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There are some great books about assertive communication, but these three simple steps will get you started: Make an empathetic statement, state your own feelings, state what you want. Here's an example that most people can relate to. Let's say someone has stepped in front of you in a line up. 1) "You seem stressed for time..." (express empathy)2) "But I am also under time pressure and I'm feeling annoyed that you've stepped in front of me." (state your own feelings)3) "I'd like you to move to the back of the line." (say what you want) The Nystrom & Associates provider consulted for this article is Dr. Karin Ryan, PsyD, LP, Clinic Director, and Outpatient Therapist. Do you know what the healthiest and most effective communication style is? According to Dr. Karin Ryan, Clinic Director and Outpatient Therapist at Nystrom & Associates, it's assertive communication. Assertive communication is where you respect and honor your needs while honoring the other person's needs. While that makes sense, putting it into practice can be hard, especially when emotions are high. Keep reading to learn the four steps to assertive communication. Related: What's Your Communication Style? Nystrom & Associates on Twin Cities Live Watch Dr. Karin Ryan on Twin Cities Live as she discusses the four steps to assertive communication. 1. Listen and Connect. The first step is to listen to the other person and attempt to connect warmly and softly. This allows you to soften your start and bridge the gap. It can be through words, but it is also about body language, tone, and timing. "What this looks like is validating what the other person has expressed, showing you hear and understand the person's needs, feelings, or the situation," says Dr. Karin Ryan. "For example, if you're talking about the messy kitchen, connect by saying something like, "I hear you, the kitchen has felt like a disaster lately." Or, if you need to bring something up, "I am thankful that we have so many positive things in the evenings." 2. Express. The second step to assertive communication is to express your needs. Use an "I" statement to express how you feel or what you need to express yourself properly. "Our tendency can be to focus on what we want the other person to do or change and are often tempted to start with 'You need to...' or 'You never...' or 'Why do you...?' Or, our tendency can be just too general or vague about how we feel." To combat this, Dr. Karin Ryan says to literally check in to make sure you start with or use "I" before you express it to the other person. To help spark some ideas, here are a few examples of "I" statements: "I start to feel really worried when you come home later for work than expected." "I am feeling overwhelmed at how many things I have to do today." "I have been feeling down and like I am stuck in a rut." Related: Are Friendships at Work a Good Thing? 3. Specify. Thirdly, specify the actions you want from the other person or what you want to happen. We tend to give our complaint or say that we are struggling but then not share what would be helpful or what we need. The other person cannot read your mind; if you do not know what you need, it is unfair to expect the other person to know. Try to ask for a specific behavior, not a judgment, general change, or mood change. Ask directly for what you want or need to be done. Keep it to one specific thing and add an appreciation statement or please, if you can. Related: Men's Mental Health: What You Need to Know For instance, here are several ways of specifying actions following an "I" statement: "I start to feel worried when you come home later for work than expected. Will you please call me if you will be after 6:00 pm in the future?" "I am feeling overwhelmed at how many things I have to do today. Would you be able to walk the dog, make dinner, or do the grocery store run today?" "I have been feeling down and like I am stuck in a rut. I think it would help me to do something fun this weekend. Would you help me plan something for us to do?" 4. Outcome. Lastly, share the anticipated outcome of the change (or negative aspects of no change). This is an optional step of self-care or validation; however, it helps tie everything together. It describes how this will help you and everyone. See below for full assertive communication examples that include validating outcome step. Assertive Communication Scenarios: start to feel really worried when you come home later for work than expected. Will you please call me if you are going to be home by 6:00 pm in the future? That way, I won't worry, and you do have to worry about being late. "I am feeling overwhelmed at how many things I have to do today. Would you be able to walk the dog, make dinner, or do the grocery store run today?" "I have been feeling down and like I am stuck in a rut. I think it would help me to do something fun this weekend. Would you help me plan something for us to do? That way, we can have fun together, and I'll be ready for the start of the next work week." Related: Ways to Move Forward When You Feel Stuck A Word From Nystrom & Associates Remember, the next time you want to practice assertive communication, listen and connect, express yourself with an "I" statement, be specific about what you want or need, and wrap it up with how it will be helpful. Working with a professional can help strengthen relationships. Nystrom & Associates offers individual, couples, and family therapy. Talk with us at 1-844-NYSTROM or request an appointment online. Source: Nystrom & Associates Are you ready to transform your life? Just 3 weekly sessions, each no longer than 20 minutes could be all it takes to improve your brain! Assertiveness. The ability to express yourself in an appropriately honest manner, defining your expectations in terms of ability, potential, resources, and timelines to set healthy personal boundaries. Being assertive is a quality held by all top leaders. It promotes