



Dare to assert your point of view

The stakes

There are times when we are better off keeping our opinions to ourselves to avoid creating needless conflict, hurting others, expressing criticism at an inopportune moment, etc. At other times, however, we may dissimulate what we really think simply because we don't want to displease or seem disagreeable. Yet, asserting a viewpoint which may not necessarily be welcome can be beneficial. It can help expose a problem, contribute valuable contradictory input to avoid hasty consensus, manage frustration, and fundamentally build interpersonal trust. So, how to improve your assertiveness?

Three areas of improvement

1

Develop your lucidity

We **do not always recognize** our reticence to speak up. It is very easy to find good excuses to stay silent—situational constraints, the other person's feelings, etc. The ability to **identify** your assertiveness issues is essential to make progress in this area.

- **Identify the fears** that dissuade you from expressing your views, as you can surmount these fears better if you understand them.
E.g. Fear of confrontation, of being less appreciated, of failure, of being less than perfect, of authority, etc.
- **Expose the excuses** you regularly evoke when you decide not to express something you have to say.
E.g. "There's no point in giving my opinion," "Some things are better left unsaid," etc.
- **Pay attention to your frustrations** when you keep your opinions to yourself. Analyzing the frequency and nature of these frustrations will help you detect potentially deeper issues.
E.g. Feeling "victimized" or not recognized for your just value, saying "yes" when you really want to say "no," not expressing a relevant opinion, etc.

2

Develop a repertoire of useful tactics

Research shows that **changing your behavior can transform your mindset**. With a few techniques, you can progressively adopt a more assertive stance and express your opinions calmly in difficult situations.

- Develop a **mindset conducive** to assertiveness.
E.g. Place yourself on equal footing, neither submissive nor dominant. Keep in mind that people can disagree and still be on good terms.
- **Carefully prepare for the conversation**: Review what makes you hesitate and distinguish subjective fears from objective risks. Prepare your arguments in advance to avoid being destabilized by the other person's reactions.
- **Express yourself clearly, but calmly**. If you feel the other person is being aggressive, defend yourself without upping the ante. However, if you feel that he or she is out of line, say so.
- **Adopt a self-assured attitude** to show the other person you feel confident.
E.g. Look him or her in the eye, keep your voice steady, etc.

3

Be ambitious, but advance step by step

Like any change of habit, you can't learn to assert your viewpoint in a single day. The most effective approach is to set a **long-term objective**, then advance **step by step** by setting an initial **attainable objective** that you can strive toward immediately!

- **Identify what you have to gain** from asserting your opinion to boost your motivation.
E.g. More influence over decisions, more recognition, fewer stresses and frustrations, more constructive relationships with others, more time (by learning to refuse some requests), etc.
- **Set an initial objective for yourself** that seems **reasonable** to attain: What upcoming opportunity to express your opinion seems within your reach?
E.g. You hesitate to underline the risks of a project, for fear the other person will think you are not fully supportive. Surmount this fear by imagining a positive reaction in which the person values your ability to analyze risks and sound the alarm.
- **Define a step-by-step action plan**: Create a short-, medium- and long-term timeframe with suitable objectives. Systematically review the progress of your efforts, emphasizing the benefits of your assertiveness. And persevere, because it is perfectly normal to backslide regularly!