Assertiveness: People Skills for Managers

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INTRODUCTION

The People Skills for Managers series of books are aimed at busy managers who want to acquire the vital people skills needed for success in a management career. This particular book covers the skills of negotiation and assertiveness. Each chapter starts with questions to prime the mind for learning and includes a summary and ends with five practical things you can do to improve your skills in the specific areas covered. Acronyms, inspirational quotations, illustrations, examples, diagrams and techniques are sprinkled throughout the text to further enhance and consolidate the learning process.

Managers spend a significant proportion of their time negotiating with employees, other managers, customers, employees and trade unions. They thus need to know how to negotiate effectively and successfully. Some of the basic skills of negotiation include planning, knowing your opponent, and exploring options. There are numerous negotiation strategies for different situations. Persuasion skills will help you get others to do willingly what you want them to do. Support your case by relying on precedent, quoting an impartial authoritative source, or claiming that it has been conceded to others in the past in similar circumstances.

A good manager knows the difference between passive, aggressive and assertive behaviour. Passive people are submissive and taken for granted. Aggressive people get angry and upset at the least provocation. Assertive people assert their rights while respecting the rights of others. They seek win-win solutions to conflict. The advantages of assertiveness are many and include expressing yourself confidently without hurting the feelings of others. Knowing when to be assertive and when to hold your tongue, bite your lip and stay quiet is a vital survival skill for a manager.

At the end of this book you will be able to:

- Negotiate successfully
- Use the conflict resolution model
- Make a compelling case when negotiating
- Tell the difference between passive, aggressive and assertive behaviour
- Know when it is most useful to be assertive
- Apply the techniques of assertion

Samuel A. Malone

August 2018

1 NEGOTIATION

What are the basic skills of negotiation?

What are the negotiation strategies?

How can I persuade someone to my viewpoint?

How can you make a compelling case?

What are the common mistakes of negotiating?

1.1 BASIC SKILLS

Negotiating is a process of bargaining by gradually moving from opposing positions to conciliatory positions closer together. Unless both parties move and compromise there is no negotiation. Successful negotiation generally results in a contract. As a manager you will negotiate with other managers, customers, suppliers, employees, and trade unions. For example, with suppliers you will negotiate payment terms, quantity, quality, timing, after sales service, and delivery.

Even in a private capacity you negotiate with your friends, family, children and partner. Examples include, getting the best deal on a trade-in against a new car, negotiating a pay rise, negotiating with an auctioneer to buy a house, or seeking estimates from builders for an extension to your home. Before you negotiate clarify your needs, wants and limits. This will crystallise the process in your mind enabling you to negotiate with great skill. Use the acronym **POCKET** to recall the basic skills needed to be an effective negotiator:

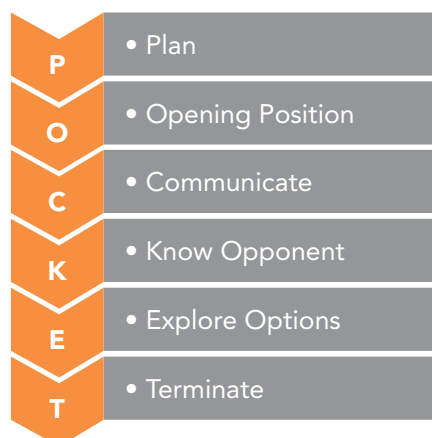


Fig. 1.1. Effective Negotiation Skills Model (POCKET)

- Plan.** The purpose is to make a deal. The ideal solution is a win-win solution. You must achieve your critical goals, and the minimum baseline, that you won't go below. Also, consider the other party's target and reservation or reference point (i.e. a point that they will not go below). In addition, consider your own reservation point or the lowest point where you are not prepared to go below. Sometimes the term anchoring is used for this process. This determines the point when you should walk away. Judge offers based on this benchmark point. The target point is your goal which you should know before you go into negotiations. This is the point that it is okay to settle the deal at. Doing your homework is an important part of planning. Preparation is the key to success and will lead to better outcomes. Ninety percent of the negotiation process is done before the first meeting. Prior to the meeting practise reverse role-play, so that you can get into the other person's mind, and experience where they are coming from. Have a clear view of the outcomes you desire. Now weigh up the strategies and tactics you will adopt to achieve your objectives. Consider where the meeting will be held and the seating arrangements. A neutral venue is probably the best as the home advantage is avoided. Suitable seating arrangements should be thought about. A round table promotes an egalitarian, non-confrontational atmosphere for negotiating. A rectangular table encourages an adversarial approach with people sitting on opposing sides. If the negotiations are going to be done by a team, pick the best people with the best skills, abilities and

talents for the purpose. People with previous experience as successful negotiators, will be an obvious choice. The more attractive you are perceived by the other party the greater your persuasiveness. Attractiveness here includes sense of humour, friendliness, appearance, dress, attentiveness, sensitivity and competence.

- **Opening position.** The opening position should be the best possible deal for you which will give you room for manoeuvre. Before you begin make sure the other party has the necessary authority to conclude the negotiations, as otherwise you can waste a lot of time. Know your own needs and what you want to achieve. Categorise your goals into “must haves” and “desirables.” The “must haves” are items that you consider critical to the negotiation. Failure to agree on these would mean the negotiations would fail. It might be useful to classify the “desirables” into strong and weak. The weak are the ones you would concede first. Be aware of your own and others perceptions. Avoid partisan or biased viewpoints and see others as your equal. Aim for a win-win outcome rather than a win-lose outcome. A win-win outcome satisfies both parties, while a win-lose outcome may store up resentments and even create enemies for the future. Identify differences between your point of view and the other party’s point of view. Try to bridge the gap by identifying common ground and similar values. Create a positive climate and promote feelings of goodwill and friendship. Establish the facts but read between the lines by studying body language and innuendo. Maintaining good interpersonal-relationships is essential, so that mutual trust and respect can be built up. Success in negotiation depends on confidence. Confidence is reinforced by effective communication and careful advance planning and helps you work creatively during the process to optimise the outcome. Never go into a negotiation without knowing what your BATNA (best alternative to negotiated agreement) is. You are then in a position to compare the deal made with the planned BATNA. Also, know the other parties BATNA. A BATNA may be making something in-house rather than through a subcontractor, stick to a particular price range, resorting to legal means rather than settling informally, or approaching another buyer. Accept things that are superior to your BATNA and reject anything that are inferior to your BATNA.
- **Communicate.** Use your powers of persuasion and be assertive as appropriate. Speak using clear, concise, constructive and logical language. Avoid technical jargon, idioms and slang. Sometimes a picture is worth more than a thousand words – so use visuals as appropriate. Listen attentively. Listening is probably the most important skill to have. Use the technique of reflective listening such as “you feel that...” Acknowledge what has been said and felt. Use paraphrasing and summarising. This will help avoid confrontation, while at the same time giving you an opportunity to find out what the other party really thinks. Use silence as necessary to encourage the other person to speak or continue speaking, as silence creates a vacuum encouraging and even compelling the other person to fill it. Flag

or signpost what you are about to say next. Ask and you shall receive. Seek and you shall find. It is surprising what people will tell you when they are encouraged to do so, and you take an interest in them. Concessions and self-disclosure on your part is likely to be reciprocated. Let the other party know what the crucial issues are for you and how you feel about the issues at hand. Use “I” statements. Respect confidential information. Avoid emotive language and insults by always maintaining your composure even in the most trying circumstances. In no circumstances should you comment on the other party’s approach to and ethics of doing business, way of life, laws, religion, race and so on.

- **Know your opponent.** Information is power and is your greatest weapon and so forewarned is forearmed. Find out as much as you can about the other party and what they want from the negotiations – their interests, concerns, desires and needs. Probe for their unarticulated or underlying interests – study the body language for clues. If there is an organisation involved carry out a due diligence test to find out their strengths and weaknesses. Help build a positive relationship by respecting the other person’s point of view. Confirm what their goals are and try to address their problems and concerns. Identify trade-offs, make concessions, and seek a compromise. Bargaining is all about compromising and trading concessions. You offer something to get something in return. A win-win deal will be perceived as fair and is more likely to be acceptable.
- **Explore options by asking ‘what if’ questions** to find out what the other party would be prepared to settle for. The more options considered the more likely that a win-win solution will result. Create options that will meet the interests of both parties. This is part of the process of searching for common ground and coming up with a workable compromise. Win-win solutions are arrived at through asking questions, considering alternatives and problem solving. They require openness, imagination, trust, and goodwill. Most deals are driven by a 50 per cent emotional need, and a 50 per cent economic need. So, be sensitive to the emotional needs of the other party. To address the economic needs only promise what you can deliver. It is good psychology to under promise and over deliver.
- **Terminate or conclude the deal.** Proposals have been made and concessions given by both sides. The deal is concluded and commitments made when the option satisfying both parties is selected. Celebrate agreement with a warm smile and a ready handshake, with the agreed deal confirmed in writing to avoid misunderstandings in the future. A good agreement meets the interests of both parties, is demonstrably fair, better than the BATNA and doable. Memory is notoriously unreliable, and so the need for written contractual agreements. Copies of the agreements should be circulated to all interested parties. Relationships are maintained when both parties stand by their agreement, and this is more likely if the agreement is in writing. Continue to work cooperatively with the other party to build trust and manage the

relationship. Do what you say you'll do, keep in contact and reaffirm trust. Remain responsive to the timely identification of problems and negotiation of solutions. Carry out a post mortem to see what tactics worked and what didn't. Reflect and learn from your experience.

