

Be Assertive the Right Way

We've all had moments when we've failed to speak up for ourselves and said yes when we really wanted to say no. No matter how self-assured you are, most of us wonder if perhaps we couldn't be just a bit more assertive in certain situations. Luckily, assertiveness is a learned ability. It's learned through practice. This workbook will provide you with the knowledge, skills and confidence to become more assertive, taking control of your life in the process.

NAME



HOW TO USE THIS WORKBOOK

Use this self-study workbook to help you boost your assertiveness.

It's designed to support the assertiveness skills and strategies explored in the Be Assertive e-learning course.

You can work through the entire course, or, because we know how busy life can be, you have the option to go straight to particular skills you'd like to work on.

If you're not naturally assertive, it can take some effort. But being more assertive is not impossible.

If you don't speak up for yourself, refuse to make decisions, or let others dictate your actions – people start to view you as a pushover, or someone who lacks confidence – neither of these are advantageous, especially in the workplace.

Yes, it's easier for you to swallow your feelings, scream at someone or give them the silent treatment. But assertiveness is a much better strategy.

WHO SHOULD READ THIS?

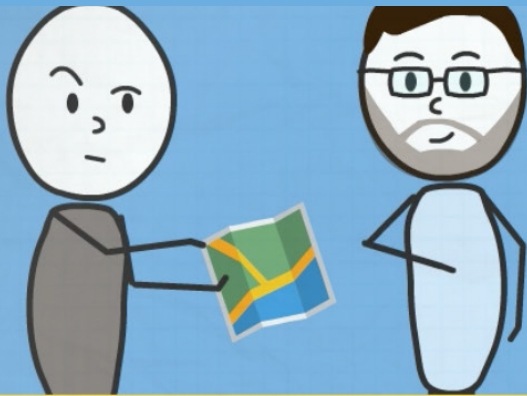
- Anyone tired of holding back in conversations.
- Anyone fed up of having people take advantage of them.
- Anyone with a quick temper who finds other people infuriating.
- Or anyone who'd like to learn a more about what assertiveness actually is.

KEY INSIGHTS

1. **What is assertiveness? If you want to learn how to be assertive - you first need to understand what it really is.**
2. **The four types of communication - which one do you use most?**
3. **Rights and responsibilities - being assertive really comes down to being able to stand up for your own or other people's rights in a calm, positive way.**
4. **Foundations for change - in reality, the barriers that prevent us from being more assertive are in our own heads.**
5. **"I" Messages - when you replace "You" messages with "I" messages you are able to provide feedback safely.**
6. **The Bonsai Principle - like a bonsai tree, when it comes to assertive communication, less can be more.**
7. **Non-assertive choice - an assertive person can decide not to act assertively.**
8. **Assertive check-up - how assertive are you?**
9. **How to say "No" - if you want to be successful you're going to have to get comfortable with saying "no" from time to time.**

WHAT IS ASSERTIVENESS?

If you want to learn how to be assertive – you first need to understand what it really is.



Human beings are social animals. We like to communicate with each other for different reasons in different situations. Assertiveness is simply a style of communication that can be used in all of these situations. But there are three other such styles we can use:

- **Passive style**
- **Aggressive style**
- **Passive-aggressive style**

Let's explore each type further. As they're explained, you may identify with a description – this can be really useful. It's likely you use one of the styles more than others. But remember, these are types of communication and don't define you as a person.

WE ALL USE EACH OF THE STYLES AT LEAST SOME OF THE TIME.

As you consider the different types, try to think of times you have used each one.

THE PASSIVE STYLE

Scenario 1 - Imagine you are in a restaurant and you order a steak, well-done. When it arrives it is clearly rare – the waiter asks if everything is to your liking and you say “yes, the steak is fine”.

This is passive communication and is designed to avoid conflict at all costs.

Do you find yourself giving in to unreasonable demands?

Or going along with the crowd?

If you do, you could be giving control of your life to other people.

