

Chapter 1

Assertiveness in the Workplace

Not every one of us has the cool and confident grace that we so admire in people. Not all of us are born secure and confident and know how to present ourselves to the outside world. We are not always speaking our minds, taking what is ours and standing up to others.

That is exactly what 'Assertiveness' is.

Assertiveness is – to quote a formal definition from a dictionary – “forthright, positive, insistence on the recognition of one’s rights’.

In an non-formal definition, Assertiveness is the ability to belief and implement your personal rights, and to always honestly express your feelings, opinions, ideas and rights.

Sounds pretty simple, does it? Isn't it what we do every day in our lives?

For some, yes. They are the lucky ones who are confident and brave enough to face the world with their own judgment and thoughts, and can argue to make a point, and know how to make their voices heard over a hundred others.

However, for some others, it is not so easy. Some of us live their lives in the shadows of others, gently passing through and following orders, not trusting themselves or their opinions to speak out loud. This book is about them, and for them.

Assertiveness is something that comes in handy everywhere in our lives, from our early childhoods into the late years – in our families, among our friends, in school and high school, college and in our social lives. But perhaps the most important use of an assertive personality is during our professional life, at work.

Why, you may ask?

Let's start with the first step, shall we? When you were called for interview by your dream company for your dream position, and you have always been an non-assertive person all your life. You are qualified in every possible way – a good education, plenty of extracurricular activities, a good college background – all but experience. You are a fresh graduate!

The Interviewer points it out, "You seem perfect for the job, but you seem to have no experience, at all!"

What do you do then? Follow your gut instinct to sit back quiet, and nod as if to say, "Yes, you are right! I don't deserve this job." Or, do you gather up your courage, and answer. "I can see what you mean, but even though I am fresh out of college, I believe I am perfectly ready for this job. Let me show you how - "

Which answer will get you your dream job, do you think?

Let's assume that you got the job. Congratulations! Your actual troubles start now, which will include constant belittling because you are young, because you are new, because you are inexperienced. Trust me on this, there will never be a dearth of reasons to put you down by your own colleagues. This happens to almost all new comers to almost all offices everywhere, unless you know of a way to stand up against it.

"Get me a cup of coffee, will you, sweetie? Thanks!"

"When you are going over to the copier, can you make me a few copies of these too, please?"

"Throw these back into the outbox, will you?"

"Pop over to the next room and fetch me the file, please, can you?"

If you think you are being nice and helpful to your colleagues by running errands for them, you are sadly mistaken. You are neither an intern nor the mail-guy and your colleagues will soon learn to get used to this, and you will be stuck in the role of one.

And of course, there's always the 'taking advantage of the new girl/guy'. When there's a new project that needs to be taken care of, it is given to the 'new girl/guy' because you need to familiarize yourself with what goes on. Any pressing research that needs to be finished overnight will also be pressed into your hands for the same reason.

As the 'new girl/guy', you will be voted to stay and work late, or drop in by the weekends and during the holiday season. You'll be the one chosen to work while they head out for a long lunch or go window shopping.

Suppose you do survive this and actually on, your situation wouldn't improve much. As a girl, you may have to endure thousands of advances and crude jokes from your colleagues that you should report but can't make yourself to do so. After a promotion, you ought to have reported

a junior but decided to let it go. Someone in the office is really rubbing you the wrong way, but you decide not to do anything about it.

And then finally, it happens. An new marketing scheme that you once discussed with a colleague is announced at the board meeting and praised and your colleague/friend gets all the credit for it, and your name isn't even mentioned as the original inventor of the idea? What's more, your colleague doesn't even look ashamed because s/he knows that you'll never bring the topic up again?

Did your partner again leave for a family vacation this year abruptly when you were working on an important project together? And they didn't even bother to apologize for the matter because they know you wouldn't reproach them? Did your Assistant miss work again without prior notice because she knows you wouldn't say anything to her?

Are you still wondering why all these things happen to you? There is a reason, my friend; and the reason is that, it is because you never speak up. You never take a stand against inappropriate behavior in the office, against plagiarizing your work and your ideas, against misbehavior and tardiness, against unfinished work and early lunches.

This is because of your non-assertive attitude in the workplace that has made your professional life a nightmare. Until and unless you learn to stand up against every wrongdoing and get a voice, your life at the office isn't going to improve much.

But before we launch into helping you do so, let us look for the reasons behind a person's non-assertive behavior.

