ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION
Our communication skills and style are essential to positive and productive relations at work or at home. Effective communication requires us to be clear about our thoughts and desires, and also to be responsive to those of others. Assertive communicators express positive and negative ideas and feelings in transparent, welcoming and direct ways – stating their needs clearly and without defensiveness. Participants in this workshop will build an awareness of their communication patterns and learn to deal confidently with people around them. This workshop is fun, meaningful and highly effective for improving communication awareness and skills.

*This training manual and workshop was developed by Wendy Loewen, Trainer with the ACHIEVE Centre for Leadership & Workplace Performance.*

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ACHIEVE is a leading provider of professional development training throughout North America. Our primary focus is on providing training and services related to leadership development and organizational performance for the general public, businesses, and organizations throughout North America.

Contact
Phone: 204.452.0180
Email: info@achievecentre.com
Web: www.achievecentre.com
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Communication Overview
Communication is the process by which information, emotions, thoughts and ideas are exchanged. There are many factors to consider when analyzing communication. Being aware of the influence of these factors helps us to be better communicators. When evaluating communication the following statements are important to keep in mind:

- Culture influences communication expectations.
- Effective communication is an essential work skill.
- We are always communicating.
- Communication is goal-oriented.
- Communication varies in complexity level.

Effective Communication
Skilled communicators exhibit the following qualities:

- They listen well to others.
- They actively think about messages given and received.
- They are perceived as being impartial.
- They ask relevant questions.
- They accept silence and are comfortable with it.
- ____________________________
- ____________________________
- ____________________________
- ____________________________
- ____________________________
- ____________________________

Obstacles to Communication

Skilled communicators understand the factors that may impede communication exchanges and work to minimize the effect of the following obstacles:
**Assumptiveness Test**

Using the scale below, indicate how the following statements reflect your actions and feelings when communicating in a work context.

5 = Very often; 4 = Often; 3 = Sometimes; 2 = Occasionally; 1 = Seldom; 0 = Rarely

___ 1. I am able to recognize and express my point of view clearly.
___ 2. I like to control the conversation.
___ 3. I shy away from difficult conversations.
___ 4. I mentally prepare and plan for the difficult conversations I will have.
___ 5. I sometimes make unreasonable demands on others.
___ 6. I have difficulty saying no even when I really don’t want to say yes.
___ 7. I am able to offer critiques without being cruel.
___ 8. I sometimes say something abruptly before thinking.
___ 9. I will stay quiet, rather than risk offending someone.
___ 10. I am very conscious of others’ opinions but will give mine, too.
___ 11. I notice and will take advantage of people’s weaknesses.
___ 12. I have difficulty making requests of others.
___ 13. I am able to control my inner frustrations and speak appropriately.
___ 14. I engage with people when I want to—timing doesn’t matter.
___ 15. I stay away from topics that are controversial.
___ 16. When necessary, I can tactfully handle and approach people who are rude and abrasive.
___ 17. I won’t back down when I know I’m right, even if the matter is trivial.
___ 18. I sometimes feel that people take advantage of me.
___ 19. I want other points of view to be heard, but I also expect my view to be respected.
___ 20. I will push people around if I can get away with it.
___ 21. I prefer to keep my opinions to myself.
### Scoring

Write the number you wrote for each question on the corresponding blank below. Then total the columns. The highest score is your most common form of communicating.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASSERTIVE</th>
<th>AGGRESSIVE</th>
<th>PASSIVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>4</td>
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Aggressive Communicators

Characteristics of Aggressive Communicators

- These communicators express their needs, ideas and feelings in a clear but self-focused way.
- Their goal is to gain control of situations and maintain a position of power.
- They often dismiss the ideas of others as invalid or even stupid.
- This style of communication conveys a readiness to fight in order to meet their own goals.
- They use imposing body language, sustained eye contact and a loud tone of voice.

Beliefs that Support Aggressive Communicators

- If I don’t express myself, nothing will get done.
- Nice guys finish last!
- My anger is justified.
- I am only being honest.
- I need to maintain control.
- I have goals to meet and I know how to accomplish them.

