



How to be Assertive at Work

Are you reluctant to speak up when you're being treated unfairly at work? You don't have to suffer in silence. You can learn how to assert yourself without jeopardizing your job.

"Assertiveness isn't complaining about what you don't like, it's requesting what you would like," says communication expert Sam Horn, author of *Tongue Fu: How to Deflect, Disarm and Defuse Any Verbal Conflict*.

Seek Balance

Many employees can't decide about when it's appropriate to speak up. They have mixed feelings. "Am I being selfish?" "Do I have a right to complain?"

"When people don't speak up, it's because they really don't have clarity about their right to speak up," states Mr. Horn.

"You can get clarity in making the decision about when it's appropriate to speak up by picturing an old-fashioned scale of justice with its two interconnected scales."

Because the scales are connected, when you put a weight on one it goes down and the other one rises. The success of any relationship depends on whether the scale is kept in balance.

Therefore, if managers think only of what they want and disregard the needs of employees, over time it will be an unequally weighted relationship. Likewise, if employees think only of their own wants and not what the company needs, the scale also will be unbalanced, and it won't be an effective relationship.

For example, a typical complaint of employees is being asked to work overtime. If it's a one-time request or an unusual occurrence, the scale will still be in balance, and it's appropriate for you to go along with the request and stay late, even if it's inconvenient, without speaking up about it.

If it's an ongoing occurrence, however, and you're continually being asked to work overtime, then the scale gets outweighed on the manager's side, and it's appropriate for you to speak up for yourself.

Avoid Aggressive Language

An aggressive person will attack using "You" language. "You're asking me to work late all the time and it's not fair." "You should be more considerate." The word "You" makes it attacking, aggressive language.

Use Assertive Language

Instead of complaining about the past and what you don't like, Mr. Horn suggests you use the following assertiveness strategies:

1. Use the word "I" instead of "You."
2. Focus on the future.
3. Request or suggest what you would like.

In one sentence state the facts, and then state what you want. Use the word "and" in your sentence as a bridge to what you want in the future, instead of the word "but", even though it may seem awkward to you. The word "but" is adversarial and invites an argument.

Here's an example of an assertive response to the overtime situation: "In the past couple of weeks I've been asked to work late several times, and I was happy to do that because I understood that we were short staffed, AND starting next week I will be coaching my daughter's little league [or other reason], and I will need to leave by 5:30."

"By being assertive, you're not attacking the person or selfishly asking to leave early," says Dr. Horn. "You're keeping your service to others and yourself in balance."

Always Speak up

Not speaking up and hoping the situation will get better is a losing proposition.

"If you're unhappy about a situation, and you haven't spoken up about it, you're equally responsible for it," says Dr. Horn. "By using assertiveness techniques, you can stand up for yourself without stepping on toes."





Secrets for Finding Happiness at Work

The type of work you do, your title or your salary has very little to do with whether you are happy at work.

Self-esteem and believing you deserve to be happy do.

“Self-esteem is the first key to finding happiness on the job,” says Denis Waitley, Ph.D., speaker and coauthor of several books on personal and career success, including *The Joy of Working*. “Self-esteem is a deep-down feeling in your soul of your own self-worth. Individuals who enjoy their work develop strong beliefs of self-worth and self-confidence regarding everything they do.”

Setting and achieving goals that are important to you are a necessary part of developing self-worth. “I advise people to chase their passions, not their pensions,” Dr. Waitley says. “People who are working for their salaries alone become slaves to their work. People who are involved in what they’re doing, who put their signature on everything they do, find satisfaction and happiness on the job.”

Wake up Happy

“Optimism is a learned attitude,” Dr. Waitley says. “If you start thinking positively early in the day, you’re more likely to maintain a positive stance as your day progresses.” To have a happier morning: Wake up to music instead of an alarm. Begin your day by saying something positive to your spouse, your children or the first person you see.

Positive Self-talk

“The role of positive self-dialogue in maintaining a positive attitude has been well documented,” Dr. Waitley says. “And it’s been found to be most effective if you put it in the present tense.”

Dr. Waitley begins his day with these affirmations: “This will be a good day.” “I’m going to take steps today that will move me closer to my goals.”

Here are other ideas from Dr. Waitley:

- Always greet your co-workers and your boss with a smile. “As simple as it sounds, a smile establishes your own self-worth and shares it with others,” Dr. Waitley says.
- Turn dilemmas into opportunities. To do so, examine your most pressing problems on the job. Then, to gain a better perspective, come up with solutions as if you were advising one of your best friends.
- Stay away from pity parties or gripe sessions. Joining in may feel like worker solidarity, but it’s actually climbing aboard a sinking ship. Instead, find happy and successful role models to pattern yourself after. Surround yourself with people who enjoy their work.
- View change as normal. Constantly monitor and evaluate your capacity to be flexible, open to new ideas and adaptable to change.
- Be persistent in visualizing your ultimate goals and dreams of achievement. Constantly practice positive self-talk and keep a positive attitude when times are tough and your perseverance needs bolstering.
- Don’t let trifles bother you. “If the effort it takes to change something far exceeds its worth, forget it and learn to live with it,” Dr. Waitley says. “Keep your mind free to concentrate on larger issues and problems.”
- Don’t make too much of your mistakes. They are part of being human. Concentrate on the lessons to be learned from even the most trying confrontations.
- Set your own standards rather than comparing yourself to others. Successful people run their own races.
- Appreciate each moment of your working day. If the work gets boring, use your powers of visualization to see yourself succeeding in your goals.
- Discover a sense of purpose. Knowing why you want what you want makes the difference between success and failure, happiness and unhappiness, joy and frustration.
- Expect the best from others; that includes your boss, co-workers and subordinates. “Be a leader in spreading encouragement and praise,” Dr. Waitley says. “You’ll be surprised how people will live up to what you expect when you share your positive expectations.”