Of course some situations dictate the need to hand the lead to others, like going mountain climbing for the first time – we'd expect the expert to give us instructions. In these kinds of situations it's ok to choose a less assertive style, but generally, passive communication leads to the build-up of resentment and trains other people to treat you like a doormat.

See if you recognise any of these passive beliefs or emotions – if you do, they could be holding you back:

1. "Other people are more important than I am"
2. "They can do things effectively. I can't."
3. You have a fear of being rejected if you don't do everything others want.
4. You resent all the demands being made on you.

Can you think of a time when you displayed passive behaviour? Write down the scenario and importantly, how it made you feel:

(e.g. One of my employees turned up late for work again yesterday, but rather than address the issue, I decided to let it go, as he can get angry when I talk to him about it – it made me feel helpless as a manager and I think the rest of the team lost respect because of how I handled the situation).

SCENARIO (BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF WHAT HAPPENED)

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HOW DID IT MAKE YOU FEEL?

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THE AGGRESSIVE STYLE

Scenario 2 – Ok, so this time when the waiter brings you the undercooked steak you explode with rage! You yell at him about the inadequacies of misremembering the order and demand a free meal because of the horrible and incompetent service.

This is aggressive communication, and is the flip side of passive communication. Instead of submitting to others, we try to get others to submit to us – we must win at any cost - Usually, after the verbal explosions there are:

- Hurt feelings
- Enemies are made
- Problems resurface in the future

The aggressive style does have its advantages – intimidating people can get things done, and if others fear you they are likely to make less demands – but eventually people will:

- Resent you
- Show little loyalty
- Make fewer pleasant invitations

IF YOU RECOGNISE YOURSELF AS USING THE AGGRESSIVE STYLE OFTEN, TAKE SOME TIME TO REFLECT WHERE IT DEVELOPED?

For example:

Did you have an aggressive parent who acted as a role model for you?

Do you have low self-esteem? - “I can’t handle this situation so I better intimidate the other person”.

Did you have early experiences of obtaining what you want through aggression?

Or do you just fail to see the negative consequences of aggression? “She always gets upset when I talk to her – she’s so emotional”.

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Can you think of a time when you displayed aggressive behaviour? Write down the scenario and importantly, how it made you and the other person feel:

SCENARIO (BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF WHAT HAPPENED)

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HOW DID IT MAKE YOU FEEL?

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HOW DO YOU THINK IT MADE THE OTHER PERSON FEEL?

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REMEMBER – AGGRESSIVE COMMUNICATION RARELY SOLVES PROBLEMS IN THE LONG TERM

THE PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE STYLE

Scenario 3 - Your boss has asked you for a report by noon tomorrow, despite the fact you are already overloaded with work. Instead of shouting at her (which would be aggressive) or staying late to finish the work (which is passive) – you simply decide to forget to do the report. You get your way, frustrate the boss, and deny any responsibility.

This is a combination of both aggressive and passive communication styles. The problem with this style is eventually others start to see you as unreliable, irresponsible or inconsiderate.

Your self-esteem drops, you'll be anxious, and shame and guilt can build up from constantly letting others down.

Do you recognise yourself as passive-aggressive? See if any of these examples describe how you act.

Do you ever undermine co-workers by talking about them behind their back?

Do you let people down, even if you promised to do something?

Are you always late for appointments with an excuse in hand?

Have you ever done a household chore so badly that someone else takes over?

These are all signs of passive-aggression and you should consider why you act in this way given how damaging it can be.

Can you think of a time when you displayed passive-aggressive behaviour? Write down the scenario and, importantly, how it made you feel:

SCENARIO (BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF WHAT HAPPENED)

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HOW DID IT MAKE YOU FEEL?

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ASSERTIVE STYLE

Scenario 4 - Let's go back to our example of the undercooked steak. An assertive response would be to say "I'm afraid my steak is undercooked. I asked for it well-done and there is too much pink for me. I know you're busy but would you please take it back and have the chef cook it for a bit longer?"

The best way to communicate with others is by using assertive communication. Here the **problem is stated** and a **solution is requested**.