productivity, performance, commitment, and respect within the team. It creates a culture of collaboration and accountability, along with giving a framework to tackle stressful or conflict situations and resolve them before they escalate. It is something that all leaders strive for yet often they fall short. For some, fear of the potential consequences or hurting someone causes us to withdraw from the situation or bite their tongue. The downside of this is that they backpedal our frustrations until one day it becomes too much and they lash out at someone who has been the most supportive. Alternatively, some lack the confidence or skills to develop the appropriate approach to resolve the situation. The result is they take a passive-aggressive approach, using sarcasm or becoming ulterior. In this instance, the recipient is unsure of the sincerity of the speaker, leaving them confused. Finally, in all of their efforts to be assertive, they overshoot their target and communicate in a manner which is perceived as blunt, abusive, and "bossy". So how do we put ourselves in a position to have assertive communication in all of our interactions? These three steps will help! Step 1: Be analytical Emotions often influence our interactions, causing us to lose our ability to be assertive. Before engaging in the situation, stop for a moment. Pausing is a mental trigger that causes you to reset, silencing your negative thinking and shifting you to an alternative, but positive, direction. The goal is to reach a "Position of Independence", which requires us to consciously commit to tune in to the situation. Who are we dealing with? What have they said so far? Do we understand their perspective? By asking these questions, we are able to distinguish facts from emotion, as well as challenge our perceptions by asking ourselves why we are responding the way we are. This gives us the freedom to control the direction we take. Step 2: Make clear, direct statements First, consider what you want to walk away with at the end of the interaction. We want to focus on our objective as it gives us control of the conversation. In defining our objective, consider SMART: specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and/or timely. Use questions or statements that clearly define the purpose of the interaction. Examples would be: "What steps are necessary to reduce spending by 1%?" or "I think we need to reduce the amount of printer ink we use." When asking questions, try to avoid using why. Why is often perceived as implying blame, putting others into a defensive position while how, what, when, where are objective and encourage collaboration and engagement. Step 3: Consider who you are interacting with On any given day we have a preferred communication style influenced by our preferences and emotions. Of course, the reverse is true as well! Perceptions and emotions are the most likely causes of falling short of your goal. Acknowledge emotion and remain focused on the objective. If you are interacting with a person who is not currently around oneself. Afterward, offering a reasonable change that corrects the issue. Make sure this is a specific, realistic action they can take, like, "Could we agree to start our meetings on time?" List the Positive Outcomes That Will Occur if the Person Makes the Agreed Upon Change: Explain the benefits of making the change. This encourages cooperation by showing how the change is mutually beneficial. The example above might be, "If we start our meetings on time, we'll be able to adhere to our schedule and finish our work efficiently, reducing stress for everyone." The XYZ formula is a technique for assertive communication that's designed to help express your thoughts, feelings, or needs more clearly and effectively without causing unnecessary conflict. The aim of the XYZ formula is to articulate your emotional responses (your internal reality) to the actions of others (the external reality) within certain contexts. You are the sole proprietor of your emotions; others cannot perceive your inner state unless you communicate it to them. In the same way, you can only interact with and understand the external behaviors of others, not their internal experiences. This model can be especially useful in tricky conversations, where emotions might be high and it's important to communicate clearly and respectfully. It's also designed to reduce defensiveness in the person you're speaking to, which can help the conversation be more productive. I Feel (X)When You Do (Y)In Situation (Z)I Would Like*I feel upset when you arrive later for our dinner plansand I would like you to inform me in advance if you're running lateI feel frustratedwhen you interrupt meduring our team meetingsand I would like you to wait until I finish presenting before adding your inputI feel ignoredwhen you check your phone when we discuss household choresand I would like you to give our discussions your full attentionI feel appreciatedwhen you cleaned the kitchen and prepared dinnerwhen I came home late from workand I would like you to continue helping out when my workload gets heavyEach row in this table expresses a feeling in response to a behavior in a specific situation, and also proposes a desired change or action. This can help foster constructive conversation and resolution of issues. Rather than saying "You ruined what I was going to do," specify the consequences and the impact of those behaviors, rather than making generalizations about the person's character. This can make it more likely that the other person will be receptive to what you're saying and willing to work on a solution. Keep your communication brief and to the point. People are more likely to understand and respond to concise messages. Ensure that the message one wants to portray to another is straightforward to understand. We can take a crazy example like a dance routine - while it may be entertaining, it is not necessarily the most effective way to communicate one's message. When one