

MANAGEMENT TIP: "THE ART OF ASSERTION AND MANAGING UPWARDS"

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Sound management practice is more about managing upwards as it is downwards and sideways. This is all too often a neglected aspect of management as the traditional emphasis has been on effectively leading and managing our subordinates.

1. How good are you at leading your boss?
2. Do you know how to stand your ground or 'push back' without limiting your career prospects?
3. Do you know what to do when your boss is behaving in a dysfunctional way?

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STAND YOUR GROUND - THE ART OF ASSERTION

In most cultures, standing your ground or 'pushing back' as it is often referred to is hard to do. Most of us do not want to deal with conflict or handle upset people. However, often the result of not standing our ground when we should have done can have unfortunate and even serious consequences.

A common problem is that we confuse assertion with aggression. A good start in developing assertion skills is to understand the Submission-Assertion-Aggression continuum.

1. Submissive Behaviours

Lack of respect for own needs - do not express honest feelings, needs, values and concerns. "Pardon me for living"

2. Assertive Behaviours

Method that maintains self-respect and meets your needs without abusing or dominating others. "While meeting my needs I don't violate the dignity or the reasonable needs of others"

3. Aggressive Behaviours

Lack of respect for others' needs – expresses feelings, needs and ideas at the expense of others. "My way is the right way"

THE IMPORTANCE OF SAYING "NO"

If you don't say this simple word when you need to say it, you run the risk of losing control of your life. Yet many people find this hardest of all words to say in any language, especially face-to-face.

There are number of different ways of saying no:

1. Natural "No"

"No, sorry, I can't come to the movies today"

2. Reflective listening, then "No"

"You really would like me to come to the movies with you. I'd love to but I have another engagement. Not this time"

3. Reasoned "No"

"No. Thanks anyway. I don't enjoy movies"

4. Raincheck "No"

"I can't come today but how about another time?"

THREE PART ASSERTION MESSAGE

Using "I" Statements to Deliver a 3-Stage Assertion Message

Objectives of the Assertion Message:

1. To communicate clearly and cleanly my perception of feelings about a problem without attacking, blaming or hurting the other person.
2. To open a discussion without eliciting defensiveness from the other person.

Stage	Description	Example
1. The action or behaviour	State non-judgementally and without blame – stick to behavioural descriptions	When reviewing the draft company results I noticed that some of the debtors have been under-stated.
2. My response	Disclose your feelings as accurately as possible	I now feel uncertain about the accuracy of the remainder of the debtors' information
3. The impact or outcome	Clarify the impact of the behaviour on you and/or others or the organisation	I will not be able to recommend that the Partner sign off on the accounts until the debtors are checked and re-valued.

SOME FACTORS TO CONSIDER BEFORE DELIVERING AN ASSERTION MESSAGE:

1. Is it likely the other person will alter their behaviour?
2. Will I diminish the other person's self esteem?
3. What is the risk of damaging the relationship? Is it worth it?
4. Is it likely that defensiveness will result and escalate to destructive levels?
5. Is the timing right?

DEALING WITH DEFENSIVENESS

No matter how well we phrase our assertion message, people seldom like to receive it. Even the best assertion messages are likely to trigger defensive responses from the receiver.

"When you send a well worded assertion message, don't expect an accolade. Anticipate an attack or some other form of defensive response"

DEALING WITH DIFFICULT RESPONSES

Hostile responses – reflect content and feelings with a special emphasis on acknowledging feelings

Deal with questions – a form of defensive response is asking a question. Don't answer a question when asserting – reflect content and feelings

Sidestepping debates – debates are win/lose affairs – avoid them and use reflective listening techniques

Overcoming withdrawal – some people react like a turtle and retreat into their shell. "I take your silence to mean that you don't want to talk about it now. Perhaps we can do so later – can we meet again at...?"

Remember:

Your aim is for the other person to change their behaviour – they don't have to be happy about it.

Reference: "People Skills", Robert Bolton Phd, 1995