Appropriately assertive people stand up for themselves in a respectful manner that does not purposely or intentionally escalate situations.

It's often defined as standing up for you own rights in such a way that you don't violate another person's rights (expressing your needs, wants, opinions, feelings and beliefs in direct, honest and appropriate ways).

It's not an easy technique to master and takes practice - but the next sections of the workbook are designed to provide you with practical skills and exercises you can work on to improve your own assertiveness.

TAKEAWAY

ADMITTING THAT YOU MIGHT BE PASSIVE OR TOO AGGRESSIVE IS TOUGH - BUT IT IS THE FIRST STEP IN BECOMING MORE ASSERTIVE.

WHEN SOMEONE IS ASSERTIVE, THEY APPEAR AND SOUND CONFIDENT - PEOPLE LISTEN TO THEIR OPINIONS.

IF YOU ARE NOT NATURALLY ASSERTIVE, IT CAN TAKE SOME EFFORT. BUT BEING MORE ASSERTIVE IS NOT IMPOSSIBLE.

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KNOW YOUR RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Before we look at some practical skills, we first need to take a quick look at your rights and responsibilities.

BEING ASSERTIVE REALLY COMES DOWN TO BEING ABLE TO STAND UP FOR YOUR OWN OR OTHER PEOPLE'S RIGHTS IN A CALM, POSITIVE WAY.

You must recognise your rights and stand up for them. If you do not, other people define your role for you and stop you being yourself.

Take some time to have a look at the rights and responsibilities table – it's easy to dismiss these statements and move on, but if you really want to improve your assertiveness, you need to read each one and reflect on your behaviour – is this how you act? Is there room for improvement?

RIGHTS	RESPONSIBILITIES
I have the right to be treated with dignity and respect.	I have the responsibility to treat others with the same dignity and respect I desire from them.
I have the right to decide what is best for me.	I have the responsibility to allow others to decide what is best for them.
I have the right to change my mind.	I have the responsibility to allow others to change their minds.
I have the right to express my own feelings and opinions.	I have the responsibility to express those feelings and opinions in a way that does not insult or put others down.
I have the right to ask for what I want and need.	I have the responsibility to allow others the right to refuse my request even though I might not like being refused.
I have the right to say "NO" without feeling guilty.	I have the responsibility to allow others the right to say "no".
I have the right to be listened to and taken seriously.	I have the responsibility to listen to others and take them seriously.
I have the right to make mistakes.	I have the responsibility to accept the consequences of those mistakes.
I have the right to all of my human weaknesses and limitations without guilt or shame.	I have the responsibility to allow others their weaknesses without ridiculing or resenting them.

LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS FOR CHANGE

In reality, the barriers that prevent us from being more assertive are in our own heads.

Before we move onto some new skills and strategies you can try out – there are a few last steps to consider.

Take a look at some of the common barriers to change people experience and put a tick next to the statement you most relate to:

“I’M NOT THE ASSERTIVE TYPE”

“I’VE TRIED BEING ASSERTIVE AND IT MADE ME FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE”

“WHAT IF I MAKE MISTAKES AND PEOPLE THINK I’M AGGRESSIVE?”

“I WOULDN’T KNOW WHERE TO START”

Now you’ve identified your main barrier – let’s bust that barrier!! Find the barrier below and discover why you shouldn’t let it hold you back.

“I’M NOT THE ASSERTIVE TYPE”

You might think that some people have assertiveness and others don’t – like athleticism or intelligence.

Whilst it is true that not everyone is born assertive – assertiveness is a skill, not a personality type. And like most skills, it can be learned.

Think of someone saying “I can’t speak other languages, I’m just not the type”. Yes, they’ve never learned, but they could surely learn another language if they wanted to badly enough.

Assertiveness is a skill – not a personality type.

