

How to be More Assertive

What does it mean to be assertive? Being assertive means, you can communicate your needs, expectations and perspective clearly and honestly. It means you are not held back by fear - you are not afraid to speak your mind.

It is not an excuse to be aggressive - being assertive and doing it well requires you to know how to be honest, how to communicate your needs with others, and have the ability to express yourself.

According to Holocaust survivor Edith Eva Eger: "To be passive is to let others decide for you. To be aggressive is to decide for others. To be assertive is to decide for yourself. And to trust that there is enough, that you are enough."

Taking the opportunity to lead with your own best interest at heart - without infringing on the rights or feelings of others might seem like a difficult or daunting prospect and one which you might not know how to start. But wanting to start, and wanting to learn is always the best way forwards.

What is assertiveness: a quick look

The concept of assertiveness was first codified by Joseph Wolpe in his 1958 book *Neurosis*, where he introduced it as the state of being that could counter anxiety. He believed that in the presence of assertiveness anxiety could no longer exist. Since then, it has been recognized as an essential and critical treatment in behavior therapy. Assertiveness training is not a stereotypical trope from the 1990s, it is an essential methodology for teaching us to act with agency and advocate for our own needs. Assertiveness training involves the following four pillars:

- Acknowledgement of personal rights
- Recognizing the difference between non-assertiveness and assertiveness
- understanding what constitutes passive-aggressiveness and aggressiveness
- learning the skills to express assertiveness both through words and action

Assertiveness is not the reward of high self-esteem - it is a skill that we can all cultivate, and learn to bring into our everyday life. When we have learned to act assertively, we will have gained the ability to:

- share our inner thoughts and feelings without fear
- enter into relationships with other people, and maintain them
- know what our rights as individuals are
- learn to control our negative feelings - not surprise them, but rather speak of them and control the emotion
- understand how to compromise without only focusing on our own way
- learn how to have healthy friendships

There are very many ways that we can learn about assertiveness, or learn this type of approach - either through self-study or even from a CBT practitioner. However, from the perspective of this text, we will take a look through some at why you behave the way you do, what you should expect to receive as your fundamental rights, and how to change the way you think and become more assertive.

Choosing to learn about assertiveness is the first step, so let's get started.

Why we behave the way we do

Much of what stops us from living a happy and fulfilling life is our thoughts and actions. Part of these thoughts is directly preventing us from reaching new heights of success in our personal and professional life. These are known as self-limiting beliefs and their negative impact on our experience, is greater, and more damaging, than we think. These are thoughts such as "you are not good enough" or "if you try for that new position, you will fail" - opportunities will fall by the wayside as you focus on feeling bad. Looking at it from this perspective, you can see that this can have long-ranging effects on so many parts of your life.

You can only fight these types of thoughts by embracing self-confidence with courage. Turn those negative thoughts down. Address them and see them for the fallacies they are. For a concrete exercise to fight these beliefs, take a piece of paper and write down all of your self-limiting thoughts, look at them dispassionately. Evaluate them and realize them for the lies they are. Start thinking thoughts that contradict these self-limiting thoughts. If your self-limiting belief is "you don't know enough for that job" you can counteract this with "I have years of experience and the confidence of my colleagues who know that I am an expert in this field".

This type of thought can be related to anxiety, and if this type of thinking is overwhelming you and interfering in your daily life, please seek someone to help you address them. This type of anxiety can only be contradicted with professional assertiveness training, as initially proposed by Joseph Wolpe.

How are you are being perceived?

You might be surprised about how you are perceived by others. Perhaps you think you are being assertive and confident, but in fact you are in fact giving a very different impression.

Passive people are perceived as having trouble saying 'no'. Giving into the requests of others, even if it is not convenient. They are seen as not standing up for their rights and doing anything they can to avoid conflict.

Conversely, on the other end of the spectrum, are aggressive people. They are those who are viewed as inconsiderate of others - pushy in fact about their own agenda and interests. They are reactive, and tend towards anger. They only care about their feelings, and anyone else's.

How are assertive people viewed? They are seen as those who fall somewhere in the middle of the two types. They are focused on the present, and are direct in their approach. They take responsibility for themselves, and are not interested in hashing over old conflicts, they know who they are and what they want. And most importantly they respect other people's feelings and opinions, as well as their own.

