

**Leadership Tips**  
**Fall 2004**

**Communication is the #1 reason that teams fail. How effective are you as a communicator?**

Assertive communication is a key skill. We must learn to express constructive criticism in a positive way by using assertiveness. No one is consistently assertive. All of us use three basic styles described below depending on the situation and personal factors. The good news is that we can learn to use the assertive style more of the time and create more win-win situations.

**Nonassertive communication** is indirect. It communicates a message of avoidance. By being nonassertive, you allow others' messages to be more important than yours or override your opinion. Nonassertive communication helps create win-lose situations. A person behaving non-assertively often loses or at best can be disregarded while others win. Coaching can help you learn to influence more effectively and directly. What you may label as strategic avoidance can be misinterpreted by others as non-involved or unmotivated.

**Aggressive communication** is more complex. It can be either active or passive, direct or indirect, honest or dishonest. It always communicates an impression of superiority, disrespect, and often anger. Those who are aggressive put their wants, needs, and rights above others. They attempt to get their way by not allowing others a choice. Aggressive communication is usually inappropriate because it violates the rights of others. People behaving aggressively may win by making sure others lose, but in doing so, they set themselves up for retaliation. It is imperative to coach these individuals so that they aren't seen as bullies. If you observe this behavior pattern in someone, offer feedback and see if you can get him or her some coaching.

Scenario: One manager we worked with had a very direct style. He used to bark out orders to his staff and made them believe that everything was a top priority. With practice, he learned to calm himself by taking time out and using a more assertive approach. He now says things like, "Excuse me, is this a good time? We have an urgent client request. Here's the situation.... How long do you need to respond? The client sounded very stressed. Is an hour realistic to complete this?" His new approach is much more respectful and encourages staff to give input and to feel heard.

**Assertive communication** is active, direct, and honest. It communicates an impression of self-respect and respect for others. By communicating assertively, people are being respectful. It works toward win-win outcomes. An assertive person wins by influencing, listening, and negotiating so that others choose to cooperate willingly. This behavior leads to success without retaliation and encourages honest, open relationships. Assertive communication requires patient and reflective listening.

**Tip:** Try listening to someone you consider "difficult". Keep an open mind. Park your judgment and listen from a place of inquiry.

Warmly, Marilyn

**(Contents of this newsletter taken from, *Developing as a Professional*, by Dr. Marilyn Manning and Patricia Haddock. Please e-mail us if you would like an autographed copy \$13.95 + shipping. Also available through Amazon.com)**

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