“I’VE TRIED BEING ASSERTIVE AND IT MADE ME FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE”

This is normal – when you first start to practice any skill it can feel awkward. Think of the first time you tried a new language out on holiday – it feels unnatural – this can stop some people progressing – but if you carry on, gradually the language becomes more familiar, you get more comfortable, it becomes second nature.

Assertiveness is the same – part of the challenge is getting through the early, awkward phase.

“WHAT IF I MAKE MISTAKES AND PEOPLE THINK I’M AGGRESSIVE?”

You’re going to make mistakes – it’s natural when learning a new skill. Just as you would do when speaking a new language for the first time, you can’t be expected to get it right straight from the off. So you need to give yourself permission to make mistakes.

When learning new assertiveness skills – you need to get comfortable with risk taking. When you make a mistake it’s easy to get stressed about it – but stress often leads to an aggressive fight response or a passive flight response.

So ask yourself this – when you make a mistake (which you will) how can you turn it into an opportunity to improve?

“I WOULDN’T KNOW WHERE TO START”

Just like learning a language, you wouldn’t throw yourself in the deep end. You’d start small, and work on particular phrases that are most useful to you.

Assertiveness skills are no different. Take your time and practice the basics first.

You don’t need to be super assertive from day one. Gradually introduce the assertiveness skills you learn into safe or easy situations.

WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO DIFFERENTLY TO ‘BUST YOUR BARRIER’ TO CHANGE?

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THE BE-ASSERTIVE WORKOUT

Are you tired of holding back in conversations?

Fed up of people taking advantage of you?

Or perhaps you find it difficult to remain composed when someone frustrates you?

Whatever your reason for wanting to become more assertive, in this be-assertive workout section you can explore basic skills and strategies to improve your assertiveness. For them to work you must approach them with an open mind and be ready to practice.

- 1. "I" Messages**
- 2. The Bonsai Principle**
- 3. The Non-Assertive Choice**
- 4. Assertive Check-Up**
- 5. How to say "NO"**

NUMBER 1 – "I" MESSAGES

We've all done it. Lost our cool in the heat of the moment and said something that we later regretted. The strategy to overcome this is to use "I" messages.

When we break it down – the "I" message is made up of 3 parts:

1. Describing the behaviour.
2. Describing the feeling the behaviour creates.
3. The effect that the behaviour has.

Let us imagine you are dealing with a challenging employee who consistently turns up late for meetings.

You could ignore the behaviour which would be passive.

Or you could shout, "Don't you dare be late for one of my meetings again." - clearly aggressive.

Or a much better strategy is to construct an "I" Message statement, for example:

“WHEN YOU COME TO MY MEETINGS LATE I FEEL VERY FRUSTRATED BECAUSE I HAVE TO REPEAT INFORMATION THE REST OF THE GROUP HAVE ALREADY HEARD.”

Let's break down the statement, to see how all the bases were covered:

1. “When you come to my meetings late” – identified the behaviour.
2. “I feel frustrated” – conveyed your feelings.
3. “I have to repeat information” explained the effect.

This is much more productive and assertive than simply ignoring the problem or just expressing your anger or frustration.

An effective “I” message doesn't contain a “you” reference in it.

A “you” message would be something like “you are always late”. As soon as the other person hears the ‘you’, they immediately feel like they are under attack.

When we replace “You” messages with “I” messages we're able to provide feedback safely, as they avoid putdowns, judgement or assigning blame.

ASSERTIVE CHALLENGE

Now you're aware of “You” statements you'll notice how frequently they're used. Write down any “You” statements you hear being used by yourself or others and work on rephrasing them into “I” messages you can use.

“You” Message (e.g. you don't appreciate me)

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Transform it into an “I” message (e.g. when you don’t listen to me, it really hurts my feelings and I get frustrated with you)

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THE BONSAI PRINCIPLE

Ok, so I’m guessing your wondering what a bonsai tree can have in common with assertion right?

Well as we all know, Bonsai is a Japanese art form using miniature trees grown in containers. The trees need to be trimmed down and shaped by the grower. There is a beauty and simplicity to bonsai.

THE SAME APPLIES TO ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION.