"Trades would not take place unless it was advantageous to the parties concerned. Of course, it is better to strike as good a bargain as one's bargaining position permits. The worst outcome is when by overriding greed, no bargain is struck, and a trade that could have been advantageous to both parties, does not come off at all."

– Benjamin Franklin

1.2 NEGOTIATION STRATEGIES

A good negotiator will be thoroughly familiar with numerous strategies that can be used appropriately:



Fig. 1.2. Negotiating Strategies

- **Salami.** This strategy is divide and conquer. Getting one slice at a time and being patient may mean that eventually you get almost the whole salami. Chunk objectives down into sub-objectives. It is easier, more manageable, and digestible to agree things by stages than all at once. As each stage is concluded it can be written up and put aside. This will give you a feeling of accomplishment, and motivate you forward to achieve more sub-goals. Then concentrate on the next stage. Start with the items where there is little disagreement.
- **Limited authority.** This is a ploy where you pretend that you have to refer back to a higher authority for approval. The strategy may backfire in that the other party may

call your bluff and insist that they go to the higher authority. Pre-empt the other party from employing this strategy by enquiring what power and level of authority they have at the start of the negotiations. If you find they have insufficient power and authority, then you should stop the negotiation and insist that you negotiate with the person with the power.

- **Withdrawal.** This is the sham of taking umbrage at what is being said, or what is being offered, and then storming out of the negotiations giving the impression that the process is over. You may believe that the offer on the table is not reasonable and the withdrawal gives the other party time to reconsider. It may be used as a tactic hoping to get a better offer on return. The success of the ploy depends on one's acting ability, and determination to persist.
- **Pretence by 'flying a kite' to gauge a situation.** This might be a ploy to gauge a reaction to a proposal by testing the waters and so finding out what the other party's attitude is towards the negotiation. If the proposal is not agreeable then it can be dropped. It's based on the principle of "you don't know how deep the puddle is until you step in it." Unions usually come in with a high wage demand partly to test the waters and see what reaction they'll get from the employer. It also gives them space to manoeuvre. Politicians do it all the time. They leak some "confidential information" about a proposed new controversial policy or tax to see what the voting public's reaction is likely to be. If the reaction is favourable they will then pursue the policy. If the reaction is negative they will quietly drop it and hope the public will quickly forget it.
- **Deadlines.** A specific deadline will concentrate minds and energies. However, deadlines are nearly always negotiable. If the other party has set the deadline you can always test it to see if it can be changed. The Brexit negotiations between Britain and the EU is prolonged and difficult with little progress up to June 2018. Consider the Northern Ireland Belfast Agreement (10 April 1988) talks where brinkmanship was the name of the game with the deadlines continually being pushed back. Determination and persistence to get an acceptable result won through in the end.
- **Good guy-bad guy or the hard line versus the soft line.** This is often the scene in cop films where two cops are interrogating a criminal suspect. One detective acts the nice guy to win approval, while the other acts the tough guy to break down the suspect's resistance. Sometimes the good guy may ask the bad guy to calm down in a seemingly gesture of support for the bad guy. Similarly, in negotiations one person may take the soft line and be friendly, approachable and reasonable, while the other takes a hard line being difficult, threatening and uncompromising. When the hard-liner leaves the room, the other person offers a deal that in the circumstances looks comparatively attractive. This may backfire as when the person taking the hard line is ignored completely, and all the negotiation is done with the person taking the soft line.

- **Standard contract.** A standard contract suggests it can't be changed. Saying this is the norm for the industry implies that everybody accepts it without question, and that you should also do so. An employer may make a pay offer claiming it's what has been accepted generally in the industry. People like to follow the lead of similar or like-minded people. In fact, it may be possible to negotiate more favourable conditions. Details of the standard contract can usually be changed and negotiated to accommodate the needs of both sides.
- **Fait accompli.** The deed is done and is irreversible. It's like taking your car to the garage to get an estimate for repairs, but when you go back to collect your car you find that the job has been done. This may backfire in that you are entitled to insist that they were not authorised to repair the car until after you had seen the estimate and agreed it. However, most people don't like the prospect of an acrimonious dispute and causing upset, and just accept it as a fait accompli. Builders have been known to demolish buildings with a preservation order and contrary to planning laws. This is a risky strategy and can go very wrong if the planning authority insists on the building being reinstated!

"In good deal making, 90% of the real negotiation happens before you sit down to negotiate."

– Lesly Stolz, Ph.D.

1.3 PERSUASION

There are many approaches you can adopt to persuade others to your viewpoint. Persuasion is the art of influencing or getting what you want. Negotiation is central to gaining agreement and exercising influence. The ability to influence others, resolve conflict and compromise is the essence of negotiations and the core of successful business. People are more likely to conclude agreements with those that they like, befriend, trust and respect. The following are some of the persuasion techniques commonly used:



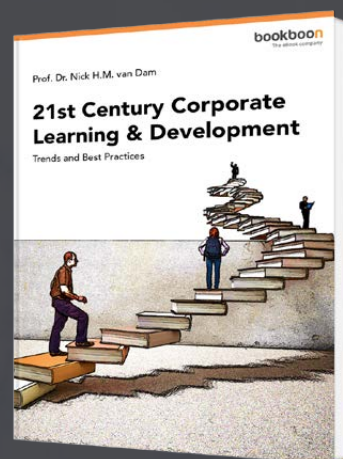
Fig. 1.3. Persuasion techniques

- Style.** There are two basic styles – competitive and co-operative. The competitive style is tough, confrontational, adversarial, and aggressive. It assumes the pie for sharing is finite and aims for a win-lose outcome. The co-operative style takes an integrative problem-solving approach and aims for an agreed solution. This style assumes the pie for sharing is expanding and aims for a win-win outcome. Back up your arguments by reference to authority figures, with case studies as well as hard evidence and deliver your message in a confident and authoritative way. Seek

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to be friendly, reasonable and collaborative and build up rapport. For example, when productivity deals are agreed with trade unions both the company and the workers benefit. Productivity increases the wealth of the company for sharing with managers, employees and shareholders alike, so that everybody gains.

- **Talking/listening.** To persuade someone you need to spend about half the time talking and listening. In fact, you should give the other party the opportunity to talk more than you. People like the sound of their own voice and are more likely to be persuaded if they are given plenty of opportunity to speak, as they are surprised when they come across somebody who actually patiently listens to what they have to say and proves it by responding in a meaningful way. The aim of a good negotiator is to build a good lasting relationship with the other party. Say the right thing at the right time and in the right place. Remember not to say the wrong thing at the wrong moment.
- **Get the other person's point of view.** Pay attention to what the other party is saying and try to see the world through their eyes. Show empathy for the position they are in. Stress the benefits of your proposals to meeting their needs by emphasising what's in it for them.
- **Probing questions.** Use probing questions to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the other person's argument. Focus in on their weaknesses to dilute the strength of their arguments. Do this in an unobtrusive and sensitive way, as you do not want to antagonise them. Give two-sided arguments with intelligent people but demonstrate how the counter arguments are invalid. Don't presuppose that you know what the other party is thinking or looking for, as reading minds is extremely difficult and counter-productive. Instead, ask them what they want from the negotiation, as knowledge is power to be used with advantage.
- **Adjournments.** These can be used for rest, recreation or coffee breaks to discuss proposals or develop and consider solutions. They can also be used to break a deadlock, or to consider new information presented by the other party. Breaks give people time to cool down, socialise, relax and reflect on both sides of the argument in a dispassionate fashion. Also, a bit of humour will help the negotiations along. We like people who make us feel at ease by making us laugh, and are, therefore, more likely to be influenced by them. When we are laughing we are less likely to be thinking of counter arguments and be more receptive to ideas.
- **Win compromise by making concessions.** It's better to sell the wool than the sheep. Bargaining is all about give and take and making trade-offs. When people receive they like to reciprocate in return. The ability to bargain is a managerial skill necessary for personal and organisational success. Back up your case with information, facts and logic, to make it as compelling and bullet-proof as possible. Using logic is non-threatening, and, therefore, relationships are more likely to remain positive. Great negotiators always have a sweetener in reserve to win over

support and clinch a deal. Putting all “the cards on the table” at an early stage in the negotiations is not a good idea. Trading mutually advantageous concessions is the hallmark of professional negotiation. If appropriate, emphasise the scarcity value of some of the concessions given, as items perceived to be hard to win tend to have more persuasive value and appeal.

- **Summarise** in writing what has been agreed so far in the negotiations. This is a public declaration of commitment that people will feel obliged to honour. It will also record and consolidate your position to-date and prevent the parties from going back over old ground. It also acts as an aide memoir that people can refer to rather than relying on their fallible memory.
- **Reaching agreement.** Timing is very important, and so you will need to gauge that the mood is favourable before you decide to conclude. The posture, gestures and facial expression, of the other party should provide clues as to when the right moment for agreement has arrived. When you have agreed, test the understanding of the other party to make sure you are of the same mind. Establish monitoring and review procedures to ensure that the agreement is implemented satisfactorily.

“Your ability to negotiate, communicate, influence, and persuade others to do things is absolutely indispensable to everything you accomplish in life. The most effective men and women in every area are those who can quite competently organise the co-operation and assistance of other people toward the accomplishment of important goals and objectives.”

– Brian Tracey

SUPPORTING YOUR CASE**Fig. 1.4.** Making Your Case

The following are some tips to make your case more compelling.