So which one are you?

How can I change myself? Why should I want to?

When you begin the journey of becoming an assertive person, there is no one way to go about it. Everyone will have different expectations and a different journey. That is why the first important step to take is to understand what you are trying to achieve.

It is very easy to confuse assertive behavior with aggression, and it crosses over from one to the other state can happen when we are not careful. Defending your right to make your own decisions and standing up for yourself can be done in either way, aggressively or assertively. Of course, you cannot be responsible for others response to your speaking up, however, when you come from a place in which you understand how you are trying to advocate for yourself, in which you realize what assertiveness means, your chance of success will improve.

Assertiveness is about intimately understanding yourself, knowing your strengths and weaknesses and feeling comfortable in advocating for your needs. However, assertiveness is not about only speaking up about your thoughts and desires. It also asks that you listen and understand others around you. Assertiveness strives to help build self-assuredness because this confidence can help you communicate your thoughts in a way that it is perceived as fair and understanding of the other person's perspective.

Aggressiveness, however, is about coming out on top. It is a state of mind that prioritizes the person's best interest. People who are aggressive are not concerned about others needs or desires or anything at all, not as long as they can get their own way. Bullying and selfishness are the hallmarks of aggressiveness. These are the acts of a person who doesn't care how their actions affect others; they only care if they win.

Part of the pay to become an assertive person is accepting the fact that we must take responsibility for our behavior. Our emotions and feelings, and the acts they inspire are not reasonless, and we bear certain responsibility for any fallout. The second part of taking responsibility for our behavior is taking control of our reactions.

Another way to look at this is to understand that any issue (argument, dispute, thing to be resolved, or simple human interaction) exists outside of our input to a certain degree, at least until we react to it. The way that we and any counterparty respond to the situation determines the outcome - which may or may not be a positive one. Of course, in every case, we can only be responsible for our actions - and the way we act will determine the outcome in some way. This is not an easy concept to accept, yet it is crucial to accomplish as you strive to become assertive. Perhaps your boss criticized you at the office, and you felt upset. You cannot blame your boss for your anger and the fact that you yell at your children when you return home. You have chosen the outcome for your behavior. What was the other result? Perhaps you might have created a consequence of this situation that would have allowed you to process your boss' comments before lashing out at someone else.

Something important to realize as you begin your path to assertiveness, is that in these emotional situations, we tend to default to our dominant feelings - without paying any attention to the outcome we want to receive. When dealing with confrontational situations, we experience both a physical and emotional response, and these are both primal impulses that are hard to resist. Essentially our mechanisms for dealing with anger and confrontation, for example, are laid down very early in our life. As children we deal with confrontation and other situations from a general position of weakness, so even as adults, our response is colored by this. We carry with us, associations that have been built up over time that color every reaction, until we learn to control our response. This is not easy, changing patterns of behavior is going to be difficult. But as you learn to control your actions, you will find that you can begin to determine the outcome.

Gender Roles

Sadly, our society still struggles with stereotypes when it comes to gender. The expectations for men are quite different than those for women. And these discriminatory beliefs will color

perceptions of a person's actions depending on their gender. It's quite common for people to consider assertiveness as a male trait, along with confidence. An assertive woman, especially in traditionally male areas, may be perceived as aggressive for displaying normal assertive behavior. The stereotypical "dragon lady" label as applied to women is a quite common criticism. Women are also often asked to be less abrasive or authoritarian.

A Harvard Business Review article even took the time to examine 200 performance reviews and came to some troubling conclusions, in cases of employees being labelled "aggressive" 76% of them were women, and only 24% men.

This may not be something that you can fix if you are a woman. However, this is an important bias to be aware of, if you are striving to build open lines of communication with people. Don't feel compelled to accept their criticism at face value, instead make sure that you seek to understand and express yourself honestly.

For men, this is a warning to avoid this type of communication bias. There is no reason why a woman should not speak from a place of honesty and strength. Be aware of how your actions may be perceived.

Am I right?

This bias, however, does illustrate a salient point. Do we understand when assertion crosses the line into aggression? You may find yourself feeling doubt about your actions when you first set out to change your behavior. However, you will learn the right moment in which to speak out and when to hold your tongue. Assertiveness is not about being socially disruptive, it is about taking care of yourself.