Points to Help Aggressive Communicators

1. Remember, you can reach your goals without being aggressive.
2. Let go of the fear that no one will listen to you if you are not aggressive.
3. Remind yourself that just because others have different viewpoints than you do, does not mean that they do not value yours.
4. Do not interrupt when others are speaking.
5. Ask questions to make sure you understand the other person before you state your interests.

Aggressive communication is reactionary and demanding.
PASSIVE COMMUNICATORS

Characteristics of Passive Communicators

• They often keep quiet and apologize when they express themselves.
• This style communicates to others that they are submissive and will allow others to dictate what goals will be accomplished.
• They use small, retreating body language, avoid eye contact, and often speak softly.
• Their goals are to avoid conflict and give control to others.
• These communicators find it difficult to express their needs, wants, feelings or ideas.

Beliefs that Support Passive Communicators

• We need to be careful to not make demands of others.
• My opinion is not important, and other people obviously know more about the topic at hand.
• If others ask me to do something in a particular way, it must be valid.
• It is selfish to think of your own needs before the needs of others.
• Being accepted is very important, and I do not want to offend others and risk rejection.

Points to Help Passive Communicators

1. Remember, your feelings and ideas are worthy of being heard.
2. Know that people who think differently than you do want to hear your thoughts.
3. Ask questions of others to build rapport and demonstrate interest.
4. Give yourself the freedom to make mistakes.
5. Speak up.

*A note about passive-aggressive behaviour
This communication style has elements of both the passive communicator and the aggressive communicator. Passive-aggressive communicators are passive in that they do not transparently communicate their goals. At the same time, they are aggressive in that they maintain control of the situation and meet their goals in a self-focused manner.
Characteristics of Assertive Communicators

- Assertive communicators believe in their ability to express ideas and opinions openly and honestly without denying the rights of others.
- These communicators express their needs, ideas and feelings clearly and respectfully.
- They understand that the goal of communication is to express their ideas and to listen to those of others.
- They do not assume that their perspective is the only correct one.
- This style communicates that both parties in dialogue are important and that working towards a goal requires both parties to participate.
- Their body language is relaxed and casual, their eye contact is natural and inviting, and their voice is appropriate to the situation.

Beliefs that Support Assertive Communicators

- I am responsible for my choices and my behaviour.
- I will judge my own actions. The appraisal of others is up to my discretion to accept or refuse.
- Anyone can ask anything of me they like.
- Anyone can change his or her mind—including me.
- I can speak up when I feel compelled.
- Being straightforward is usually best.

Assertive communication is intentional, goal-directed and ethical.
SELF-REFLECTION

Aggressive Response
I was aggressive in this situation:

What I said:

What I did:

How it turned out:

Passive Response
I was passive in this situation:

What I said:

What I did:

How it turned out:

Assertive Response
I was assertive in this situation:

What I said:

What I did:

How it turned out:
**Self-Reflection**

Think of three situations in which you would like to be more assertive:

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

I tend to become aggressive when: _________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

I tend to become passive when: ____________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

The two people I find it most difficult to be assertive with are: _______________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Why do you think you find it difficult to be assertive with these individuals?
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

One area in which I feel confident about my ability to be assertive is:
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
THE IMPORTANCE OF BODY LANGUAGE

Two Channels of Communication
When verbal and non-verbal communication are not aligned, the nonverbal channel communicates most strongly. Our aim is for the two channels of communication to match. Our nonverbal communication includes our posture, gestures and movements.

Body Language
Body language plays a crucial role in communicating assertively. As much as possible, we want all facets of communication to align and convey the same message.

Most assertive training focuses on the verbal channel of communication. In order to be most effective we must also utilize our nonverbal communication skills to assert ourselves.

1. Body language is not a precise science and it is important to remember that a particular gesture can have more than one meaning.