- State explicitly and clearly what you want. Have a clear, consistent vision of your goals. Great leaders have compelling visions that inspire others. Don't assume that the other party is a mind reader. In fact, nobody can read another person's mind. So be specific and candid about your wants and needs. Remember that first impressions are critical – so make sure you create a good one.
- Use precedents, examples, stories, visuals, authority figures, or case studies, from comparable situations to back up your case. These will illustrate and support your case and make it more forceful, meaningful, understandable and compelling.
- Support your case with impartial facts researched from an eminent reliable source. Be fair and consistent in your argument. This makes your case more tenable. Make a clear and explicit conclusion to your argument.
- Make the case that it is the industry norm and thus widely acceptable. For example, a trade union may refer to comparable percentage increases obtained by other workers in the same industry that year. This makes your case more reasonable, palatable and factual.
- Support your case by demonstrating that it has been conceded to others in a similar situation in the past. This shows your case has some merit. During all this time show that you are fair and consistent, trustworthy and professional.
- Acknowledge what the other side sees as important so that they feel their point of view is being considered. Ascertain their needs and priorities. Identify areas of agreement and disagreement to the satisfaction of both sides. This demonstrates that you are listening and concerned to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion to the process.

“Negotiation is hardly ever a one-time transaction. It is a process that begins from the first impression you make when you meet a new contact and continues to the moment that both parties sign off on a deal.”

– Alaina G. Levine

1.4 NEGOTIATING MISTAKES

The following are some of the mistakes you may make when negotiating:



Fig. 1.5 Negotiation Mistakes – Attitude

ATTITUDE

- Adopting a win-lose attitude. You view negotiation only as getting the best deal for yourself, and as a contest to beat the other side. This is likely to create an antagonistic atmosphere in the negotiating room. Consequently, you miss opportunities for a mutually beneficial trade-off.
- You are too committed to your viewpoint and unable to objectively consider other's point of view. You are stubbornly stuck in an entrenched position, without being able to see the possibilities for breakthrough, with no give and take, or win-win values. As a result, you win the battle and lose the war. The other party is dissatisfied and will be waiting in ambush to retaliate in the future.
- Seeing your own side as more intelligent, talented and capable than the other. For example, if you see the other side as stubborn, the self-fulfilling prophecy may operate, so that the other side lives up to your expectations and behaves in an inflexible and uncooperative fashion.

POOR PEOPLE SKILLS



Fig. 1.6. Negotiation Mistakes – Poor people skills

- Using abusive behaviour. Being confrontational and continually interrupting the other party. You are prone to argue, get angry, and lose your temper. This is not the way to win friends and influence people. Even your body language may show coldness, indifference, and inadvertent signals of lack of trust, disrespect, and hostility. Building good relationships and mutual respect should be your aim and should not be betrayed by inappropriate body language. Remember that your emotions are written all over your face.
- Not listening attentively to the other person's point of view and finding out exactly what they want. You engage in a monologue rather than a dialogue instead of using appropriate insightful questions and silence to engage the other party and ascertain their concerns.
- You fail to build up a trusting respectful relationship. Trust is at the heart of negotiation. If we are suspicious or wary of people we may find it extremely difficult to engage and make agreements with them. The use of honest self-disclosure is likely to contribute to the creation of trust and respect. People are influenced more by people they consider friendly, truthful, mannerly and transparent.
- You ignore the signs of conflict and fail to defuse situations. You personalise issues by concentrating on the person's physical appearance or personality rather than their behaviour. Be soft on the person but hard on their unacceptable behaviour or abusive language.
- You patronise the other person. This is often evident when the other party is a woman, or when a specialist is dealing with a non-specialist and is contemptuous of their lack of knowledge and technical language.
- Using irritators. Irritators are words or phrases used by one side that get under the skin, irritate, annoy or offend the other. Examples include phrases such as, 'unreasonable demand,' 'very fair offer,' and 'you are being unhelpful.' Often people use these without any thought and don't realise the annoying and negative effect they have on others.

"Effective negotiation is 90% attitude and 10% technique.

– Lesley Stolz, Ph.D.

PLANNING

Fig. 1.7. Negotiation Mistakes – Planning

- Poor preparation. Information is power while ignorance leads to exploitation. You fail to do your homework, establish the facts, do a due diligence and get quality information. This helps you identify key issues, which can be addressed and resolved early. You jump to conclusions. In other words, you blindly go into a situation without having and considering all the necessary facts and the options available – agree in haste, repent at leisure. Failure to plan is planning to fail, and so you should carefully and meticulously plan the negotiation process.
- Lack of clear objectives. You need to know your goals and bottom line or anchor point as otherwise you may agree to something you don't want. You also need to know the goals of the other party and what their base line is – the minimum they are prepared to accept.
- You don't anticipate or foresee what deadlocks are likely to emerge, and therefore have no contingency plans in place to deal with them. You should always have a fall-back position to help you come back no matter what happens. Things will seldom go according to plan and you must be ready to deal with unexpected and often difficult situations.

- You have poor problem-solving and decision-making skills and thus don't approach issues in a rational systematic way. You are unfamiliar with the basic techniques and process for negotiation. You are swept along by a tide of emotion rather than by facts, logic and reason.
- Impatience. Negotiations can be a tedious and trying process. The slow and steady tortoise often wins the race. Patience, persistence, attention to detail and thoroughness in your approach will see you successfully through in the end. You lack the flexibility to believe that in certain circumstances everything is achievable and probably negotiable. The law of expectancy suggests that those who expect good outcomes are more likely to get them while those who don't expect good outcomes are more likely fail.

"Always anticipate that the other side will use surprise as a tactic. You will come across as cool and collected no matter what happens."

– Jack Pachuta

1.5 SUMMARY

The basic skills of negotiation can be recalled by the acronym **POCKET**. There are numerous negotiating strategies that you can use in different situations. These are salami, limited authority, withdrawal, pretence, deadlines, good guy-bad guy, standard contract and fait accompli. Persuasion skills will help you get others to do what you want. Some of these include creating good relationships, making concessions, and summarising what has been agreed to date. A cooperative collaborative style is recommended.

Support your case by relying on precedent, quoting an impartial eminent source, or claiming that it has been conceded to others in the past in similar circumstances. The possible outcomes of negotiation are win-win, win-lose, compromise and failure to reach an agreement. The types of negotiating situations can be one-to-one and team based. There are many mistakes to avoid when negotiating including poor preparation and failure to compromise.

1.6 FIVE STEPS TO IMPROVE YOUR NEGOTIATION SKILLS

1. Learn the basic skills of negotiating by memorising and practising the skills and behaviours in the **POCKET** acronym. This will help you become a more effective negotiator.
2. Chunk the negotiating objectives into sub-objectives and as agreement is reached record them in writing. This will win commitment and save time by preventing you from backtracking.
3. When using a team approach to negotiation have one person take the lead, the second presents the case, and the third will observe and take notes.
4. Become familiar with the range of common mistakes people make when negotiating, and make sure you do not commit them. These are well known and should be avoided if you wish to be a successful negotiator.
5. When making a case support it with precedent, BATNA, case studies, reputable sources, accepted industry practice, or the fact that it has been conceded in similar circumstances. Explicit signs of advance planning and preparation impress negotiating parties.



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2 ASSERTIVENESS

What is the difference between passive, aggressive and assertive?

What does being assertive involve?

What are the assertive non-verbal behaviours?

What are the techniques of assertion?

What is the TAILOR model?

2.1 PASSIVE/ASSERTIVE/AGGRESSIVE

As a continuum of styles this is classified as passive/assertive/aggressive. The two extremes at both ends of the spectrum are passive and aggressive. Step back and consider where you fall on the continuum in most situations. If you want to feel good about yourself, and gain the respect of others, you should aim to be in the middle of this continuum and so be assertive without being nasty, pushy or rude.



Fig. 2.1. Passive/Aggressive/Assertive Model

PASSIVE

The first item on the continuum is passiveness. Many women are taught from an early age to be agreeable, considerate, complacent, compliant, polite and put others' needs first. In contrast, men are often taught to be the opposite: – aggressive, strong, macho and competitive and put their own needs first. Being passive may help you avoid conflict but at the cost of feeling inferior, helpless, at the beck and call of others and out of control. When passive you do not take responsibility for your own decisions and allow other people to walk all over you, treat you like a doormat and make decisions for you. When you fail to stand up for your rights people will exploit and take advantage of you.