wants to be heard, the messages one sends must be understandable and straightforward. Most people will try to impress others with big, complicated words or terminology, but we should ask ourselves: does one want to impress the other, or should one be heard and understood? One has to believe in one's ability to handle a situation. It can be incredibly frustrating when someone says one thing and then says something different the next day. Ask yourself: if you're not convinced what your message is, how can you expect to communicate it effectively? Over time, inconsistency in the messages one is sending can start to cause distrust in the people one is engaging with. So in order for one to be taken seriously and earn credibility as a leader and a strong communicator, one has to be consistent in the messages one sends to others. Before speaking, learn to take a moment and figure out precisely where one stands on the issue. This will make it easier for other people to understand where they stand concerning their relationship with you. Assertive communication involves controlling your emotions, tone of voice, and body language. Try to remain calm and composed, even when discussing difficult topics. Speak in a calm and steady voice, and use non-threatening body language. Keeping your emotions under control will help keep the conversation productive and prevent it from escalating into an argument. Scenario: Your teenage daughter is known to get mad every time you attempt to tell her to clean up her room or assist around the house. Assertive Statement: "I feel overwhelmed when you do not pitch in and help keep the house clean and tidy. I understand that you do not like having me remind you to clean your room, but it is a task that needs to be done, and everyone needs to do their part." Takeaway: Sometimes, we do not express ourselves because we fear how others react. Assertive people understand that they have no accountability for how the other person chooses to respond - that is entirely on them. A normal human being will know that we all have needs and desires and should be entitled to express them willingly. Scenario: Your father wants you to come to his house immediately so you can help him sort through things he wants to sell at a garage sale. However, you had planned to spend the evening relaxing, taking a calming bath, and just lounging around because you had a rough week at work. Assertive Statement: "I understand you need help, and I would like to help you. Although today, I need to take care of myself because I am very exhausted and overworked. I can better help you tomorrow. Does that work for you?" Takeaway: Part of being assertive is caring for oneself and valuing one's needs just as much as the other person's. An assertive person says, "I am worthy of this. I deserve this." Scenario: Your friend asks to borrow \$1,000, and you doubt she has a history of defaulting on her financial commitments. Assertive Statement: "My policy is never to lend money to friends or family members." Takeaway: Using the term "policy statement" is a great way to express one's core values and outline what one will and will not do. Scenario: Your roommate is yelling and complaining that you are not devoting enough time and attention to the household. She launches into a long list of what she perceives to be your character flaws. Assertive Statement: "I see you are angry. I hear you saying that you think I should spend more time doing _____. However, I am afraid I have to disagree with you, and here's why." Takeaway: Assertive people do not get caught up in anger or strong emotions. They acknowledge the other person's thoughts and feelings but frankly express their own. Scenario: You planned to meet up with your boyfriend to have a nice meal at a restaurant. You get there, but he is late - again! Every time you make plans, he seems to leave you waiting while he shows up 20-30 minutes after the scheduled meeting time. Assertive Statement: "I'm disappointed that you're late again. I made you wait because you are frequently late. It makes me feel uneasy and like I am not a priority for you. Is there something I can do to help you fix this problem?" Takeaway: Assertive people use "I" statements instead of throwing blame or insults at the other person. Offering to support come up with a solution lets the other person know you care. Scenario: Every day when you come home from work, your husband ignores you and continues doing whatever they are doing. He does not acknowledge, greet, or ask you how your day was. Assertive Statement: "I feel sad when I come home, and you do not seem happy to see me or ask how my day was. I feel lonely and not appreciated." Takeaway: Assertive people always state the problem instead of assuming that others know what they think, feel, or need. Scenario: Your boss wants you to do your co-worker's report because he has fallen behind schedule, and your boss knows you work efficiently. This has happened multiple times this past month. Assertive Statement: "This is the sixth time this month I have been given extra work because Steve has been behind on his work. I want to be a team player, but I am stressed when I am overburdened. What can we do to ensure this does not occur again?" Takeaway: Stating the facts and expressing one's feelings helps avoid making the other person get their defenses up. Offering to help solve the problem expresses one's concerns. Scenario: Your co-worker wants you to come in overtime to help her with her portion of work on a project that is due relatively soon, and she has been putting it off. Meanwhile, you have already completed your project share and have plans outside of work. Assertive Statement: "I understand you need help with your project. However, I already completed my share and I have plans outside of work that I cannot change. I can give you some advice and pointers, but I will not stay overtime." Takeaway: Again, stating the facts helps avoid making the other person get their defenses