2. You are an expert already. We all read body language and make assumptions about what we are seeing.

3. You can use your body language to foster an assertive appearance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Passive Body Language</th>
<th>Aggressive Body Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Chewing on objects</td>
<td>• Puffed cheeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Self-soothing</td>
<td>• Clenched teeth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Folded arms</td>
<td>• Clenched fists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Hunched shoulders</td>
<td>• Waving finger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Jutting out jaw</td>
<td>• Arm chops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Avoiding eye contact</td>
<td>• Accelerated blink rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Small stance</td>
<td>• Large stance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Assertive body language communicates ease and comfort. Movements are smooth and fluid. Even when speaking passionately, the body is still under control. The body is aligned and solid in placement, and at the same time demonstrates an openness that is nonthreatening. Assertive body language includes the following:

- **Horizontal arms**
- **Vertical alignment**
- **Squaring off**
- **Leveling height**
- **Comfortable eye contact**

**Fostering Assertive Body Language:**

Once you are aware of assertive body language you can practice it with two simple techniques.

1. You can change your body language by changing the messages you give yourself. Negative messages cause people to exhibit less effective non-verbal communication. Give yourself messages that affirm your confidence, such as “I can manage this situation.”

2. Focus on a skill you want to improve and give yourself helpful mental reminders, such as “look at the person I am talking to.” Continue working on the skill until you are comfortable, and then begin working on another skill.
**Areas of Assertive Communication**

There are many arenas in which to practice assertive communication. Each one provides a unique opportunity to enhance our development as healthy communicators.

Remember:

- Assertion is about clear communication.
- Assertion is behaving and speaking in ways that maintain our integrity and that of others.
- Assertion is about learning from the process and being willing to change.
- Assertion is growing as a communicator.
OFFERING YOUR OPINION

Variety is the norm in relationships. We all believe, think and perceive the world around us in different ways. Assertive individuals know that expressing their opinions is valid and healthy. It is about living in our own skin, being comfortable with who we are and being able to share ourselves with others.

Specific Guidelines for Offering an Opinion

- **Ownership**
  Always speak as an expert about yourself. If you are unsure, verbalize your lack of certainty clearly. Use words that demonstrate that you “own” your opinion and that it is your personal position that is being expressed. Remember, you need not justify your opinion.

- **Clarity**
  Be clear that you are expressing an *opinion*. Know the difference between stating a fact and offering an opinion. We may feel passionately about our preferences but we need to realistically appraise an opinion as a position on which reasonable people may differ.

- **Don’t Apologize**
  An apology is not warranted when giving an opinion. We say “sorry” when we have overstepped boundaries, behaved poorly or acted in a way that was hurtful, or to express empathy for another person—not when we offer an opinion.

- **Don’t Intimidate**
  We do not need to convince others that our opinion is the best or right opinion. Our confidence should come from knowing what we think and believe even when it differs from those around us.

- **Enjoy**
  Trust that by expressing your opinion you encourage others to do the same. Invite others to be free with their opinions. You will be able to relax and enjoy the conversation if you are genuinely interested in what others have to say and, at the same time, confident in what you have to say.
**Skill Development: Offering Your Opinion and Assertive Body Language**

**Skill Development Practice Instructions:**
1. Choose a statement from the “Opinion Statements” list below.
2. Write down your opinion on the lines provided.
3. One partner plays the role of the “listener” and the other of the “speaker”.
4. Repeat with another statement, switching who is listener and who is speaker.

**Opinion Statements:**
Should the blood alcohol level tolerance in drivers be zero?
Should we have harsher jail sentences for young offenders?
Is sex education in school a good thing?
Are the Olympics corrupt?

---

**Listener**
- Face your partner and make use of assertive body language.
- Listen—do not speak until your partner is finished speaking.
- Restate the speaker’s opinion.
- State your own opinion.

**Speaker**
- Face your partner and make use of assertive body language.
- Present your opinion.
- Use personal language.
  - “I think...” “In my opinion...” “My thoughts are...”

**Assertive Body Language Checklist**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do</th>
<th>Don’t</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stand or sit tall</td>
<td>Slouch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distribute weight evenly through body</td>
<td>Cross legs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep hands visible</td>
<td>Press weight into one hip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use calm gestures</td>
<td>Hold hands on hips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain natural eye contact</td>
<td>Fidget</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speak in a voice fitting the situation</td>
<td>Look down or glare at the person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate appropriate emotion</td>
<td>Speak too loud or too softly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
MITIGATED SPEECH AND GIVING DIRECTIONS

Mitigated speech refers to the packaging in which a message is delivered. It is helpful to understand the levels of mitigation when giving directions. We all make use of mitigated speech, either consciously or unconsciously. Effective communicators are aware of the nuances in relationships as well as the context of the communication and are adept at using all levels of mitigated speech.