Passive people are usually liked but not respected. Passive behaviour communicates a message of lack of confidence and inferiority and makes you prone to abuse of some kind. Some organisations provide assertiveness training for women to help them compete more effectively with men. These programmes can also cater for the needs of unassertive shy male employees. Bear in mind that some organisations norms and national cultures may prefer people to be passive and may view assertive behaviour as unacceptable, rude or even offensive. The following are some of the behaviours passive people display:

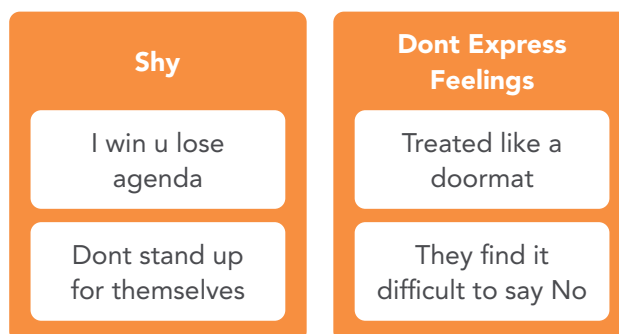
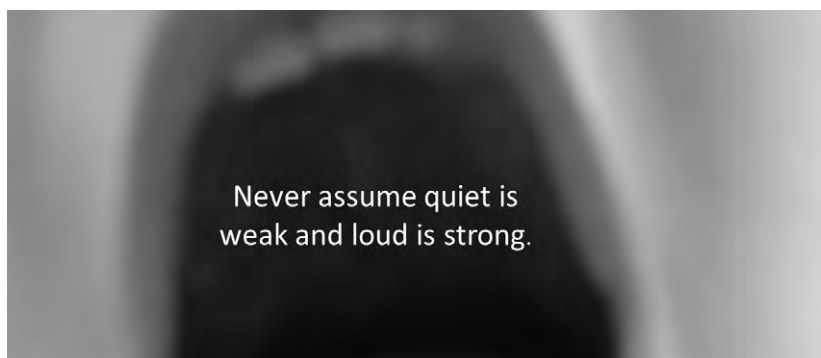


Fig. 2.2. Passive People

- Passive people may have been taught as children that their needs were unimportant and that putting them first was selfish. Early conditioning by parents and other significant adults in their lives taught them to be seen, barely tolerated and not heard. Consequently, they tend to grow up to be shy, diffident, unobtrusive and unassertive adults. They feel their opinions are worthless and without merit.
- They have a you-win and I lose agenda, and let other people control and dominate their lives, as they believe that they are inferior to others. This means that they do not stand up for their rights and as a consequence other people take advantage of their shortcomings and exploit this weakness.
- They fail to stand up for themselves and adopt the role and attitude of helpless victim or martyr. They worry incessantly about what others might think and are reluctant to upset people and thus avoid conflict at all costs. They compromise and accommodate others views in the interests of harmony, peace and friendship. They

allow their human rights to be violated and find it very difficult to say “no”. They often say yes when they mean no. Thus, they finish up reluctantly doing things they don’t really want to do.

- They don’t express their honest feelings, needs, values or concerns. They agree to things contrary to their own feelings and wishes and subjugate their feelings to the feelings of others. They allow others to violate their space, continually interrupt them, deny their rights and ignore their needs. They avoid controversial issues and suppress their resentment when they have been treated unfairly. Secretly they are seething underneath because of the unfair treatment they are receiving but fail to do anything about it.
- They are treated like a doormat being constantly afraid to rock the boat. When in doubt they clam up and agree rather than debate their case assertively, explain their feelings and explore the issue. They are submissive and so concerned with being liked and accepted that they always go out of their way to please others. They tend to be inoffensive and taken for granted. Most people only respect others who are prepared to stand up for themselves.

ASSERTIVE

The middle item on the continuum is assertiveness. According to the Oxford Dictionary, assertiveness can be defined as “confident and forceful behaviour.” In the context of Psychology, assertiveness is self-expression which is direct, firm, positive – and, when necessary, persistent – action intended to promote equality in person-to-person situations.” Assertive behaviour is based on balance. Getting the degree of assertiveness right is a challenge for all of us. It means balancing your wants and needs while respecting the rights, needs and wants of others. Your rights, thoughts, feelings, needs, and desires are just as important as anybody else’s, but not more important.

You are assertive when you do not let others control you, when you courageously stand up for your rights while respecting the rights of others and when you express your feelings openly and honestly and without rancour. Assertiveness is a skill anybody can learn. It is logical rather than emotional. You can train yourself to be more assertive. Practise being more assertive on a friend or family in a neutral non-threatening situation. Rehearse what you want to say. Consider role-play with a friend or colleague and ask them for honest feedback. Of course, you can also take a formal course on assertiveness.

A contingency approach to assertiveness may apply. The optimum level of assertiveness will vary from situation to situation. Different situations call for different levels of assertiveness. A manager’s style of assertiveness will vary across a range of situations, including dealing

with staff, superiors, unions, customers and suppliers. Some situations clearly call for conciliation and accommodation while others call for vigorous resistance and competitiveness. An effective and successful manager will be able to calibrate the ideal level of assertiveness to the varying demands of interpersonal situations they are confronted with. For example, an effective manager must assertively define goals and issue work commands to get things done on an ongoing basis otherwise he may lose credibility.

The win-win approach is the assertive one. Assertive people try to achieve fair play for everyone without manipulating or exploiting others. Assertive people are respected but not necessarily liked. There is a high correlation between assertion, confidence and self-esteem. Also, there is a positive correlation between age and assertiveness. This is probably because older people have acquired more wisdom and experience in standing up for their rights in various situations and have more experience in how to do so in an appropriate and acceptable way.

“Be not too sweet, lest people swallow you up, yet not too bitter lest they spit you out.”

– An old proverb.

Assertive people act in the various ways as illustrated in the following diagram:



Fig. 2.4. Assertive People

- They assert rights tactfully by communicating calmly, clearly, mannerly, directly and honestly. They do not wish to offend or take advantage of others, accept defeat gracefully while all the time being polite, gracious and mannerly in their dealings with others. They are self-assured and self-confident and get their point across firmly, fairly and with empathy.

- They seek out win-win solutions to conflict and do not wish to exploit the vulnerabilities and weaknesses of others. Thus, assertive people actively listen, patiently explain themselves clearly, and invite others to jointly work towards a common acceptable solution.
- They adopt an attitude that everybody is of equal value, deserves respect and consideration, and thus they accept the right of others to disagree with them. They give and receive in equal measure and are slow to hold resentments and grudges.
- Assertive people tackle issues promptly and focus on solutions rather than problems. They are logical and stick to the facts while avoiding sudden emotional outbursts. They know that anger only adds fuel to the fire without making a contribution to a satisfactory solution but merely aggravates the situation.
- They refuse to be intimidated, upset and frightened by the aggressive actions of others. They refuse to respond to and get caught up in the anger of others but instead prefer to remain calm in the face of provocation, abusive and insulting language.

"Assertiveness is not what you do, it's who you are."

– Cal Le Mon

AGGRESSIVE

The third item on the continuum is aggressiveness. Aggressive people do whatever is in their own best interests without regard or consideration for the rights, needs, feelings or desires of other people. Aggressive behaviour includes arguing, blaming, bullying, accusing, name calling, sarcasm, insulting and threatening and a general disregard for the feelings and rights of others. In our culture men are taught to be strong and equate strength with confrontation, competition, aggression, standing your own ground and manliness. Some women working in male dominated places of employment adopt a male persona in order to gain attention and compete on an equal footing. The boss who places work on your desk the day before you are going on holidays, demanding that it be done straight away, is being unreasonable and aggressive. The timing is insensitive showing little regard for your needs and feelings.

Aggression often breeds counter aggression and in extreme cases violence and may create resentment and lifelong enemies. It also creates bitterness, unnecessary arguments and the desire to exact revenge. Many people tolerate aggressive people because they are afraid to confront them. Aggressive people are neither liked nor respected but often secretly hated and despised. In the work context an aggressive style by a manager may be seen as intimidation, bullying, abuse or harassment and is thus no longer acceptable. Managers

should be assertive rather than aggressive. Assertion will lead to harmony while aggression may lead to conflict, grievance, industrial relations disputes and litigation. The following are typical aggressive behaviours:

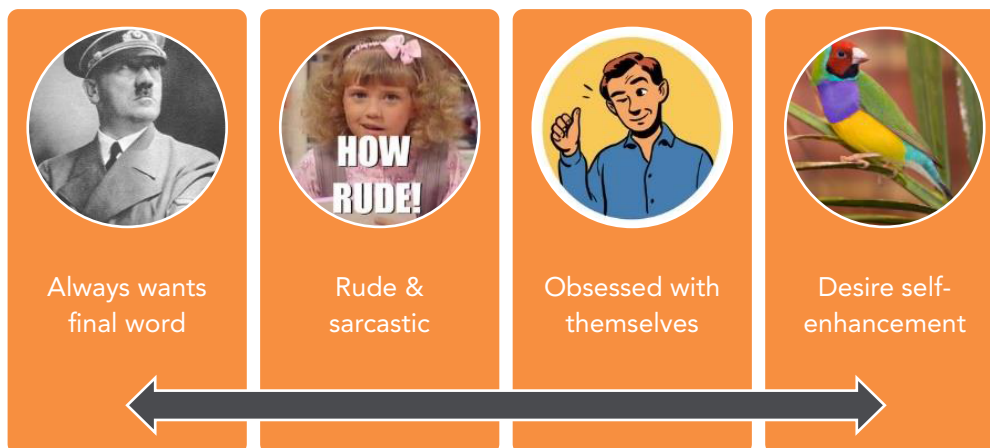


Fig. 2.3. Aggressive People

- Aggressive people may insist on always having the final word and try to dominate and manipulate others. They always feel they are right and others are wrong. They have no regard for the rights, feelings, desires or wishes of others and are only interested in getting their own selfish way.
- They almost always win an argument, speak in a high tone and can be abusive, rude, loud, inconsiderate and sarcastic. They are easily aroused, annoyed and upset, becoming angry and abusive at the least provocation. They may shout or employ bully tactics to get their own way. Remember, you have no control over others peoples' behaviour and make sure you do not react to them in a similar way. Just because somebody is rude and inconsiderate to you doesn't mean you should be the same to them. Control your emotions and be respectful at all times.
- Aggressive people insist that their feelings and needs are more important than others. Consequently, they fail to listen to others because they are focused on themselves and obsessed and consumed by their own wants, needs and desires.
- They desire self-enhancement at other's expense displaying an I win-you lose approach. They habitually cut across and interrupt people before they finish speaking. They are bereft of graciousness and manners and the ordinary civilities of normal living. They are offensive, unpleasant and insensitive and thus lose the respect of others. They may openly criticise or find fault with others' ideas, opinions, or behaviours.

