

## Assertiveness Skills (Achieving the Right Balance)

Performance discussions require two-way communication. When discussing performance (whether our own or the other person's) our response can vary between being passive (where we do not express our thoughts or feelings honestly), assertive, or aggressive (where we place our own rights above those of the other person). Assertiveness is the middle way – it's the ability to honestly and constructively express our thoughts and feelings **without** placing our rights or needs above those of our listener. Assertive statements are expressed without humiliating, dominating or insulting the other person.

Generally assertiveness requires that you clearly state what outcome you are seeking using "I" statements i.e. "I want", "I need", "I would prefer", "I'm upset about...", etc. Indicate the impact of the person's behaviour on you e.g. "I feel...because you seem...". Take care not to embellish or exaggerate the behaviour you wish to address e.g. rather than saying "You are never on time for my meetings with you" (when you know they have been late two or three times over the year), rather say something like "I know you are busy but I feel my time /my workload isn't valued when you are late and haven't let me know. I'd prefer that you phone me to let me know when you are running late".



### Tip: A word of warning!

Don't fall into the passive trap by trying to minimise your desired outcomes by adding a question or statement that subordinates your needs i.e. "I don't want to do that (the assertive comment), is that okay by you? (the subordinate comment)" By being assertive you will feel more confident and gain respect from others.

### Example assertive statements:

Where someone criticises your work:

*'What is it about the way I chaired the meeting that you don't like?'*

In response to someone who is unwilling to discuss new ideas:

*'What I hear you saying is all the reasons why it won't work. I'd like to explore a few alternatives. What else would work?'*

When discussing a problem with a person's performance:

*'I understand your feelings and I'm interested in discussing with you what I am unhappy about and the results I expect.'*

In response to someone who has closed themselves off to discussion:

*'I feel frustrated that we're unable to work this out or discuss it.'*

In response to someone who avoids giving specific feedback about your performance:

*'I accept your right to have a perspective on my behaviour, but I have a different perspective. I'd appreciate some specific examples of what you're referring to.'*

Source: Queensland University of Technology: Performance, Planning and Review