up. Offering to help in any way is also helpful for the other person. One should also be aware that if one has not been assertive in the past, one will come up against resistance when one begins taking steps to stand up for oneself. There may be disputes with family members and friends or tension at work, so it is best that one is prepared for various forms of backlash. For example, if one is discussing with one's partner how to interrupt, learn new boundaries, or please do not interrupt me when I'm speaking." Chances are they will get's need to be heard over the other individual's right to speak. However, with assertive communication, you are acknowledging the other person's feelings and wishes. Still, at the same time, you are openly sharing yours and trying to find the best solution for the situation. The assertive communication style correlates to very little stress. Trust is crucial in all of one's relationships, and being assertive helps one arrive there naturally. Most of the time, passive communication results in others not taking one seriously, while aggressive behavior leads to resentment. Being trustworthy in one's communication significantly builds connection. When one hides their feelings or interacts with others without caring about what they feel or think, one either lowers one's self-esteem or builds it on the wrong foundation. While assertive behavior, on the other hand, assertive behavior demonstrates that one is both brave enough to stand up for one's rights and in control of what one is saying and, more importantly, how one says it). One can find the balance between clearly stating one's needs and allowing the other person to do the same and feel equal. Last but not least, assertive behavior is excellent for everyone involved. If one communicates wisely, one can get what one wants out of any interaction and leave the other person fulfilled. There are three main communication types: passive, aggressive, and assertive. In every conversation, our communication style makes it easier or harder for the other person to understand what we mean. Therefore, we would suffer the consequences if we did not know which communication style to use. Often, this can lead to accidentally offending people or not conveying the point you are trying to make. Aggressive communication style is a method of expression where individuals assert their opinions, needs, or feelings in a manner that infringes upon the rights of others. It can involve speaking in a loud, demanding tone, employing harsh or disrespectful language, ignoring others' viewpoints, or using non-verbal cues like invading personal space. While it can help achieve one's goals, it results in strained relationships due to its lack of respect for others. Aggressive communication can prevent you from having stable friendships because no one enjoys your company who constantly jumps, disputes, disagrees, and does not allow others to share their views." This style can lead to misunderstanding, resentment, and a lack of personal fulfillment, as it inhibits effective interpersonal exchange and self-advocacy. On the other hand, passive communication may lead to feelings of being misperceived and misheard. You may feel like no one truly hears you or respects your input. A passive-aggressive communication style is characterized by indirect expressions of hostility or negativity. Instead of openly expressing feelings or needs, individuals may use sarcasm, silent treatment, procrastination, or subtle sabotage. This style can create confusion and conflict as the communication is covertly aggressive, making it hard for others to address the real issues, leading to ineffective resolution and strained relationships. We should all strive for an assertive communication style because it is the best of both worlds. You not only meet your needs, but you also meet the needs of the person you are engaging with, so everyone is happy. An assertive communication style is a balance between the other two communication styles. An awareness of assertive communication can also help one handle complex family, friends, and co-workers more efficiently, decreasing drama and stress. Ultimately, assertive communication empowers one to draw essential boundaries that allow anyone to meet their needs in relationships without excluding others and letting anger and resentment creep in. Of course, occasionally, it can be challenging to create this habit and stay away from other, less productive communication styles. There needs to be a healthy amount of self-control. Fortunately, some innovative and easy ways exist to improve your assertive communication skills. Before this, let us examine why you should prioritize aiming for a more assertive communication style. Passive communication is an avoidance style that is considered inefficient, as it does not communicate the person's sentiments. The person will avoid expressing what they mean to evade conflict. They will prioritize the needs of others over their own and are often taken advantage of. The biggest issues when it comes to hiring and retaining quality... read more Career Development Today's world of work is about constant personal growth, rapid learning, and the ability to pivot where needed. Individuals who understand how to pivot their careers for the future, learn new skills, and embrace new opportunities are the ones that... read more Career Change n the fast-paced world of tech, it's not uncommon for employees to switch roles or even companies. Even if you're happy in your current role and with your company, it's still a good idea to keep an eye on your career development. Having a strong... read more Career Development o you feel like your career has stalled? Do you feel like there are no opportunities for advancement at your current company? Or maybe you're just not sure what the best way is to develop a meaningful and successful career. Whatever stage of your... read more Career Development o've just been promoted or you see an opportunity