"The basic difference between being assertive and being aggressive is how our words and behaviour affect the rights and well-being of others."

– Sharon Anthony Bower

PASSIVE/AGGRESSIVE

This is a blend of two and is implicit rather than explicit. Passive/aggressive people feel angry and a sense of injustice when their needs are not met, but instead of speaking up or behaving aggressively they express anger or rage in an indirect or underhand way. People can use the grapevine to spread gossip in order to undermine, devalue or hurt a person’s reputation. Similarly, output or work can be intentionally sabotaged in a subtle way without others being consciously aware of what is going on. People can slow down work, ignore advice or damage the efforts of others surreptitiously.

Another type of passive/aggressive behaviour is sarcasm as in saying one thing and meaning the opposite in order to be hurtful, insulting or cutting. They may use spite, backbiting and vindictiveness to vent their frustration. However, you should remain cool, calm and collected. Mentally strong people know and live by their values and beliefs – even when confronted with insulting and sarcastic people. They know that maintaining their integrity is the key to inner peace. Therefore, you should ignore these types of people and never stoop to their level.

A 2016 study by Michigan State University found that incivility spreads if you take it to heart. The researchers found that individuals who were subjected to sarcasm and put downs wasted their mental energy trying to interpret the individual’s intentions. Passive/aggressive people may engage in manipulative behaviour to serve their own ends, by procrastinating purposefully, co-operating reluctantly, forgetting intentionally, working inefficiently and blaming others for their shortcomings. They may also sulk and use emotional blackmail to get their way. Sometimes they may act in a superficial friendly way being unwilling to confront others and cause a scene.

2.2 MY BILL OF RIGHTS



Knowing your rights is an important part of exercising your power of assertion. The basic human rights apply to all mankind irrespective of class, gender, race or nationality. They are not new or revolutionary but have been known for many years. They have evolved over

thousands of years influenced by the Greeks, the Bible, the French Revolution and the American Revolution. They follow the principles of democracy and natural justice.

You have the right to:

- Be firm but fair and flexible.
- Believe in your own self-efficacy and competence to do the job.
- Take responsibility for yourself but not for others on the principle that people are responsible for their own actions and their consequences.
- Express your views, attitudes, beliefs, opinions, emotions and feelings in a direct, unapologetic and honest way. You have a right to tell others on how you wish to be treated.
- Allow yourself to be human and make the occasional mistake.
- Look for information, advice or help when you need to do so.
- Respect the dignity of yourself and others. Have the right to have positive, satisfying relationships and the right to change or end relationships if they don't meet your needs.
- Recognise your own and other's needs. Ask for what you want. Others have the right to refuse.
- Say "No," "I don't know," or "I don't understand, without feeling guilty, shameful or apologetic. Refuse unreasonable requests. Stop others from being patronising or taking advantage of you.
- Request time to think things over. Decisions made in haste may be regretted at leisure.
- Change your mind or decide on a different course of action. Circumstances change as more information becomes available and so should viewpoints. It is silly to believe that changing your mind is always a betrayal of your principles or word.
- Not depend on others. In a society we do depend on others but at the same time we should always try to be as self-reliant and self-sufficient as possible. This means that you have a right to decide how to lead your life.
- Handle aggression with assertion. Handling aggression with aggression only adds fuel to the fire.
- Have your own priorities that may be expressed in the form of a mission, vision or goals.
- Get what you pay for. The law protects this right through consumer legislation in many countries.
- Compromise as appropriate because it's the most equitable and best thing to do in the current circumstances.
- Object to gender stereotyping. Being asked to do something because you're a woman. For example, being asked to make the tea in the office.

Knowing your rights and the principles of democracy and natural justice underlying them will give you a sound basis to be more assertive and self-confident. Remind yourself that you are perfectly within your rights to have needs and to express them positively to people in a position to respond.

“Joint undertakings stand a better chance when they benefit both sides.”

– Euripides

2.3 FAMOUS ASSERTIVE PEOPLE

Assertion is an important aspect of interpersonal relationship skills essential for success in life and in work. Being assertive helps you stay in control and win respect. Personal credibility is enhanced if you come across as calm, confident, rational, impartial, forceful and determined. Historical figures such as Gandhi, Dr. Martin Luther King and Mrs. Rosa Parks achieved great political and social change in their lifetimes by being assertive when appropriate, using non-violent means.

Mahatma Gandhi, though one of the gentlest of men, used great assertiveness and determination to win independence for India from Britain without striking a blow proving that peaceful assertiveness rather than aggression can reap great results. Gandhi's life is a testament to the fact that one totally committed person can take on the might of an Empire, bring it to its knees and in the process change the course of a nation's history.

On the 1st December, 1955, Mrs. Rosa Parks asserted her human rights under natural justice and refused to give up her bus seat to a white person, and thus triggered off the Civil Rights Movement led by Dr. Martin Luther King in the USA. The bus driver had her arrested for violating the state segregation laws. This led to a boycott of the Montgomery bus service by blacks that lasted for 382 days. It brought the Bus Company to its knees and changed the segregation laws and American history forever. In December 1956, the Supreme Court decided that bus segregation violated the constitution. The Civil Rights Movement came into being and eight years later the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed. This gave all Americans, irrespective of colour, race, nationality or religion, the right for equal treatment under the law. Mrs. Rosa Park's life demonstrates how an ordinary person with assertiveness, purpose, extraordinary determination and resolution can achieve so much.

These people won the respect and admiration of people throughout the world because they conducted their demonstrations in an assertive, peaceful and dignified manner. They attracted large national and international support and media attention to pursue their aims. They refused to react in like fashion to the aggression and violence committed against them but instead continued on with their peaceful protest. On the other hand, Charles Darwin proved to be non-assertive when he postponed publishing his theory of evolution for many years because he was afraid of public scorn and disapproval and upsetting the establishment

including the scientific community and the Church. It is only when Alfred Russel Wallace was about to come out with an almost identical theory that he felt compelled to publish *On the Origin of Species*.

ADVANTAGES OF BEING ASSERTIVE



Fig. 2.5. Advantages of Being Assertive

- It will help managers to win respect and progress in their career. Assertive managers get things done by treating people fairly and respectfully and are treated likewise in return. Therefore, they are well-liked and seen as leaders that people want to work with. If there are two managers with similar education and experience it is likely that the more assertive one will get the prestigious assignments and promotion. The more assertive person attracts the attention of those in authority and those with the power to make decisions.
- You can achieve your objectives in a corporate or social situation. If you are shy and diffident you are unlikely to create the opportunity to impress powerful people or convince others of the forcefulness or soundness of your point of view. In corporate and social situations, the majority of people stay quiet, while the brash and loudest get their points of view across at the expense of others. In an organisation this can be problematic because potential flaws in a proposal may go unnoticed because of fear of backlash or hurting someone's feelings. Everybody has unique strengths,

talents and insights that they can bring to the table and therefore have valuable contributions to make.

- You can negotiate a pay rise, a budget allocation, promotion, negotiate successful win-win solutions, ask a colleague to do their fair share of the work, not allow someone to interrupt, or get a topic discussed at a meeting. Assertive people recognise the value of their opponent's point-of-view and can quickly find common ground. Self-employed people need assertiveness to pitch for jobs, market themselves, negotiate rates and build up a roster of clients. Passive or shy people are unlikely to have the social skills to do so and consequently suffer a significant loss.
- You can deal effectively with a pushy salesperson whether on the doorstep or on the phone. Use the "thank you, but no" technique and then close the door or put down the phone. You can be assertive, considerate and courteous at the same time without causing unnecessary offence. In fact, the greatest benefits from assertiveness come from knowing when to be assertive rather than always being assertive, as well as knowing how assertive one should be. In certain unimportant situations it is not appropriate to be assertive. Being so can unnecessarily hurt relationships.
- A person trained in assertion techniques will enhance their self-esteem and become more self-confident and less self-conscious. You will be seen as more productive, efficient and respected, too. This will have a positive effect on all aspects of their

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lives. Being assertive helps you go outside your comfort zone. If you are afraid of public speaking it is a good idea to avail of every opportunity that comes along to do so and practise. This will help you stretch yourself while at the same time confronting your worst fears.

- You can reduce stress and social anxiety by knowing how to handle difficult interpersonal relationship situations and thus have fewer arguments and conflicts with others. You will feel less anxious, threatened or victimised when things don't go according to plan. You will develop more decisive problem solving, decision-making skills, self-esteem and enjoy an enhanced sense of self-efficacy boosting our view of ourselves and raising our mood. Assertive people give and receive criticism constructively reacting dispassionately to unfair criticism.
- Reduces the number of people you will antagonise, hurt or alienate because you know how to treat people fairly and thus gain the respect, liking and friendship of those you work with. Enemies last for life so the less enemies you accumulate as you make your journey through life the better! Your objective should be to always create win-win situations.
- On a personal basis you will know how to deal confidently with situations like returning goods for replacement or refund, deal effectively with shoddy repairs, or deal with social situations like queue jumping, or stop talkative people from continually interrupting. Because you know your rights, you are able to do this diplomatically without upsetting others or causing undue resentment. This prevents others from taking advantage of you, as you are able to make your point logically, express yourself with confidence and gain the respect of others without causing offence. Nobody wants to be treated like a doormat.
- You will be able to make or refuse a request with positivity, dignity, diplomacy and self-assurance without being embarrassed or causing offence. By being able to advocate on behalf of ourselves we reclaim more control over our lives. Passive people are unable to do this because they lack the requisite assertiveness and diplomatic skills. In addition, people do not take them seriously because they come across as too weak, shy or easy going.