It can be really tempting to over-explain yourself when dealing with an issue.

For example - “You missed the report deadline yet again, I really needed you to submit it on time and as always you let me down, again, you’re so frustrating and you’ll never change. You’ve basically ruined my life”.

Sound a bit over the top?

Long explanations are usually a bad idea. The other person is likely to switch off or challenge your reasons.

LIKE A BONSAI TREE - IN ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION - LESS CAN BE MORE.

When we clip our statements to be more precise, we can communicate exactly what it is that’s bothering us – for example, take our earlier statement. If we trim the comment using the bonsai principle we might have said:

“I wish you had called to let me know the report was going to be late”.

TAKEAWAY

NEXT TIME YOU’RE TEMPTED TO GO ON A LONG RANT – THINK OF A BONSAI TREE AND TRIM DOWN TO THE BASICS.

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ASSERTIVE CHALLENGE

Think of a situation that really bothered you, when someone really got to you in work or in your home life. Now write down what you'd want to say to that person to make them change:

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Now imagine your words as a bonsai tree, you need to trim away all the unnecessary filler, emotions and vague comments.

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Take your time with this process, it's not easy to master. Over time, you'll find you'll become more precise and less emotional when delivering your assertions.

NON-ASSERTIVE CHOICE

Given everything we've covered so far, it might seem odd to consider when not to be assertive. But here's the thing – an assertive person can decide not to act assertively.

KNOWING HOW TO BE ASSERTIVE DOESN'T MEAN YOU HAVE TO BE ASSERTIVE ALL OF THE TIME.

This is different to being passive as you recognise it's a choice.

You choose not to be assertive and deal with the consequences of your non-assertiveness.

For example, if you feel you're dealing with someone who is dangerous and could harm you – it might be the safest option to move away.

TAKEAWAY

SOME SITUATIONS REQUIRE MORE ASSERTIVENESS THAN OTHERS SO REMEMBER THAT BEING ASSERTIVE IS A CHOICE YOU MAKE. BUT BE CAREFUL NOT TO DRESS UP BEING PASSIVE AS A NON-ASSERTIVE CHOICE.

In what other situations might you decide to be non-assertive? List 5 below:
(e.g. I don't really feel that strongly about the issue being discussed)

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- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

ASSERTIVE CHECK UP

By now you're probably wondering just how assertive you already are – this checklist can help.

Take some time to write down your answers to the following questions:

1. When you differ with someone you respect, are you able to speak up and share your own opinions?

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2. Are you able to refuse unreasonable requests made by friends or co-workers?

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3. Do you readily accept positive criticism?

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4. Are you someone who can ask for help if you're struggling?

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5. Do you have confidence in your own judgement?

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6. If someone else has a better solution, do you accept it easily?

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7. Are you honest when expressing your thoughts and feelings in a group setting?

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Now review the statements and your answers. How many times did you answer yes?

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A yes answer indicates an assertive response. Chances are, you probably have a hard time with one or two of the statements – decide which statements give you the most trouble.

ASSERTIVE CHALLENGE

Write down the statement you have the most trouble with. Really reflect on why you struggle in this situation. Try to think about how you could be more assertive in that particular situation – and try it out in a safe environment.

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HOW TO SAY “NO”

Are you regularly saying no?

In our home and working lives we're presented with more demands than we can ever meet and still be effective. And yet, for many, saying no is really hard, no matter how unreasonable the request may be.

If you want to be successful you're going to have to get comfortable with saying “no” from time to time.

Saying no shouldn't be seen as being rude; it's being strategic. Declining in a smart way shows your assertiveness as a leader. Successful people recognise that their time is their most valuable commodity so here are some things to consider next time you want to say no to someone:

The Direct No - When someone asks you to do something that you don't want to do, just say 'no'. The aim is to say no without apologising. Don't apologise unnecessarily - remember your rights, you have the right to say no without feeling guilty. So statements like “I'm so sorry but I just can't do it” should be wiped from your vocabulary.