Who's being the aggressor here?

Have you asked yourself if you are an aggressive person? These are generally personality types whom it is easy to spot. They tend to dominate the conversation, and may even be the type who, as they say, 'sucks all of the air out of the room'. There is room in every culture for these aggressive types, and aggressive people will thrive for sure at certain types of jobs. Do you tend to escalate every interaction until the other person backs down? Do you make demands on people, but you are never satisfied with their response? Are you constantly feeling let down as your expectations are not being met? If yes, you may well be on the more aggressive end of the spectrum.

However, if you are able to function in your social network by making claims and keeping your sense of perspective, and your cool, then you are likely already developing your assertiveness skills. It's not about claiming the credit, it's about working with others and not losing your needs and rights in the process. Assertiveness is a strong and surefire path towards becoming a good leader, the sort that others will look up to.

Reading the room

One key distinguishing factor between aggression and assertiveness is the fact that assertiveness depends on caring about the reactions and feelings of others. This is not to say that you should curb yourself to please others, but rather to point out that a successful communicator will make the effort to 'read the room' and make an effort to be empathic to the feelings of others. Take the time to watch everyone around you as you craft your assertiveness skills, body language, emotional intelligence, etc, all of these can help you learn how to communicate assertively. Also, be aware of your own emotional state, or the way that you react

to situations or stress, these can impact anyone's behavior and can very quickly turn a peaceful encounter into a more unpleasant one. Understanding other's emotional state can allow you to adjust your own. You can't control other's behavior, remember, but you can make sure to be 'aware' of the feelings of others.

How am I expressing myself?

It is so important to remember that you cannot control others' acts. You cannot change them with a magical spell, nor can you manipulate them to bend to your desires. Assertiveness isn't about beating your audience into submission, it's about seeking ways to mutually engage.

Think of the bright side, you don't have to assume responsibility for the way others will take your assertive actions. As long as you are respectful and calm, you should free yourself from any responsibility for their reaction. Lose the guilt. You are not responsible for their anger or resentment.

It is very rare that you are the sole cause of their unhappiness either. Everyone carries baggage with them that can affect all of their other interactions. It shouldn't stop you from being assertive.

Of course, the question you should ask yourself here, is if they are angry or resentful, how will I respond? This is where you need to keep your cool and respect their needs while still speaking up as you need to.

Your Basic Rights (How to say no without guilt, Change your Mind and Make your Own Choices)

You can say no without guilt. Be gracious - avoid aggression and remember your manners. It is easy to think that 'no' means you are being negative. After all who wants to let people down, or disappoint them. When we are in a relationship with someone, no matter how casual we would rather make them happy. And how do we make someone happy? By being kind, guarding our relationship and being agreeable to each other.

You might be inclined to regret saying no - you may think that perhaps you have not thought things over properly, or that if you had given it more time, perhaps you may have reached a different decision. Don't doubt yourself, think of the good results that have resulted from making your own decisions and don't waste time feeling guilty or regretful.

"No" can also be a way to earn respect from others - for yourself (and your self-esteem) and for those who are around you. This kind of no is quite closely linked to feelings of self-esteem, and giving yourself permission to say 'no' is a huge step along the path towards becoming an assertive and happier person.

Remember you will never please everyone.

Setting boundaries

Consider an example: Perhaps you have cleared your schedule for the weekend, and are looking forward to a few days off from work. However, at the last minute, your boss appears and assigns a whole new project with the instruction that this needs to be done as soon as

possible. Your boss has not checked in with you about your plans, and you have not agreed to any overtime, so what is your reaction at this moment?

Do you give in to their demands without speaking forward about your own needs? Or should you instead speak up and say that you will be happy to deal with this new slew of work on Monday? You should have the confidence to advocate for yourself. They may not be happy to hear that you will not do the work until Monday, but you have managed to set boundaries on their expectations while still showing your boss the respect their position requires.