"The most complete revenge is not to imitate the aggressor."

– Marcus Aurelius Antoninus

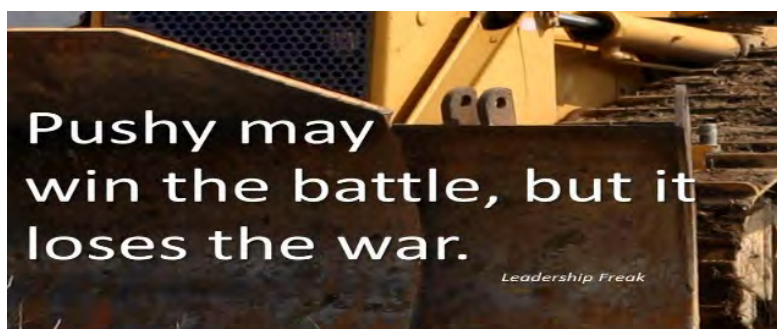
DISADVANTAGES OF BEING ASSERTIVE

Fig. 2.6. Disadvantages of being assertive

- Assertiveness can be inappropriate in some contexts. Others may not understand or accept this style of communication. If your boss is the type of person that reacts with rage to anyone questioning his orders even when this is done in an assertive and tactful way, then it makes sense to use a different approach. If the person who jumps the queue is a big inebriated male using abusive language it may be safer, wiser and more discreet just to ignore the whole incident and move on with your life.
- Even though you put your point across in a very tactful way, others may still react negatively or even aggressively. They may even harbour a desire to 'get their own back.' Assertion should be used wisely and sensitively and may be inappropriate in certain contexts. Ames (2009) reports that a number of studies on assertiveness have shown that assertive people are seen as less likeable and friendly than unassertive people, even when their behaviour is seen as effective and appropriate. In organisations, those who attempt to influence others with aggressive tactics tend to be viewed poorly by peers and evoke resistance. Assertive people are also more likely to elicit conflict from those they deal with.

- Even assertive people don't always get what they want. Others have their own agenda and rights too and may stubbornly pursue them and resist their demands. However, lack of assertiveness may be a major cause of conflict in some relationships.
- It won't solve all your problems, doesn't guarantee your happiness and doesn't ensure that others will treat you fairly or accept your point of view. However, it will make you confident about yourself and your decisions and you are less likely to be manipulated and disrespected.
- Assertive women are often unfairly perceived as aggressive and strident whereas assertive men are seen as confident, competent, strong and macho. The behaviour of assertive women is often seen as inappropriate by some in an organisational context. It is seen as unfeminine and not lady like. The traditional view of women as caring, compliant and unselfish will take some years to erode.
- Friends may resent the newly acquired assertion and may attempt to sabotage your efforts especially if they benefited materially in the past from your passiveness and lack of assertion. There is no gain without some pain.
- In some cultures, with different values, assertiveness may be seen as socially unacceptable. Therefore, people's values, background and identity should not be overlooked as well as cultural norms. For example, American are seen as loud and aggressive while Asian people are often passive and extremely subservient.
- Assertiveness assumes that everything is negotiable and that all conflicts can be resolved rationally. There are some things where there isn't scope for compromise. For instance, some people's principles, values and religious beliefs are not for negotiation. In other cases, the need for legal compliance such as health and safety mean that certain issues are mandatory.

"Assertiveness involves standing up for one's rights without infringing upon those of others, whereas aggression involves the use of noxious stimuli to maintain rights."

– Richins & Verhage 1987

2.4 BODY LANGUAGE

Part of assertiveness has to do with words – the rest has to do with body language or non-verbal behaviour like eye contact, facial expression, posture, physical distance, gestures and vocal quality. The body language component is just as important, if not more so, than the verbal part. One complements the others and both should be seen as a package. There are different types of body language involved in assertive, aggressive and passive behaviours. The following sections deal with these.

ASSERTION

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Fig. 2.7. Assertion Body Language

Assertive people use sentences like “This is what I think,” “This is what I feel,” “This is what I want,” and “This is how I see the situation.” Their body language tends to be calm, confident, controlled and smooth. It’s easier to be assertive when on your own home ground. This is why in sport it’s always more difficult to get a positive result when playing away from home. The following are non-verbal assertive behaviours:

- Non-invasion of personal space shows respect and consideration. This means standing or sitting at a comfortable distance from the other person. Invading a person’s personal space can be seen as aggressive, invasive, unsettling and intimidating. If a man invades the personal space of a woman it may be seen as sexual harassment. The amount of personal space depends on the situation and the cultural norms of the person you are talking to. Therefore, it’s important that we become sensitive to these contextual issues so that we do not unduly upset other people.
- Receptive listening using appropriate nods and gestures. Lean slightly forward to show your interest. Look the person in the eye without staring as this demonstrates sincerity. Make regular eye contact. The assertive person uses direct eye contact about 50 per cent of the time. You can break up the direct eye contact by redirecting your gaze at the person’s forehead.

- Keep your body upright and open with your shoulders relaxed and feet firmly on the ground. Breathe naturally and normally. When seated keep an open posture with legs and arms uncrossed. Crossed arms across the chest is sometimes interpreted as closed and protected. It shows the opposite of being receptive, transparent and open to ideas. Practice assertive body language in front of a mirror or with a friend or colleague so that you are fully aware of the signals it throws off.
- Smile appropriately – pleasant but at the same time serious. Match your words with your body language. Smiling is always helpful in creating a friendly relaxed non-threatening environment. Smiling is contagious and makes us appear more approachable, sincere and attractive to others. In addition, smiling releases brain chemicals that relax your body, and lowers your heart rate and blood pressure.
- A firm handshake conveys confidence, resoluteness and assertion. However, if the handshake is too firm it may be perceived as aggressive. A weak handshake is seen as unassertive and connotes weakness, lack of confidence and self-esteem. The current President of the USA is famous for his firm and strong handshake.
- Speak in a clear, calm, firm but conversational tone. Speak with conviction and determination. Use co-operative phrases like “What are your views on this?” Use emphatic statements of interest like “I would like to...”

AGGRESSIVE

Aggressive people’s attitudes could be expressed as follows, “This is what I think and you’re stupid for thinking differently,” “This is what I want and what you want is unimportant,” and “This is what I feel and your feelings are irrelevant.” Aggressive people tend to display shaky, indifferent and shifty body language. The following are non-verbal aggressive behaviours and will help you anticipate problems:

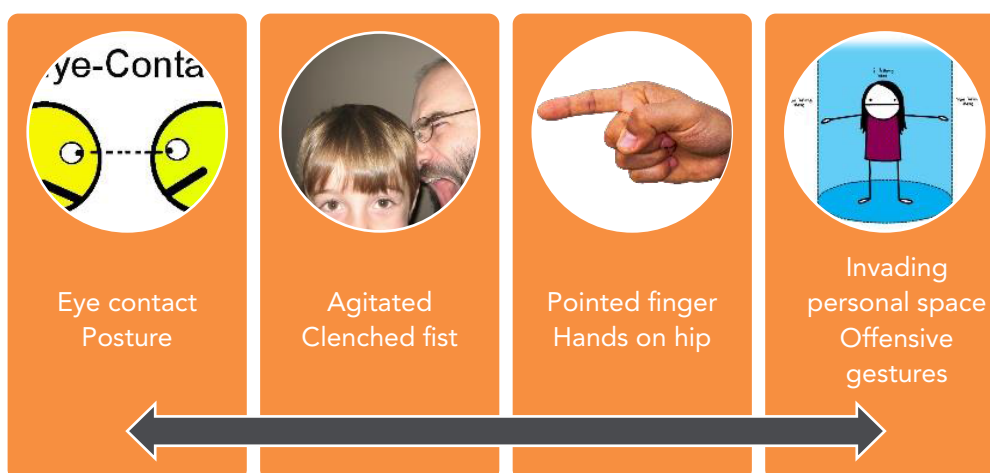


Fig. 2.8. Aggressive Body language

- Using dominant eye contact with a staring, glaring, unrelenting, angry look. This is sure to upset and unsettle the other person and create a hostile environment.
- Towering posture. If you are tall and the other person is small you should endeavour to lower your stature to the height of the other person particularly if the height difference is significant. If you are very tall sitting down equalises the situation and might prove to be the solution.
- Being agitated and restless. Using a voice that is loud, strident, sharp, abrupt and cold. This is sure to get a like reaction from the other person.
- Clenched or pounding fist. This behaviour will probably frighten the other person and when they recover they will feel resentful and revengeful.
- Pointing or poking finger in the face of the other person. This is unmannerly, aggressive, rude and inconsiderate behaviour and is unacceptable in any civilised society.
- Hands on hips or folded arms. Hands on hips indicates that you are about to become aggressive. Folded arms show you are annoyed, feel threatened and not open to somebody else's opinions. It is a sign of defensiveness, anxiety and insecurity and may create a psychological and physical barrier.
- Invading personal space or privacy. The amount of personal space depends on cultural norms. In Western societies invading personal space is seen as intrusive and intimidating. Similarly, people have a unique right to privacy. Most people maintain an invisible line around themselves which they feel you should not cross. In psychology the term boundary is used to refer to such a line, and it implies that there needs to be some type of boundary, however fluid, that protects our identity and autonomy. For example, people may pry into your personal affairs, ask intrusive questions about your personal life, or say something that is better left unsaid. Boundaries are part of all of your relationships and maintaining yours will help boost your own feelings of personal fulfilment.
- Using offensive gestures or physical aggression such as pushing. Physical aggression is never acceptable, may be considered abusive and may be a legal offence.