Avoid excuses - Ok, so when you're asked to do something you don't want to do, it can be really tempting to make up an excuse - come on we've all done it. But what typically happens? The person offers a way round our excuse and we end up saying yes. Avoid excuses and be honest that you're choosing not to do it.

Get your body language right - Make sure your nonverbal gestures mirror your verbal messages. Shake your head when saying “no.” Often people unknowingly nod their heads and smile when they are attempting to decline or refuse.

Use silence - If the person persists even after you have repeated your NO several times, use silence, or change the topic of conversation. You also have a right to end the conversation.

Accept the consequences - You have a right to say no and others have the right not to like it. They may express their disapproval by distancing from you or excluding you from activities. On a personal level, you will have to accept the consequences. On a professional level, you may have to be ready to address the conflict if their behaviour negatively impacts your ability to successfully perform your job.

ASSERTIVE CHALLENGE

Think of a person who always asks you to do things you don't want to. The pushier the person is, the better.

Now stand in front of a mirror and practice saying no assertively.

Rehearse what you would say in the situation and how you'll remain assertive.

Repeat the challenge with 3 or 4 different situations.

As with any new behavioural change, start small. Select individuals who are liable to provide a good chance of success and minimal negative consequences if you get a bad reaction.

(Write down how you might respond to the unreasonable request next time - remember, assertiveness is not aggression and you have the RIGHT to say no)

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FINAL SUMMARY

You have reached the end of the workbook and hopefully have a much better understanding of what assertiveness is and how you can improve the skill.

Just in case you missed anything, let's recap the main insights:

- Remember – assertiveness is not aggression.
- Assertiveness is simply a style of communication.
- Admitting that you might be passive or too aggressive is tough – but it's the first step to becoming more assertive.
- Appropriately assertive people stand up for themselves in a respectful manner that does not purposely or intentionally escalate situations.
- Being assertive really comes down to being able to stand up for your own or other people's rights in a calm, positive way.
- And finally, the barriers that prevent us from being more assertive are in our own heads.

Of course – simply completing an assertiveness workbook will not magically transform you into an assertive person. We've given you some information on what assertiveness is as well as some practical steps and strategies you can practice and integrate into your own life.

But becoming a more assertive person really is in your own hands – how much do you want it?

Hopefully by now you can see that being assertive comes with a lot of perks. Like any new skill, learning to be more assertive takes time and practice, but it's definitely worth the effort.

**THANKS FOR TAKING THE COURSE AND GOOD LUCK
DISCOVERING HOW ASSERTIVE YOU CAN BE.**

ACTION PLAN

KEY SKILLS (WHAT ARE THE KEY SKILLS YOU HAVE LEARNT DURING THIS COURSE)

WHAT WILL YOU DO DIFFERENTLY IN THE WORKPLACE?

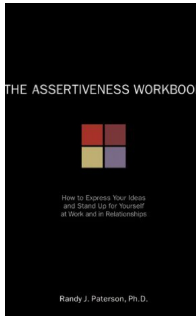
WHAT OBSTACLES MIGHT GET IN THE WAY OF YOU ACHIEVING THIS?

WHAT, OR WHO MAY HELP YOU OVERCOME THESE BARRIERS?



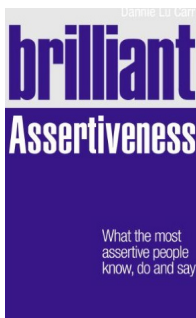
SUGGESTED READING

For those wanting to further research assertion there are some great reads available that the course authors would recommend:



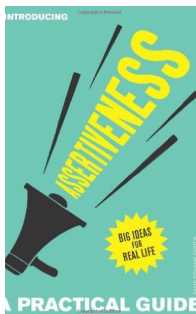
THE ASSERTIVENESS WORKBOOK

Randy J. Paterson



BRILLIANT ASSERTIVENESS

Danni Lu Carr



INTRODUCING ASSERTIVENESS

David Bonham-Carter

This workbook was produced by:

