
Article: The Stepped Model of Assertiveness

In the workplace, conflict is a given.

There will always be different points of view, different ways of doing things.

Key to managing workplace conflict is the commitment for everyone to behave assertively.

However many people don't know what assertiveness is, and it is often misunderstood and misrepresented.

Assertiveness can be defined as

"Letting others know what you do and do not want in a confident and direct way"

S Hadfield and G Hasson 'How to be Assertive in any Situation' (2010, Pearson Education)

How can this be achieved in practice?

One of the most useful tools I've found, and recommend to anyone who wants to behave assertively, is the **Stepped Model of Assertiveness**. This is described in detail in '*Assertiveness at Work*' by Ken and Kate Back (McGraw-Hill, 2005).

When using the model, the recommendation is to use the minimum degree of assertion required for achieving the objective. - so starting at the lowest level – the bottom step - and moving up level by level as required. Like travelling up a set of stairs.

The reasons for this approach are

- The objective may be achieved at a low level, so minimising the potential for conflict
- If starting at a higher level, it's not possible to then go down levels - your 'boats are burnt' - which is not the case when starting low and then going higher if required.

Two levels of assertion are identified – three lower levels (assertions 1, 2 and 3) and three higher levels (assertions 4, 5 and 6).

The Lower Levels of Assertion

1. Basic

This is the lowest level, the starting step. This is a straightforward statement that clarifies personal rights by making clear personal needs, wants, beliefs, opinions or feelings to the other person or people.

Example, *'I need to leave by 5 p.m. this evening'*

2. Responsive

This is the next level, the next step up if the objective is not achieved at level 1.

This is an assertive behaviour that aims to find out where the other person stands, their needs, wants, opinions and feelings.

Example *'I need to leave by 5 p.m. What problems does that create for you?'*

3. Empathetic

This is the next level, the next step up if the objective is not achieved at level 2.

This is an assertive behaviour that contains an element of empathy as well as a statement of personal needs and wants.

Example *'I appreciate that you need team members to work late some days this week. Tonight I need to leave by 5 p.m.'*

The Higher levels of Assertion

4. Discrepancy

This is the next level, the next step up if the objective is not achieved at level 3.

This is a statement that points to the difference between what has been previously agreed, and what is actually happening or about to happen.

Example *'Mike, we agreed at the beginning of the month that when necessary I could leave at 5 p.m. I need to leave by 5 p.m. tonight'*.

5. Negative Feeling

This is the next level, the next step up if the objective is not achieved at level 4.

This is a statement that draws the attention of another person to the undesirable effect that their behaviour is having on you. It can contain the following elements: When..., the effects are..., I feel...

Example *'When you make it difficult for me to leave when I need to, it makes me feel you are questioning my commitment to the role.'*

6. Consequence

This is the final level, the next step up if the objective is not achieved at level 5.

This is a statement that informs the other person of the consequence for them of not changing their behaviours. It also gives them an opportunity to change that behaviour.

Example *'If this occurs again, I'm left with no alternative but to escalate the matter to get some clarity on the hours I am expected to work. I'd prefer not to.'*

The importance of Consistent Communication in words, voice tone and non-verbal communication

Note. It is important that the assertive words being used in the stepped model are accompanied by

- an assertive tone of voice
- assertive non-verbal communication.



About the Author - Krista Powell Edwards

Krista is a very experienced and highly qualified consultant, coach, facilitator, trainer and author.

She uses her experience and expertise to support individuals and organisations to enhance their effectiveness and performance.

Krista is currently writing her first book on how to effectively communicate credibility.

Expertise and experience

Krista has developed her expertise through

- An extensive track record of supporting organisations in the UK and internationally since 1995.
- Masters level research in the factors that affect the achievement of workplace performance.
- Extensive Continuous Professional Development (CPD), (including regular attendance at conferences and development programmes).
- Research of 'best practice' consultancy, facilitation and learning and development
- Qualifying as a Master Trainer, Master Practitioner and Practitioner in Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP).
- Designing and delivering 500+ training and development programmes.
- 20+ years as Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) volunteer - branch chair, council representative - supporting the CPD and performance of 7500+ HR professionals.
- Lecturing at a university (International Human Resource Management).

Specialist areas

Krista specialises in three main areas:-

Credibility - How to communicate credibility for influence and positive impact in the workplace

Credible HR - Enabling HR to add value to the organisation

Personal Effectiveness Skills - Support in developing confidence, credibility, influence, time management and assertiveness and conflict management skills so that individuals and teams are able to perform effectively.

Services

Krista offers support in **workplace performance improvement**.

Tailored, cost effective

- Consultancy and Research
- Coaching
- Facilitation
- Training and Development

Contact Details



Krista@theCredibilityExpert.co.uk



07804 956007

All rights reserved. No part of this material may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electrical, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior written permission of the copyright holder. This material may not be lent, sold, hired or otherwise disposed of by way of trade in any form without the prior written permission of the copyright holder.

THIS COPYRIGHT NOTICE MUST NOT BE REMOVED.