Which level or levels do you tend to make use of the most?

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

In which situations or relationships could you increase your effectiveness by making use of another level of communication? Name the situation or context and the level of communication that may be helpful.

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________
THE ASSERTIVE “NO”

Being responsible for yourself means you need to be able to say “no”. If you rarely say no, it means others are charting your course in life.

Strategies to Saying No

Formulate your position before you speak. Know what you are or are not willing to do before you respond. If you are unsure, state that you need some time to think about the request.

Do not feel compelled to explain or rationalize your “no”. Often we contrive reasons why we cannot comply with a request. Rather, we should feel comfortable with our own decisions and verbalize them as choices, not reasons or excuses.

Be your own advocate. Often people make decisions and then need others to comply in order to make the decision a reality. Remember that just because someone has personally committed to a project or idea, you are not compelled to do so, regardless of how worthy the project may seem.

Repeat, repeat, repeat. Be prepared to state your “no” several times before it is heard and accepted. You do not need to rephrase your “no” each time; simply restating that you are not able to help out is sufficient.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>“I am not able to do that…”</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I am not taking on any more commitments…”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No &amp; Validation (and reason – if you choose)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• “I can see you are in a difficult position…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “Sounds like this is important to you..”</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>“I am just not able to do that…”</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I am not taking on any more commitments…”</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
**SKILL DEVELOPMENT: THE ASSERTIVE “NO”**

**Skill Development Practice Instructions:**

1. Brainstorm a list of unreasonable requests that you wish you could say “no” to at work or at home. Record your responses on the lines below.
2. Select one unreasonable request from your brainstormed list.
3. Write down a statement you could use to say no to your chosen request.
4. Write down one statement you could use in validation of the requester.
5. Decide who will play the role of *requester* and who will play the role of *responder*, and follow the instructions at the bottom of the page.

List of unreasonable requests:
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

“No” statement you could use in response to one of the above unreasonable requests:
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Validation statement you could use in conjunction with the above “no” statement:
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

**Requester**
- Make the unreasonable request. Be very firm in your asking. Use guilt, shame or intimidating statements to try and get your way—but don’t be over the top.
- Make the request two more times after the responder has said “no.”

**Responser**
- Use the *Repeat, Repeat, Repeat* framework to say “no.”
**Making Requests**

We often need to ask people to support us, to lend a hand and to work alongside us. When we make requests of others, we need to allow the space for either a “yes” or “no” answer.

**Framework for Making Requests (DESO)**

**Describe**
Be able to state what is happening. Be clear, succinct and to the point.
“We have a lot to do before the supervisor arrives this morning.”

**Express the Impact**
State your feelings on the situation. Verbalize your emotions—don’t act them out.
“I am feeling worried that we won’t be ready on time.”

**Specify**
Be very clear about the exact request you are making. Be positive with the words you choose. Zone in on desired behaviours.
“Could you reorganize the Cooper file and print a copy of last month’s statement?”

**Outcomes**
State your goals, objectives and hopes. This may include your feelings about the situation, the end results, the rewards or, in a worst case scenario, the negative consequences for lack of compliance.
“I think if we all pitch in we can be ready and look forward to a good evaluation.”

**Practice Making A Request**

1. Choose a request from the request list below.

2. Write out the request following the DESO framework.

**Request List**
- Request time off from work.
- Request that your workload not be increased for the next few months while you catch up.
- Request that the hotel manager deal with the noisy party in the next room.
- Ask the renovation company for a firm date of completion.
- Request a new computer at work.
- Ask for a raise.
- Ask your neighbour to keep an eye on your house while you are away.
SKILL DEVELOPMENT: MAKING REQUESTS

DESO Script

Describe — Describe the background.

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Express — Express your feeling or thoughts.

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Specify — Specify helpful behaviours.

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Outcome — State the result.

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

**Giving Corrective Feedback**

Being able to offer helpful criticism to those around us is often a difficult task. Many people steer clear of offering feedback or wait until they are so frustrated that they blow up. Neither of these tactics is healthy.