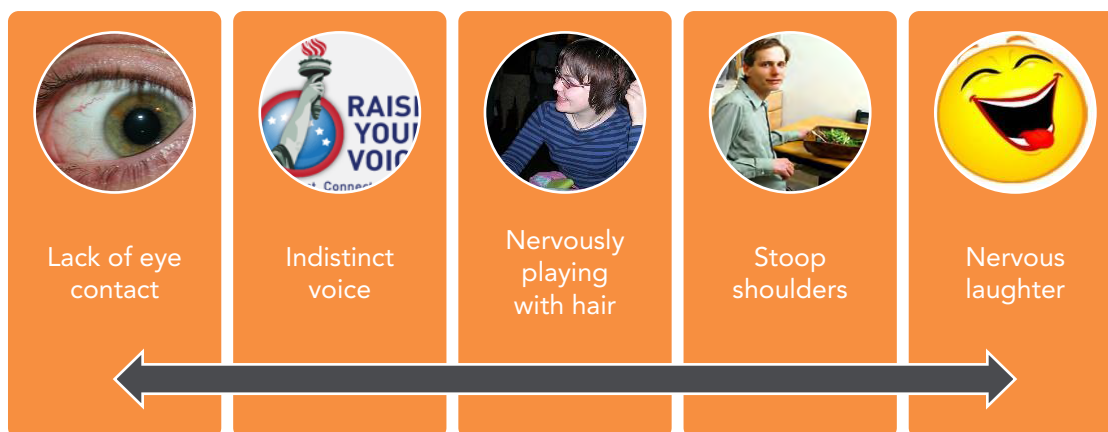
PASSIVE

Fig. 2.9. Passive Body language

Passive people's attitudes could be expressed as follows, "I don't matter, you can take advantage of me," "My feelings don't matter, only yours do," "My ideas are not important, only yours are significant," and "I'm worthless and you're superior to me." The following are non-verbal passive behaviours:

- Lack of eye contact; looking downwards, sideways or around the room.
- Using a soft, whiny, indistinct, or muffled voice.
- Nervously fidgeting or playing with hair, ear, jewellery or change.
- Shuffling feet with shoulders stooped and slumped.
- Nervous inappropriate smiling or laughter.

Three parts to Assertiveness Interventions

There are three parts to an assertive intervention:

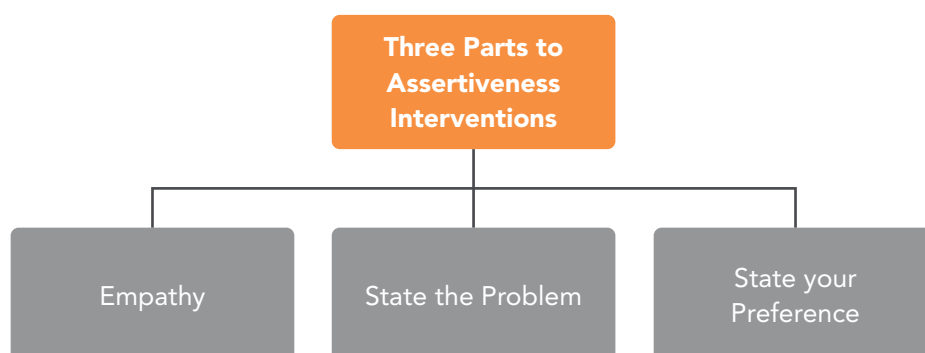


Fig. 2.10. Three Parts to Assertiveness Interventions

1. **Empathy.** Say something showing you understand how the other person feels while listening with empathy to the response. Ask for clarification while simultaneously acknowledging the other person's feelings, concerns, attitudes, beliefs and views. This shows you are conciliatory and want to conduct the conversation in a calm and constructive way without causing offence or getting personal.
2. **State the problem.** This highlights the difficulty you're having and why you need something to change. Take a problem-solving approach to a situation. Describe the facts from your perspective and share your opinions and beliefs while seeking the opinions and beliefs of others. Avoid judgements and interpretations. State what you consider are the options and look for the other person's views. Aim for a win-win outcome using collaboration and compromise.
3. **State what you want and what you don't want.** This is a specific request for change in the other person's behaviour. State your point of view directly and firmly without being hesitant or apologetic. Be honest, and open about your feelings, opinions and needs while respecting the rights and feelings of others. Be specific about what you would like to happen in relation to the specified behaviours, describing the positive consequences resulting from the change. State what you intend to do if your wishes are not met.

The 3 Fs of Assertion



Fig. 2.11. The three Fs of assertion


Essentially assertiveness can be viewed as a type of negotiation. The bottom line is what do you want out of the situation. The three Fs are:

1. **Feedback.** When you do this, it bothers me terribly!
2. **Feeling.** I get very upset and angry at the way I'm being treated.
3. **Forward.** This is the solution to the feedback and feeling; please stop this behaviour in the future and we will get on fine.

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You should respond to any situation that requires assertiveness within 24 hours; reacting straight away means you will tend to be aggressive or emotional, any longer and you're wallowing in self-pity. Conflict will always arise in life. The important point is knowing when to move forward. The three Fs will empower you by giving you a simple shift in perspective.

2.5 TECHNIQUES OF ASSERTION

The following are a variety of assertion techniques that you can use in different situations.



Fig. 2.12. Techniques of Assertiveness

EMPATHIC ASSERTION

Empathy has been defined as seeing with the eyes of another, listening with the ears of another and seeing with the heart of another. Empathic assertion is the most effective assertive statement you can make and shows that you understand the other person's point of view – how they view the situation from their unique perspective. Empathise, respect, and acknowledge the other person's problem and feelings before you make your assertion. Then follow up with statements asserting your rights. "I know you must be feeling frustrated with the lack of deadlines on this project, but I want everything to be right before we set our targets."

“I” STATEMENTS

“You statements” like “you never,” “you always,” and “you constantly,” are perceived as character assassination, threatening or blaming and make people defensive, meaning they won’t listen or entertain what you say. Express your desires by stating your needs. Use “I statements” such as “I feel,” “I need,” “I think,” “I’d prefer.” “I want.” These help you to get your point across firmly, be assertive without being critical or accusatory, and show that you accept ownership and personal responsibility. For instance, say “I disagree,” rather than, “you’re wrong.” If you have a request, say “I would like you to help me with this,” rather than “You need to do this.”

Keep your requests simple, clear and specific. Don’t attribute blame. Focus on the other person’s behaviour rather than getting personal. An “I statement” shows concern in terms of what you need, rather than in what’s wrong with the other person. Telling someone they are lazy, stupid, inconsiderate, unmannerly or thoughtless is not assertion but rudeness. Focus on issues, not the person. Counsellors and clinicians often advise clients to use I-statements and avoid You-statements in interpersonal conflicts.

BROKEN RECORD

This is one of the most widely used assertiveness techniques and is called the “broken record” because, when a record gets stuck in a groove, it plays and repeats the same thing over and over again. For example, “I can’t take on any more work right now.” This could be followed by “I’m sorry, I really value our relationship but I simply can’t take on any more work at this time.” Remain clear, cool and calm while restating things in a pleasant tone of voice.

Sticking to your point counteracts bullying, manipulation, baiting and irrelevant logic. If you have a legitimate complaint, continue to restate it despite opposition from the other party until you get your point across and receive satisfaction. Don’t let one or two refusals put you off. Persistence will pay off in the end. The broken record technique is useful when asserting your rights for a replacement or a refund in a shopping transaction under commercial law. It will help you stand your ground when dealing with authority figures in a confident and assertive manner.

SAYING NO

Most people find it extremely difficult to say no because they fear those in authority or are afraid of an aggressive response – even in situations where it is personally inconvenient to do the work requested which may be overtime. The extra work means that they will miss

their daughter's birthday party. Mark Twain suggests a compliment should always precede a complaint where possible because it softens resentment and insures the complaint will get a gentle reception. People may also feel that they may put a relationship in jeopardy by hurting the feelings of another. By saying "No" you are rejecting the request and not the person. Explain briefly the reason for saying no. Economy of words is essential. Don't over explain, get too emotional, or try to soften the blow. When confronted with anger, try lowering your voice, and being in the emotional state you want the other person to be in. Remember, that saying "No" is a legitimate response in certain circumstances.

Suggest an acceptable alternative to soften the blow and leave the other party feeling good. Saying no is preferable to agreeing to do something that you have no intention of doing. You can't possibly do everything or please everyone, or take on too many responsibilities, so it's important that you protect your time and your workload by saying "No" when necessary. Breaking your promise later on will show that you are unreliable and untrustworthy. In the case of another person's unacceptable suggestion, express your appreciation for their kindness and then politely say "No." An alternative strategy to saying "No," is not to say anything. You might be too emotional and not know what you want. Tell the person you need more time to consider the matter and get your thoughts together. For example, you might say, "Jason, I'll give your request due consideration and get back to you within half-an-hour."