to grow in your organization. But now what? How do you take your career to the next level? With career development, of course. Career development encompasses a variety of activities that help... read more Career Change ven though the job market is challenging, it's still a great time to be looking for work. You have more options than ever before, and you may be surprised by the number of jobs that can pay a decent wage without requiring a bachelor's degree. Even... read more Career Change if you're a high school or college student researching ways to make money without a college degree, you've probably heard that "no degree, no job" phrase again and again. While it is true that not having a four-year degree limits your career... read more Career Change older costs are rising and student loan debt has ballooned to over 1.5 trillion dollars. With these mind-boggling stats, it's no wonder many people are hesitant to take on the expense of a college education. Fortunately, there are plenty of jobs... read more Career Change verbody has to work at some point in their life. It is fair to say that some people don't get along with others (aggressive). Some behaviors and traits associated with assertiveness are: Being open to your and others' wishes, thoughts and feelings Listen to others and respond properly, whether you agree with them or not Accept responsibility and being able to empower others Expressing appreciation and gratitude for what others have done Behaving just, fair, and equal to others Being able to maintain self-control Admitting mistakes and apologizing To be passive means respecting others' wishes but undermining your own rights and self-confidence. It means not being able to communicate your thoughts or feelings effectively in order to advocate for what you want. Many people act passively because they want to be liked by others. For example, your spouse asks you if you have time to pick up the kids from school. A passive response would be "Yes, but I will be quite late because I have a meeting until 5 pm." An assertive response is "No, I can't because I have a really important meeting with my boss until 5 pm." It can be difficult to define assertive behavior because there is a fine and confusing line between assertiveness and aggression. Assertiveness is based on balanced while aggression is based on winning. Being assertive requires the consideration of the feelings of others while being aggressive means you disregard others' opinions and emotions, etc. However, aggressive responses try to force the other person to interact in a non-assertive way (either passively or aggressively). Sometimes when people react to a non-aggressive action in an aggressive way, it leaves the other person wondering what they did wrong and why they deserved the aggression in the first place. But, if thoughts or feelings are not stated clearly manipulation can happen. Manipulation is a form of aggression, although humor can also be used aggressively. For example, your boss places a pile of work to be done right away on your desk right before you are set to go on vacation. This is an aggressive act because your boss is disregarding your needs, feelings, and the fact you're going on vacation. It's possible to respond to your boss in an aggressive way by being hostile, angry, or rude. You could also respond with assertiveness by telling your boss that the work will get done, but after you come back from vacation. This is non-aggressively asserting your own rights while recognizing the fact that there is work to be done in cooperation. Taking an assertive approach to your work can be successful, but it's important to be respectful to your colleagues while still being respected. Be good negotiators by finding "win-win" solutions to problems. They can find common ground with their opponent. Be good problem solvers and are better do-ers because they feel empowered to do whatever needs to be done in order to find the best solutions to their problems. Not everyone is born assertive, but luckily there are some skills we can use to help us develop our assertiveness. Assertiveness can be learned. Some experts believe that the key is to first understand the context, assess your behavior and that of those around you, and then to make the right adjustments. Seeing the value of yourself, your rights, and your beliefs. Assertive people have a good understanding of themselves and recognize the value of themselves, their rights, and their beliefs by having a strong basis of self-confidence. Self-confidence will help them recognize that they deserve to be treated with dignity and respect, which leads them to be able to stick up for their wants, rights, and needs of themselves (or others). However, it's important to not allow your self-confidence develop into self-importance or arrogance. Voicing your wants and needs with confidence. Being able to work at your full potential, it's important that your wants and needs are met. Understanding that you can't control other people's behavior. People are in charge of how they react, not you. Expressing themselves in a positive way. Being open to both compliments and criticism. Have the ability to say "no". This is one of the most important skills needed in assertiveness because it's vital to know your own limits in order to stand up for yourself. Assertiveness Use "I" Statements. "I" Statements are statements that convey your feelings without imposing on the other person. For example, "I feel", "I want", and "I need" are all "I" Statements. Being empathetic. Using empathy means you understand how the other person feels about and views the situation, and take their point of view into consideration. Taking an assertive approach to your work can be successful, but it's important to be respectful to your colleagues while still being respected. Be good negotiators by finding "win-win" solutions to problems. They can find common ground with their opponent. 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