**General Guidelines for Giving Feedback**

- Plan what you will say.
- Focus on the behaviour, not the person.
- Think about the ratio of positive interactions to negative ones.
- Talk one-on-one, if possible.
- Avoid guessing at the reasons behind the behaviour.
- State what behaviour you expect.

**Shift from Complaints to Requests**

One simple way to deal with a desired change in behaviour is to transpose the negative behaviour into a request that clarifies what behaviour you would like from the other person.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complaint</th>
<th>Request</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“You are unprofessional.”</td>
<td>“When you receive a work memo, we expect that you will comply.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“You are rude.”</td>
<td>“When I come into your office, please stop what you are doing, look up, and acknowledge me.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**SKILL DEVELOPMENT: GIVING CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK**

**Practice Giving Corrective Feedback**

1. Think of one person in your life to whom you would like to give corrective feedback.

2. If you have attempted to talk about the issue, what level of mitigation did you use? Were there any barriers that you should have considered?

3. Write a DESO script.

4. If you so choose, you may find it helpful to role-play your script with a partner.

---

**Describe** — Name the issue.

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

Express — State the impact.

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

Specify — Outline expected behaviours.

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

Outcome — State the result.

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________
DEALING WITH DIFFICULT RESPONSES

At times others will react to our assertiveness. We should be ready and anticipate negative responses. In all of these difficult situations, it is paramount that we be prepared, maintain self-control, keep our goals in mind and stay on track.

**Bringing up old history**
In the heat of the moment, it is easy to bring up other unrelated issues or unresolved issues from the past (e.g., “Do you remember when you...”). This can escalate our emotions and make the situation worse.

**Responding to tears**
Do not let someone’s emotions derail your objective. Crying may be a way of averting your feedback. You need to reassert yourself and either allow time for the crying to subside or set another time to have the discussion.

**Withdrawing behaviour**
Silence and unresponsiveness may be the response you receive after giving feedback. If you encounter silence, acknowledge the silence. Give pause and then reassert your feedback.

**Debating**
Defensiveness is a natural response. Individuals who think fast on their feet often respond with defensiveness. Do not be intimidated by a rebuttal. Do not engage in a debate or offer your own rebuttal. Simply restate your feedback.

**Over-questioning**
Over-questioning is a defensive posture to feedback. If you begin to respond to each question, the feedback is lost and solutions are clouded over in the flurry of questions and responses. Paraphrasing questions instead of answering them can be helpful.
RECEIVING NEGATIVE FEEDBACK

Being able to accept criticism is a valuable skill that allows us to be objective and to grow as individuals. For some of us, positive feedback is hard enough to accept, and negative feedback can feel overwhelming.

Guidelines for Receiving Feedback

- Remember, you decide whether to accept or reject the feedback of others.
- Keep in mind that fear and anger are both normal responses to criticism.
- Remain open and resist the urge to deny the feedback.
- Don’t try to change their mind.

Strategies for Responding to Negative Criticism

1. Acknowledgment
Sometimes the criticism we receive is valid. It may not come nicely packaged, but if we are honest, it reflects a negative behaviour on our part. In these situations it is best to acknowledge the criticism and state our intent to change our behaviour.

Critic: You only spend funding for this project on areas that benefit your department. You are going to ruin this organization and its reputation.

Response: Yes, I apologize. When I review the files I realize that I have spent a lot of money on my department and will be careful to include other departments in future considerations.

2. Clouding
This technique is useful when responding to manipulative criticism or non-constructive criticism you disagree with but do not want to discuss. Clouding allows us to address the attack in a quick manner. When using this technique, find something to honestly agree with in the criticism. Then agree in part and rephrase the critic’s words.

Critic: You only spend funding for this project on areas that benefit your department. You are going to ruin this organization and its reputation.

Response: It is important to consider where our funding dollars are spent.
3. **Probing**  
This technique is especially helpful when we are not sure if the criticism is constructive or if we do not fully understand what is being communicated. This may be useful if you have a feeling that you may not be getting the whole story. When people voice criticisms, it may be a way of hiding deeper feelings or unstated issues.

