



CHANGE TOOLKIT

Tool: Assertiveness

Used in:

PLAN

Also good for:

Disengage

Implement

My Notes

What is it?

Assertive behaviour tends to be exhibited by those who respect the rights of other people to express their ideas, feelings, and needs, while at the same time recognising that their own concerns are also valid.

Assertive behaviour emphasises the value of clear, calm, frank communication. It involves being honest with yourself and others and having confidence in your ability to express that. It also involves being able to negotiate and reach workable compromises.

Why use it in a change process?

You can make effective use of assertiveness during the **Plan** stage of change. In this phase, the change starts to feel more real and the extent of what is involved for individuals also becomes more obvious. You will notice that those involved in the change can start to feel more nervous and anxious about being able to deliver what's required of them.

You might find yourself tempted to become aggressive to force through the change. However, this is likely to mean those involved withdraw at best or refuse to cooperate at worst. If you are too passive, you might find that the work drifts and stagnates.

You can also use this behaviour during **Disengage** to help move people away from an existing situation. Or during the **Implement** stage if, despite all your best efforts, you find people are threatening to withdraw or refusing to cooperate.

What do I need to do?

1. Actively listen to what is being said and show and tell the other person that you both hear and understand them. This forces you to focus on the other person and not use the time they are talking to build up a defence or attack in your mind.
2. Say what you think or what you feel without insistence or apology. Use words that are linking rather than words that flatly contradict what the other person has said. Words like 'however, alternatively, even so' can be helpful here.
3. Say what you want to happen clearly and honestly.
4. Sometimes if people are actively involved in their own concerns, they pay little attention to what others have to say. If you find the other person is not listening to you, you may need to repeat things in slightly different ways to get your message across, as in the example below:

Example to someone who won't commit to completing their part of the project plan: ***"We really need you to do the planning work. I understand it causes you problems, but the hard facts are it won't be possible to achieve the***

changes we've signed up to without your contribution. However, I can talk to the project executive about your time constraints if you like: What we can't do is continue to move back the deadline to accommodate you."

5. Slow the person down, sidestepping them with an unexpected response. This can involve acknowledging their concern while not agreeing with it.

For example if someone said: ***'Well that was a pretty stupid way to behave in a meeting'*** and you might say ***'Yes, I can see that you think that it was a pretty stupid way to behave.'***

You are not agreeing that you had behaved stupidly only that you can see that they believe that.

6. Use different ways to say no, such as ***"I would prefer not to..."*** or ***"I would rather..."*** or ***"I am not willing to..."***
7. If necessary, allow yourself time to assess the other person's request, or to ask for information or clarification. You don't have to respond immediately.
8. Try and make use of the types of body language listed under assertive in the table below:

Behaviour:	Assertive	Aggressive	Passive
Posture:	Upright/Straight	Learning forward	Shrinking back
Head	Firm not rigid	Chin jutting out	Head down
Eyes:	Direct, not staring, good and regular eye contact	Strongly focused staring, often piercing or glaring eye contact	Glancing away, little eye contact
Face:	Expression fits the words	Set/ firm	Smiling even when upset
Voice:	Well-modulated to fit context. Speak slowly and steadily.	Loud/ emphatic	Hesitant/ soft, trailing off at the end of words/ sentence
Arms/hands:	Relaxed/ moving/ easy	Controlled Extreme/ sharp gestures/ finger pointing, jabbing.	Aimless, still
Movement/ walking:	Measured pace suitable to action	Slow and heavy or fast, deliberate, hard	Slow and hesitant or fast and jerky