Drawing a line in the sand

Of course, you will not always be able to be assertive in this way - sometimes you will need to embrace that old aphorism "discretion is the better part of valor". In some situations, assertiveness will be perceived as aggression no matter how you speak or express yourself. This is especially true with supervisors who are aggressive themselves, and perhaps even a bit of a bully. However, there is something to be said about laying the groundwork for your own sense of self-preservation. Embracing and using assertiveness throughout your interactions, while bearing in mind your audience, can help prevent some of these types of negative interactions. However, if they are consistent and constantly put you in a poor position, you may want to consider changing your employment.

Consider confidence

Confidence is required and immutable from the state of assertiveness. However, you also need to be consistent. Confidence is the ability to support your belief in your decisions even when you meet with pushback. This can be something of a double-edged sword, however. If you meet with resistance, how does an assertive person need to act? Walking away might make you seem weak, however, can you push back and not look aggressive? Avoid defensiveness in this situation, be open to others thoughts and wait your turn to make your point. Building a consensus is the healthiest way to deal with these situations

The tools to develop self-knowledge as outlined below will help you gain insight into these situations. Being able to effectively communicate in a situation is more important than simply expressing yourself. At least, it is if you want to be heard.

Don't abandon your position

When you are faced with anger or resentment while being assertive, you may wonder how to respond. Should you stay the course and keep up with your assertive stance? Yes, as long as you respect the other part in your interaction. Keep calm and don't lose your cool. Remember, you are only responsible for your own feelings and behavior. If you are not violating the needs or feelings of the person who is upset, you have the right to speak as you will.

This can essentially be interpreted as "not taking' no' for an answer". And this does not mean pushing aggressively past the point of reason. However, if you have reached a conclusion, and find yourself rebuffed, reflect on the criticism and amend your point if necessary. But the very valid reasons for your point of view still exist. You simply need to conclude if there is another way to address the issue. Rely on your self-confidence and faith in yourself - you simply need to choose another path to your goal.

Focus on your value

A strong understanding of yourself and an appreciation of your own worth as a person is crucial to sustaining assertiveness. This kind of belief in yourself can eventually translate into assertiveness. You have the right to notice when you are not being treated with respect and consideration, and you have the right to speak up in your own defense.

This is essentially a form of self-talk, which is the way in which your inner self analyses and then determines reactions to situations. When we lack assertiveness, this process is out of our control. But knowing that this process can be controlled gives you immense insight into how you build up your feelings and reactions. It is an actual interruption in the process of reacting to outside stimulus that gives you a chance to stop negativity, anger, guilt and other such emotions from starting to bubble to the surface.

Speak up for yourself in the right way

You need to be your own self-advocate. No one else will ever be able to stand up for you in the same way that you will. Frankly, most will not bother to try and meet your needs or even realize that you have needs at all. You need to take the initiative, identify your needs and look out for yourself, otherwise, you will not be able to reach your goals.

The more you speak about your goals, even if you are not accomplishing them right away, you will see that your chances of success will improve. Freeing yourself from the trappings of uncertainty, you will see your own understanding of your goals grow in clarity as well. Approaching them and verbalizing them in an honest and clear way will also improve your chance of results.

Accept criticism

It would be a mistake to consider that any criticism should bow down in the face of your new assertiveness. This would be a mistake. Feedback has its worth, both positive and negative, and it should be accepted graciously. Perhaps you will not agree with the content of this feedback, however, every sort of listening can have its benefits. You will gain insight into your colleague's needs or feelings, and you can evaluate how to reach a compromise that will suit both your needs and theirs.

The Ground Rules

You will need to change your own behavior, this is the only thing that you can change. Begin by understanding and accepting that you have rights as a person. Make sure that you value your own rights first. Don't expect that people will always respect them, but make sure you stand your ground and stand up for yourself as you need to. Don't neglect the rights of others - they are as important as your own. Come to each conversation as an equal. Assertiveness is also a way of positive thinking - use this to bolster your own internal dialogue as well.

Change the Way You Think

When you embrace assertiveness you will have gained the ability to manage your relationship with yourself, first and foremost, and following on that you will be able to build healthier relationships with others. Also, when you have the confidence and respect for yourself that assertiveness brings, you will see how your ability to make decisions will grow - choices will not be roadblocks, they will be simply bends in the road.

All of this starts by changing the way you think. When you are in an assertive mindset you will be able to build balanced relationships. One way to consider this is to think of the simple formula I=You. What this means is that you recognize the other person - not as your better, or underling - you recognize them as your equal. It doesn't matter if the person you are speaking to is the Queen of England or the guy who is selling you a newspaper - you are both equals, with no gain or desire for power over each other.

Start by realizing that you can control the way you interact with others. You can learn to free yourself to be likeable, or simply see enough equality between yourself and your audience to mean that you learn to be comfortable bridging that gap. This type of emotional intelligence will allow you to reach out instead of waiting for others to only reach you. Your ability to communicate will grow commensurately - if you feel you are a person worth liking - if you will become this.

Always remind yourself, however, that you know the difference between assertive and aggressive.

Stating your opinion is not foisting them on other people. Aggression requires you to be in a state of attack - of other people, their opinions, their choices, their thoughts. Assertiveness requires you to simply recognize your own opinions, and respect the rights of others to have their own.

After all your way, while it is your own, is not necessarily the correct one. Asserting your right to have an opinion though does not give you the right to be dismissive of others. Learning to respect the ways in which we are different than others, helps us respect the way others are different from us, as well as similar. This is a great way to explore new opportunities and gain a new appreciation of the world and the people around us. By opening ourselves to the world we open ourselves to everything the world has to offer - experiences, knowledge, and everything else.

Set boundaries

You can define boundaries as the limits you have within yourself about what you will and will not allow others to do to you. These are the conclusions that allow you to distinguish between not letting people walk all over you and not being a bully. Understanding this type of distinction will help you understand when you need to say 'yes' and when it's okay to say 'no'.

Know your values

Take the time to identify the things that are important to you. Weigh your choices, decide if these feelings of responsibility to your values are real. When you know what your values are you are really casting an eye on the things in your life that matter to you. Your values are those things in your life that are truly meaningful to you and living from that place is truly empowering. In your relations with others, this type of mental shift will make you act with greater confidence and increase your ability to have a rewarding and mutually beneficial relationship.

Build self-confidence

Do you believe in yourself? If the answer is 'no' then also ask yourself, how can you expect others to believe in you either? How can you fight whatever is stopping you from starting to live in the way you want to live.

Remember the self-limiting thoughts we talked about above? Self-confidence is the best antidote for them. When you are sure of yourself - the kind of surety based on being honest with yourself - you are keeping those kinds of thoughts at bay. Of course, these thoughts are never going to be permanently eradicated, everyone suffers from moments of doubt. But these self-limiting thoughts that are holding you back from success must be fought with a concerted campaign of self-confidence and clear thinking.

Consider this exercise for self-confidence. Think over your day in the evening and think of three or four good things, no matter how large or how small, that happened to you that day. And start doing good things for others, without expecting anything in return. This is a way of building up a network of positive experiences within yourself, the kind that will last within you. Knowing you are a good person and that you are capable of good feelings and good experiences will help you build up the stamina to endure more rocky moments. And provide a strong foundation for becoming a person who can be assertive because they know their own worth.

Next, consider the things that you are good at. We all generally have an idea of the things at which we excel. And taking the time to recall them to yourself is a great place to start. Stop focusing on your weaknesses and target what makes you strong, and what you believe makes you capable. The next step is to make sure you utilize these strengths. Practice your talents and relish the strength they give you.

Recognize what you have in your everyday life

What do we mean when we say "meaning"? This is not a quantifiable value - it is rather the feeling of importance that we attach to the things that matter to us. We can bring immense positivity to our day by focusing on those aspects that are of importance and taking the time to make the most of our time with them. This is a harder concept to explain, but it is one that relies on us knowing that we feel confident enough to place importance on our own feelings. When we can experience this highly rewarding feeling, we will be able to help create a strong foundation of confidence, because we will have a better feeling about who we are.

Focus on being positive

Positivity is not to be confused with "happiness" - no one can be happy all of the time. It is rather looking towards the aspects of your day to day perspective that see you focusing on making the most of the things in your life that make you feel good, and yes, even happy. And pay attention to these things, understanding those moments, or actions or experiences helps build a core of strength within yourself as you learn to focus on being who you are and nurturing that person with kindness and attention. When you can speak from a place of inner strength, assertiveness will become easier to accomplish.

What are the things you can focus on to build up positivity, confidence and mindfulness?

Your social net

Value those who are close to you, if the relationship is one which feeds your sense of self-worth. Families and close friends can be those things that bring us the greatest joy, support and self-worth. Our family and friends help form our sense of identity, they help us build up a schema from which we understand the world around us. When our family, for example, doesn't support or care for our well-being, we may find it difficult to build up an inner core of self-confidence and speak assertively. Of course, when our social network supports us, we may still struggle with our inner self - everyone has doubts and weaknesses.

Approach life as a reason to celebrate

Accept each moment as it comes and celebrate the joy of existence. Be optimistic about your life, and don't be afraid to hope. Stepping aside from the grind and sense of despair that can weigh down your everyday life. Feeling that you have no control over your life is putting yourself in the place of the victim - but, no matter how bad things might be, you can control the narrative of your life. You can fight the stress and unease that come with living as if you a victim of circumstance.

Take the time to examine the positives in your life, see them for the benefits they are, and no matter what negatives, trauma or stress you are experiencing, make space for feeling grateful and alive.

How to stay positive, even when life tells you no

What do you do when negative thoughts start intruding? A sense of perspective is a healthy tool to fight off the blues. Build your self-confidence and don't tear yourself down - negative thoughts can only truly derail you when you give them permission to.

Take the time to understand your problems - focus on benefitting from the self-knowledge this will give you. But also, recognize the ways in which they are holding you back and getting you down. This type of introspection is key to building confidence and self-knowledge that will help you know yourself better and help you realize that you are a person of worth.

Realize that you will not be able to avoid external negatives

Recognize the troubles that exist outside of yourself, and realize how you are reacting to those stressors. Fear will not just trouble your mind, it will affect you physically. Do you feel a sense of physical heaviness? Perhaps your chest gets tight when you think about your life? Take the time to look within and isolate those things that are causing you to internalize your fear so strongly. You can feel concern and worry without letting them take over your life. You have the power to choose the way you process these negatives - give them their due, but do' t give way before them.

Seek respite in the world around you

Feed your soul with things that make you happy. Who doesn't love a good sad story? Of course, they have their place. Just remember to also supply yourself with good thoughts. Our brains are very responsive to positive thoughts - even if they come from outside us. A happy movie, a positive story or a remembrance that affirms the amazingness of our existence can all help improve your mood. You can train your brain, in the same way, that you train your muscles. Create a sense of discipline that helps build positive thoughts and actions. The more you do this the easier it will become. The easier it becomes the more you will find your sense of worth improves and you will be comparing yourself to others less. This type of action takes discipline, but it is worth it in the truly impactful effect it can have on your well-being. Remember, when you are feeling positive, and have built up the routines to maintain this feeling it will take less and less effort to achieve this state of mind.

Surround yourself with positive people

Nourish the friendships that make you feel good. Good friends can have an amazing impact on our quality of life. You deserve to enjoy their support and give them your care and support in

turn. They will also support you in your efforts to speak from a place of strength - and hey will offer a safe sounding board as you learn to embrace a more assertive form of communication. A true friend will not begrudge your honest communication, and you will be a true friend by listening from a place of openness as well.

Accept the happiness that you are building around you

Accept the fact that indulging in happiness will, in fact, make you happier. Creating a network of support and good feeling will start to change the very fabric of our lives. And we need to accept this. So don't forget to pass that good feeling on as well.

Remember, assertiveness is not about aggression, it's about creating the confidence that allows you to speak honestly and respectfully. Working with an assertive person, being with them and interacting in a way that facilitates communication is a follow-on effect of this campaign to build a positive and happy mindset.

Don't be a victim - take control of your life

This is perhaps one of the most crucial steps you can take in your path to becoming more assertive. Give up the mantle of victimhood. Give up using negative thoughts as a reason for why you have not been able to become the person you want to be. Stop fighting to change things that simply cannot be changed. Accept how things are, and start changing the things that you can change. Take control of your life. Remember, no one else is going to live your life for you. You are in the driver's seat and you can choose, within a certain framework, the direction in which you want to go. This isn't a mindset about creating a life where there are never challenges, or where you never struggle. Rather it's about knowing how to move from a place of strength and advocate for yourself. Be positive and assertive, you are the only 'you' on this planet, why not strive to be the best one?