1. Decide what it is that the critic feels most strongly about.

2. Restate the criticism and ask if your understanding is correct. Ask for further clarification if needed.

3. Have a transparent and honest conversation.

Critic: *You only spend funding for this project on areas that benefit your department. You are going to ruin this organization and its reputation.*

Response: *It seems you are concerned about how money is being spent and that I have spent a disproportionate amount of funding on my department. Is that an accurate understanding of your concern? Are there factors you would like me to take into consideration for the next round of funding allocation?*
Communication Tips

Don’t take conflict personally
Even when someone is attacking you and heaping insults, remember that they have their own difficulties and you should not soak up their unresolved issues. Listen without judgment.

Listen
One of the best ways to help communication is to listen. This involves more than just being quiet. It means letting the other person know that you have heard how they are truly feeling.

Be self-aware
Know what you are bringing to relationships and situations. Pay attention to how you feel and what you think. For example, if you feel poorly about yourself, you will find that other people treat you poorly. If you compare yourself to others you will never appreciate your uniqueness.

Build your self-confidence
Present yourself with assurance. State what you think clearly and without apologizing. Make decisions and trust your choices. Know that your confidence will encourage others to find theirs.

Manage your feelings
Do not let your emotions hijack your ability to choose your response. Know what you are experiencing internally, but do not let it control you.
Positive Self-Talk

One of the most powerful influences on your attitude is what you say to yourself. How you talk to yourself will greatly influence how you feel and think about yourself. Anytime we use, “I can’t…” or “I have to…” we are making negative statements.

When we replace these statements with “I choose to…” and acknowledge how we feel, we are creating a positive mindset. By using your inner voice or positive self-talk you will begin to see things positively and look for the good in every situation.

Look at the pairs of statements below. One is positive and the other is negative. Mark the statement you think is positive with a + and the one you think is negative with a –.

____ I can face my fear.
____ I can’t be afraid, or I’ll fail again.
____ I’ll just take a break. I can handle it.
____ Don’t slow down, I’ve just got to push on.
____ I should not be afraid.
____ It’s okay to feel afraid sometimes.
____ I can manage my fear.
____ I’ve got to stop being afraid.
____ I have to do it.
____ I choose to do it.
____ I can’t handle this.
____ I know ways to deal with this.
____ One step at a time, it will be okay.
____ I can’t do this. It is too hard.
____ Don’t get nervous.
____ I’m in control. Relax and take a deep breath.
____ I have succeeded in some ways.
____ I wasn’t a total success.

Think of a situation right now that you feel unsure of or have anxiety about. Practice positive self-talk in that area. Write it down.
Barriers to Assertion

Feelings of Anxiety
The stress response often impedes our ability to remain calm and deliberate. Sometimes just the thought of having to offer our opinion or to take charge of a situation is enough to elicit feelings of anxiety.

Common Thoughts:
- I am nervous to speak out and express myself.
- My emotions will get the best of me and I will not be able to express myself.

Helpful Tactics to Deal with Anxiety:
- Re-evaluate your thought process.
- Think of your options.
- Calm yourself.
- Do it anyway. Do not let your anxiety stop you.
- Believe you can handle the situation by using assertive techniques.
- Create a stress-resistant life.

Not Wanting to Make Others Uncomfortable
Wanting to keep the peace and being uncomfortable with conflict can cause us to steer away from assertive behaviours. We may go to great lengths to listen to others but not expect the same in return.

Common Thoughts:
- If I disagree, others will be hurt or offended.
- It is best to be polite and keep things moving smoothly.
- I feel at ease when others are happy.
- Giving our time and effort to others builds our relationships.

Healthy Thoughts
- Differing opinions are expected, wanted and helpful in all areas of life.
- Being polite does not mean we hold back from speaking up for ourselves.
- We need to remove ourselves from the emotional responsibility of pacifying and keeping others happy.
- Relationships are built by honest, open and caring communication.
**Balance of Power**

Sometimes our relationships are scaled on a hierarchy. In these situations we may feel either that we have the legitimacy to force others to comply with our wishes, or that we ourselves have to comply based on the unequal distribution of power.

**Common Behaviours:**
- Subordinates in a work environment tend to comply with those in higher positions.
- Supervisors believe that their position allows them to make demands of others even if the demands are not reasonable.

