

## HUMAN RESOURCES



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# Assertiveness vs. Aggressiveness Is There REALLY a Difference?

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In the past, assertiveness, aggressiveness and arrogance were often used interchangeably. However, in the past 10 years, people have begun to understand the vast difference between these words, and are striving to be more “assertive” rather than aggressive. Before we proceed, let’s examine the differences between passiveness, aggressiveness, and assertiveness.

When many people hear the word passive, they often think of the words quiet, timid, weak or non-confrontational. Passiveness is a nonassertive or indirect behavior. It permits others to violate a person’s rights and shows a lack of respect for one’s own needs. It communicates a message of being inferior and the person decides his or her needs are secondary to others.

When asked to describe aggressiveness, many people use the following descriptors: anger, volatile, or arrogant. This involves expressing thoughts, feelings and beliefs that are inappropriate and violates the rights of others. Aggression communicates disrespect and people frequently attempt to get their own way by not allowing others a choice. They want to be the winner..... regardless of the consequence.

Confidence, respect and honesty, on the other hand, are used to describe assertiveness. Assertive people show respect for themselves and others by trying to work toward a win-win situation. An assertive person effectively influences, listens, and

negotiates so that others choose to cooperate willingly.

Which type of person do you think you are? It is interesting how many people will view themselves as assertive while others will quickly disagree and label them aggressive or vice-versa.

*As people try to become more assertive personally or professionally, Walmsey & Associates, a professional counseling service, describes several questions that may arise:*

### 1. If I Learn To Be Assertive, Will I ALWAYS Get What I Want?

No, you will not. Assertiveness is not always getting everything you want. You cannot force others to change, yet it is far more effective than being submissive or aggressive. It is likely that by being respected, you will at LEAST be heard.

### 2. Why Should I Change If What I Am Doing Now, Works Just Fine?

People may do things on your behalf either out of guilt, fear or frustration but not because they want to! They will eventually have less respect for you and their opinion will become more negative as time goes on.

### 3. If Being Assertive Is So Great, Then Why Don't People Do It More Often?

It takes time, energy, patience, and self-control. Becoming more assertive can be riskier because if feelings are handled inappropriately in the workplace, anger or conflict can result. Until people learn to express their feelings healthily and appropriately, many people fail to learn which battles to fight. Not every battle is worth it and that can be a hard lesson to learn.

### 4. Why Should I Be More Assertive?

Becoming more assertive may sound like a good idea, but some may stall because they fear how they will be perceived. However, there are several reasons why becoming more assertive should be at the top of anyone's "to do" list.

First, by learning to be assertive, a person can ask for help when it is needed, rather than being afraid to ask. This will greatly improve their relationship with others. Second, they can respectfully disagree in a situation without seeming hostile. They understand that it is acceptable to feel angry - it's the way it is expressed that can hurt people. Third, they will earn respect from others and feel in control of their life. Confidence and a better self image will be present. And lastly, but very important, they will experience less anxiety. By being more comfortable expressing an opinion or saying no, there will be less apprehension and worries in general.

There are several suggestions or tips to assist you in becoming more assertive. While it is impossible to do all these steps in one day, you can start to incorporate them little by little into your daily life.

### Change Your Outlook and Perspective

In today's ever critical world, many people wonder what other people think of them. They worry that they won't be liked and won't have as many friends, and in turn, they become doormats. However, this negative self image is self defeating and very damaging. Therefore, stop worrying about everyone else and start

paying attention to yourself. Take control of your life and your thoughts and learn to accept them for what they are.

If your personality is the opposite though, and you are overly aggressive, reevaluate why you have the need to undermine others and how you can become more positive, yet still keep your confidence and drive. By doing so, you will accomplish even more professionally and personally.

### Find Out What You Truly Want

One of the amazing things about assertive people is that they always seem to know exactly what they want and how to get it in a positive manner. They know what they believe. They know how they feel about things and how to react to certain situations. Yet people who are aggressive are searching for more money or assets to make them more successful or wealthy, that they often quickly lose focus on what they truly want.

Use "I" language

Remember, that you are responsible for your feelings and thoughts. Once you take responsibility and accept ownership of them, you can express them without damage.

It is essential to be specific about what you say. You may want to use an "I" statement and offer a solution. For example, "I have two meetings already planned for Tuesday that I cannot change. How about we meet on Wednesday morning instead?"

This will be far more effective than stating, "You know my Tuesdays are full. Why do you always schedule more meetings on my most difficult day?" This statement sounds vague, negative and full of blame and it will cause the other person to react defensively.

### Be Honest and Clear

Understand that honesty is a strong asset and is helpful to you and those you connect with. If you want or need something, state it affirmatively and positively. Don't use judgments or emotion to sway someone to your point of view; to do so is manipulative.

Instead, use facts. Stating how you feel is a fact - weeping hysterically or waving your fist in anger is not.

You also need to be concise about what you want. Be direct and specific. If there is a problem, state what you think is the problem and what you think will be the best resolution. One suggestion is to ask for clarification and understanding after you make your point. If you feel you haven't been heard, state your point again. In addition, you may want to repeat what you have heard from the other party, assuring that you understand his or her own side before moving on or addressing a concern.

### Stay calm

Staying composed and keeping your cool is not always easy. If you feel that your blood is beginning to boil, it is better to take a step back and state that you need some time away from the issue at hand, rather than responding in anger, violence or crying. Simply suggest a specific time to resume the discussion and remove yourself from the situation.

### Have a Win/Win Attitude

Lastly, when solving a problem, it almost always involves compromising. While assertiveness is helpful, you also have to know what you will accept to achieve successful resolution. It does not force others to change or for them to accept your opinion. It merely opens the door to communication and hopefully ends in a win/win situation. Being assertive won't assure you the perfect life, but it will take you in a new direction to allow more honesty, respect and happiness.

In closing, a quote from W.W. Ziege seems to summarize these points perfectly. "Nothing on earth can stop the individual with the right mental attitude from achieving their goal; nothing on earth can help the individual with the wrong mental attitude."