How can I build up my assertiveness in the real world?

If you have reached the point where you are ready to interact and begin self-advocating you may find yourself in situations in which you are not sure how to react. Perhaps you are attempting to express your thoughts in a workplace situation but are meeting with resistance. Do you continue to argue? Or do you back down? While not pursuing confrontation is sound, backing down too often can make you appear too timid. One great strategy is to stop and listen, waiting for your turn to speak. Acknowledging another person's point of view and opinion is a powerful way to earn another's ear. Avoid defensiveness if at all possible, for it breeds resentment. Listening and respecting another's point of view is a great way to win their trust, and this type of mutual exchange can build trust.

What about the pitfalls?

It's important to be careful about not overemphasizing your self-belief and the prioritization of your needs. Of course, your own feelings and needs have their importance, however, you cannot prioritize everything about yourself over someone else's needs. Every thought you think or every feeling you have does not need to take precedence in every situation, a sense of perspective is important to avoid this mistake and avoid sliding into aggressiveness.

Practical acts to build and maintain assertiveness

Body language

Make sure that your communication style is on point. Your body language should reflect the words you are saying and ensure that your message is consistent both in your speech and your physical expression. Make sure you stand up straight, keep your posture open and neutral. When walking into a room, enter slowly and confidently. Do not enter in a rush, which may make you seem disorganized or ill-prepared. When you stand upright and cultivate a relaxed posture, you will look assertive even before you say a word. When you sit down, be sure not to slouch. Also, do not fold your arms or cross your legs, these are classic signs of nervousness. However, sitting upright, and with a sense of confidence makes you seem interested in the speaker.

Also, be sure to look your audience in the eyes. Eye contact is particularly important when it comes to being assertive. It gives the listener the sense that they are being listened to and respected. When you look away or down it can make you seem anxious or even that you are dismissing what the other person is saying to you. Of course, on the other hand, if you continually stare someone in the eyes, this may also come across as aggressive and territorial - a common behavioral trait seen among animals. When you meet someone's eyes to the proper degree you will leave them feeling confident in your good intentions.

When speaking, make sure you modulate your voice and do not speak too quickly. Also, keep your voice in the lower register. This will increase your impression of calmness and capability. Also, a common assertiveness technique is to take two breaths before speaking, this established you as someone who should be listened to, as well as giving you time to formulate your thought without seeming to be rushed.

Another aspect of body language that may not come to mind so quickly is the idea of personal space. Passive-aggressive individuals may try to use their physical presence to intimidate or manipulate you. Be sure and set boundaries to establish your limits for this behavior. You may indeed move away from someone, or even simply request them to move back from your personal space.

Focus on "I"

Don't shy away from speaking about your needs. Saying "I think" or "I feel" can have a huge impact on your ability to communicate. Also, by starting the conversation by speaking of your own personal needs, you are indicating that what you are about to say allows them to have their own perception and feelings about the situation. Acknowledging that you are each coming to the situation or problem with your own perspective, makes sure that the facts of the matter remain separate from your own desires.

Remember, starting a statement with "You never..." only makes the other person angry and will shut down any fruitful conversation.

Don't be afraid to push

If you find that you have not had success in your first try at being assertive, don't be afraid to push. Escalating by using a firmer method of speaking, while being polite, is a very good method for asserting your position. Make sure, however, that you do not escalate the emotional level of the conversation. This may be difficult, especially if you are new to this sort of assertive method, however, it's crucial to learn to distinguish between these two states of expression and avoid aggression.

Practice what you are going to say

Work out what you want to say before you say it. This technique will allow you to anticipate negative reactions and be prepared to react without losing your cool. When you are practicing make sure to isolate the nexus of the problem or situation so you know exactly what you will be talking about. Second, consider how you feel about the situation and think about how you can talk about it without assigning blame or anger.

Listen actively

Pay attention. But even more than that, be an active listener. When there is a break in the conversation, repeat back to the listener some form of what they have just said to you. For example, something like "So, if I am understanding your point.....". Don't interrupt the speaker in mid-sentence but show them that you are not merely listening, show them that you are truly involved in what they have to say.