**Healthy Thoughts:**
- Work environments often need a chain of command in order to function and accomplish the tasks at hand.
- Being assertive does not mean that I have the right to make unrealistic demands of others.
- I am free to speak my thoughts and feelings with integrity at any time.

**Lack of Skills**

Family backgrounds, community and work experiences may not have supported the development of communication skills. We all learn from our parents, extended family and life experiences. For some, these environments may have inhibited the expression of strong emotions or unique ideas, and being assertive was not encouraged.

Being assertive involves definable skills that can be learned, practiced and strengthened.
## Choose Your Response

| Scenario | passive response...  
|----------|---------------------
|          | aggressive response...  
|          | assertive response...  
| Your boss has asked you to do a project that you know you are capable of doing well. You would like to do the work, but know you don’t have the time. |  
| You are at your in-laws. The neighbours pop by to offer an invitation to a church function which you are not interested in attending. You know your mother-in-law is also not interested, but she replies, “Sure, we’d love to go.” The neighbour looks at you for your response. |  
| Your cell phone is not ringing for incoming calls. It has been an on-going problem. You call the company. |  
| Your co-worker often shuffles work to you. Initially you wanted to help, but now you feel like he is taking advantage of you. |  
| **Personal scenario** |  

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FURTHER RESOURCES


Training
Our training is available in public, on-site and webinar formats. Below is a sample of the workshops we offer.

Leadership Development Workshops
Coaching Strategies for Leaders – Conflict, Performance, Change
Change Management – A Leader’s Guide
Leadership – The Essential Competencies
Leading Meetings – How to Make Meetings Great

Management Development Workshops
Management and Supervision – The Crucial Skills
Performance Reviews – How to Get the Best from People
Mediation – Facilitating Difficult Conversations
Motivating Change – Coaching ThroughResistance

Conflict and Communication Workshops
Bullying in the Workplace
Conflict Resolution Skills
Dealing with Difficult People
Assertive Communication
Difficult Conversations

Workplace Culture Workshops
Diversity and Culture – Strategies for Working with Differences
Generations – Working with Differences
Personal Work Styles – Working with Differences
Respectful Workplace – Strategies for a Healthy Environment

Performance Workshops
Change Management – An Employee’s Guide
Emotional Intelligence – Expanding Influence
Mental Health in the Workplace
Stress Management
Team Development – Creating Functional Teams
Time Management

Safety and Violence Prevention Workshops
De-escalating Potentially Violent Situations
Emergency Preparedness Planning
Safety at Work – Mindfulness-Based Strategies
Workplace Violence Prevention

For a complete list of the training we offer, please visit www.achievecentre.com
**Member Plan**
ACHIEVE offers a membership plan that provides the member with unlimited access to our pre-recorded webinars.

**Member Benefits**

- Unlimited access to all pre-recorded webinars whenever and however often you want. New content added throughout the year.
- Ability to download useful PDF handouts and workshops, exclusive to members.
- Notification of special discounts and promotions on products and public workshops only available to members.

**Assessment Tools**
ACHIEVE Assessment Tools help leaders and organizations have thoughtful and proactive discussions related to a variety of topics and issues. Each Assessment Tool Package includes one Facilitator’s Guide and 25 copies of the Assessment Tool questionnaire.

- Employee Engagement Assessment Tool
- Organization Health Assessment Tool
- Personality Dimensions at Work Assessment Tool
- Respectful Workplace Assessment Tool
- Strengths and Weaknesses Assessment Tool
- Workplace Violence Assessment Tool

**Consulting Services**
Our consulting services assist organizations and individuals to manage issues related to planning, change, conflict, and stress. To explore how to connect with one of our consultants, please contact us to discuss your needs in more detail.

- Coaching
- Group Facilitation
- Incident Management
- Mediation – Conflict Resolution
- Organizational Assessment – Conflict
- Team Development
- Workplace Violence Risk Assessment

**Lunch & Learn, Keynote Addresses, Mini-Workshops**
Sometimes you don’t have the need for a traditional workshop. The next time you require a shorter presentation, consider using an ACHIEVE Centre speaker. Our speakers provide engaging inspirational and humorous 30-90 minute presentations on topics related to leadership and organizational performance.