FOGGING

From time to time most of us have to deal with people who attempt to put us down. Fogging is a polite way of disagreeing or deflecting negative criticism. The person accepts the negative criticism but has no intention of changing their mind or behaviour. Hear the person out and then acknowledge the criticism by saying that there might be some truth or legitimacy in what the person is saying. Agree in principle or part to what is said, while still sticking to your point of view. For example, if a colleague says, "that was a stupid idea you put forward at the meeting," you might retort, "Yes, I can see how you think my idea has little merit." You're not agreeing with your work colleague; you're only saying that you can see that from their perspective they believe that.

Another example might be your boss saying "Michael, this is very sloppy work, your work is really going from bad to worse." You retort, "I agree this is not my best work, but with more realistic time constraints, adequate training and more resources, I could have done much better." Fogging avoids confrontation and will help calm the waters down rather than using an aggressive response inflaming the situation. For example, "I can see why you're upset..." The term fogging is used because the person acts like a "wall of fog" into which arguments are thrown, but not returned. Fogging works because the victim agrees with the verbal bully – a disarming tactic they do not expect.

THE “ALL” TECHNIQUE

Alexander (2004) reports that the “**ALL**” technique may be useful in appropriate situations. “**A**” stands for acknowledgement. “**L**” stands for the list of things you need to do. The second “**L**” stands for listing alternatives. For example, say your manager has approached you late on Thursday with a request to do an urgent and important project involving you working late. Acknowledge that the project is very important, and then make the manager aware of the current projects that you’re working on. Tell him that you’re on your way to an out of town meeting, and tomorrow morning you have arranged to bring your very ill mother to the hospital. Then list alternatives, offering to complete the project at a later date or by another arrangement. In other words, you say that you can attend to his request early tomorrow afternoon, so that you could probably have the job done by four in the afternoon. This arrangement would be acceptable to most reasonable managers.

NEGATIVE ENQUIRY

Negative enquiry requests further, more specific criticism. It accepts negative feedback about your behaviour at face value without feeling defensive or anxious and thus may help to defuse a situation. After all it is just another person’s opinion. Accept your mistakes or faults, but do not apologise. Instead agree with the critic’s assessment of your faults. Ask them for constructive criticism offering specific suggestions for improvement. In other words, what do they think you are doing wrong and how could you improve in the future. For example, “Yes, you’re right. I don’t always listen to you. How can I listen more effectively in the future?” This retort puts the ball back in the other person’s court.

NEGATIVE ASSERTION

This means accepting the truthful part of the criticism and restating it in positive terms often in a humorous way. For example, a person accuses you of being aggressive and you retort “I don’t let people walk all over me, that’s for sure.” In response to being accused of being stupid you could reply “I’m not the most intelligent person in the world, but I try my best.” This dispassionate approach does not make the situation worse and ensures that the conversation can continue on an even keel.

POSITIVE AFFIRMATIONS

A change in beliefs and expectations is necessary to become assertive. One way of doing this is restructuring your thoughts by positive affirmations or self-talk. Non-assertive individuals tend to engage in negative self-talk. Assertive individuals see themselves as assertive and flood their minds with assertive positive affirmations such as “I’m entitled to ask for what I want.”

SCRIPTING

This is another assertion technique which you might find useful in certain circumstances. In practice, it is often difficult to put your feelings across clearly and confidently to others. The scripting technique allows you to prepare what you want to say in advance, using a four-stage approach as follows:

1. *Event*. Tell the other person exactly how you see the issue. For example, say, “Michael, the budget figures are overspent by 50% this month. You didn’t forewarn me about this possibility, and consequently I was completely surprised by the news.”
2. *Feelings*. Describe how you feel about the situation. “This really annoys me and makes me feel you don’t really understand the importance of meeting targets and living within the budget.”
3. *Needs*. Inform the other person what your needs are. “In future, I need you to be totally honest with me and alert me in advance to possible adverse budget situations.”
4. *Consequences*. Describe the positive outcome for both parties if your needs are successfully met. “Remember, it is always better to meet targets and this may lead to better end-of-year bonuses.”

“He who has learned to disagree without being disagreeable has discovered the most valuable secret of a diplomat.”

– Robert Estabrook

2.6 THE TAILOR MODEL

This is a useful acronym to help you practise assertion. It stands for:

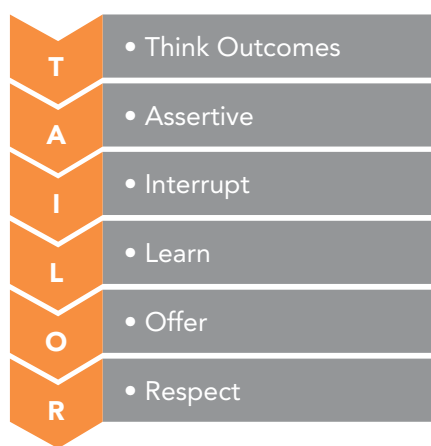


Fig. 2.13. Assertion Model (**TAILOR**)

- **Think** about the outcome desired and the behaviours you want changed. Think assertiveness rather than aggressiveness or passiveness. However, you can be over-assertive and under assertive. Both types are viewed negatively by peers and subordinates. Under-assertive leaders tend to be seen as ineffective because they cannot get their way; over-assertive leaders tend to be seen as ineffective because they cannot get along. One is unwilling or unable to exercise authority, including reluctance to confront problems and handle conflict, the other terrorises their subordinates exercising aggressive and abusive management. Your aim is to find the right balance of assertiveness. It means having a strong sense of yourself and your values and acknowledge that you deserve to get what you want. It means standing up for yourself even in the most trying circumstances.
- **Assertive.** Use assertive words such as “I” instead of “you.” Say “I feel” or “I think” rather than “you always” or “you never.” Be specific in what you want. Mentally rehearse affirmations to become more assertive such as; “I have the right to say no,” “I have the right to be treated with dignity and respect,” “I have the right to express my opinion,” and “I have the right to change my mind.” Visualise yourself being assertive in different situations.

- **Interrupt.** Don't interrupt people when they are speaking, as this is rude, undermining and insensitive. Wait until they have made their point before responding. Listen attentively to understand what they have to say. Use silence and body language as appropriate to encourage the other person to speak their mind.
- **Learn from experience.** Reflect on situations where you have tried to be assertive. Learn from your observations and feedback and plan to do better the next time. Asking for feedback helps correct any misperceptions you may have, as well as showing others you are open to communication, interested and willing to learn and change.
- **Offer to brainstorm for alternative to help solve problems together.** Aim for a compromise or a win-win solution, as people are more likely to agree to something they have contributed to. They are also more likely to be agreeable in the future.
- **Respect other viewpoints.** Express your views and feelings honestly. Accept that others have the right to express their viewpoints too and just like you they have a right to differ and be treated with respect.

2.7 SUMMARY

Know the difference between passive, aggressive, assertive and passive/aggressive behaviour. Passive people are submissive and taken for granted. Aggressive people get angry, rude and upset at the least provocation. Assertive people assert their rights while respecting the rights of others and seek win-win solutions to conflicts. Passive/aggressive people use emotional blackmail, sabotage, and gossip surreptitiously to get back at others.

The advantages of assertion are many and include expressing yourself confidently without hurting the feelings of others. The disadvantages include that it may not solve all your problems. Body language can be used effectively to complement your assertion message. The techniques of assertion include, I statement, broken record, and negative enquiry. The **TAILOR** acronym will help you gain expertise in the process of assertion.

2.8 FIVE STEPS TO IMPROVING YOUR ASSERTIVENESS SKILLS

1. Make sure you understand the difference between passive, aggressive and assertive behaviour. This will help you identify the mode you or others are in. Decide that you want to be assertive rather than passive or aggressive. Identify the situations in which you behave non-assertively. To become more assertive use assertive language such as "I feel" and "I think." Avoid aggressive language such as "You always" and "You never."
2. Adopt an attitude that everybody is of equal value. Respect the dignity and rights of others as well as your own rights. Remind yourself that you are perfectly entitled to have your own views, opinions and wishes, and that you have the right to expect to be treated with respect. Get familiar with the Bill of Rights and use it as a template for assertiveness.
3. Learn to say "No" firmly but tactfully but without feeling guilty. If appropriate suggest an acceptable alternative arrangement to make the negative more palatable.
4. Practise the "broken record" technique when you want to persistently assert your point of view especially when you know that you are right or want a particular outcome.
5. Memorise the "TAILOR" model so that you practise the process of assertion in an effective manner. Remember that assertiveness is a skill that you can learn but it takes time, practise and commitment to do so.

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Previous books published by the author include *Awaken the Genius Within* (2014) (*Glasnevin Publishing Dublin*), *Why Some People Succeed and Other Fail* (2011) (*Glasnevin Publishing Dublin*), *Learning about Learning* (2003) (CIPD London), *A Practical Guide to Learning in the Workplace* (2005) (The Liffey Press Dublin), *Better Exam Results* (2005) (Elsevier/CIMA, London) and *Mind Skills for Managers* (1997) (Gower, Aldershot, UK) and *How To Set Up and Manage A Corporate Learning Centre* (2003) (Gower, Aldershot, UK). The last two books became best-sellers for Gower in their training and business categories. *Better Exam Results* proved to be a best-seller for Elsevier/CIMA and is still in print 30 years after its earliest incarnation (*Learning to Learn*). Most of my published books are available on Amazon.co.uk. The authors latest books have been published online by bookboon.com in 2018 namely:

- *The Role of the Brain in Learning*
- *How Adults Learn*
- *Learning Models and Styles*
- *Experiential Learning*
- *Learning with Technology*
- *The Ultimate Success Formula*
- *Series of Book on People Skills for Managers*

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