Don't get angry

This may be the hardest aspect of assertiveness to master, but anger is the red flag that will let you know that you might be becoming aggressive. Remember, that your audience doesn't have to agree with you, take a deep breath and take a step back if you need to. It is okay to request a temporary withdrawal from a conversation when you feel the tensions are too high. This is not a retreat, it is another way to control yourself, and determine an outcome that is more in line with your desires - not your dominant emotions.

And don't give up

A classic assertiveness technique is the Broken Record Technique. This is simply the insistence on persisting with your point of view, even when it is not being heard. This may lose effectiveness over time, however, in circumstances where you must deal with individuals who refuse to acknowledge your agency or boundaries, with passive-aggressive individuals this is often the only recourse. Do not get angry and do not abandon your resolve, simply repeat your resolution and disengage. When you do not provide others with the audience or drama that they seek, you will find that your sense of engagement with this drama will be slowly reduced as well. Over time, hopefully, the passive-aggressive individual will lose interest as well.

Keep it brief

In charged situations, you need to make sure that you don't lose the thread and start meandering. Say what you need to say and keep it concise and direct. It is very easy to get worked up when you start recalling or retelling perhaps unnecessary details or diversions. A person who is in control of their speech is automatically given the benefit of the doubt that they are worthy of respect and attention.

Keep it calm

Excitement is a great and positive emotion, but it can rub some the wrong way. It might even be confused for aggression. Confidence is also improved when a person remains calm, especially in a tense situation. Watch your body language here also, breathe and don't tense your muscles. When you radiate calm you will also help your colleagues to remain calm as well - calm can be infectious.

Turn the other cheek

This may be a counterintuitive technique, however, it can be a very helpful way to deal with passive-aggression and other kinds of individuals who thrive on conflict. This is a method called the "Fogging Technique". Essentially it is a way of accepting criticism by absorbing the negative comment and repeating it back at the person who criticized you. For example, if someone says "You made a stupid mistake." In response, you simply repeat the comment back "Yes, I did make a stupid mistake." The intent is not to indicate any particular agreement with the critical individual, rather it drains their malice away. You retain control of your emotional state and are not giving in to their attempt to manipulate you by making you feel bad or guilty, etc.

Be open

"In the interest of full disclosure..." no this is not a legal argument. It is simply an assertiveness technique allow you to be honest about contextual issues of which your audience may not be aware. Things such as "I have a headache today, maybe we should discuss this later..." can help your conversational partner to understand that you may have other issues that can affect your dialogue. This is also an amazing way to build trust with someone, as it allows them to feel compassion for the speaker. Be prepared to offer the same compassion yourself if you are approached in this way.

Keep your perspective healthy

It's really not enough to stress how much a healthy perspective can keep you in a good state - the kind of state that allows for assertiveness to flourish in a healthy way. All of the mindfulness exercises above should not be allowed to fall by the wayside, because it is easy to forget how much we have, and what we have to be thankful for. Take as much time as you can on a regular basis to remind yourself of the things in life which make you happy. This may sound trite and meaningless, but it is actually a powerful tool - it can act as a brake on rash behavior or it can help you go that extra mile when you need it.

Some philosophies even see this practice as reminding ourselves of the impermanence of life in order to ensure that what we have is cherished. The Stoics believed that this is the only way to build up fortitude and an attitude of acceptance. A healthy perspective is an inner core that can fuel the strength of purpose in times of adversity. And strength of purpose is just another word for assertiveness.

Use your time wisely

Your presence and attention is a gift, and you do not want it wasted, nor should you waste it yourself. Do not spend too much time in endeavors that are unworthy of your attention, and do not get distracted by disputes or actions that simply waste your time. Also, show respect to others by being timely and to the point in your interactions. Do not arrive late and ill-prepared for meetings. Respect your time and that of others.

The last word

Perhaps as a final word it is worth remembering why you have undertaken this step to build your assertiveness. To be able to create a situation in which you have learned to accept yourself for who you are and know yourself better is definitely a worthwhile endeavor. And it is also a benefit to be able to navigate your day to day life without falling under the sway of negative emotions and passive-aggressive opponents.

You have chosen to take control of those negatives that filled you with dread and anxiety, and decided to change the outcome of all the petty and dreadful interactions that make up your day. So take these lessons and head on out there, assert yourself and make your world a better place.