

Assertive Communication: 20 Tips

Most of us know that assertiveness will get you further in life than being passive or aggressive. But few of us were actually taught **how** to be assertive. Here are some helpful tips.

1. **Choose the right time.** Imagine you're dashing down the hall on your way to a meeting. Lisa passes by. You call out, "Can you have the Microsoft project out by Tuesday?" Because you haven't scheduled a special time to bring up the issue, Lisa has no reason to think your request deserves high priority.
2. **Choose the right place.** Discuss important issues in a private, neutral location.
3. **Be direct.** For example, "Lisa, I would like you to work overtime on the Microsoft project." Whether or not Lisa likes your request, she respects you for your directness.
4. **Say "I," not "we."** Instead of saying, "We need the project by Tuesday," say, "I would like you to finish the project by Tuesday."
5. **Be specific.** Instead of, "Put a rush on the Microsoft project," say, "I would like the Microsoft project finished and on Joe's desk by 9:00 Tuesday morning."
6. **Use body language to emphasize your words.** "Lisa, I need that report Tuesday morning," is an assertive statement. But if you mumble this statement while staring at the floor, you undermine your message.
7. **Confirm your request.** Ask your staff to take notes at meetings. At the end of each meeting, ask your group to repeat back the specifics that were agreed upon. This minimizes miscommunication.
8. **Stand up for yourself.** Don't allow others to take advantage of you; insist on being treated fairly. Here are a few examples: "I was here first," "I'd like more coffee, please," "Excuse me, but I have another appointment," "Please turn down the radio," or "This steak is well done, but I asked for medium rare."
9. **Learn to be friendly** with people you would like to know better. Do not avoid people because you don't know what to say. Smile at people. Convey that you are happy to see them.
10. **Express your opinions honestly.** When you disagree with someone, do not pretend to agree. When you are asked to do something unreasonable, ask for an explanation.
11. **Share your experiences and opinions.** When you have done something worthwhile, let others know about it.
12. **Learn to accept kind words.** When someone compliments you, say, "Thank you."
13. **Maintain eye contact** when you are in a conversation.

14. **Don't get personal.** When expressing annoyance or criticism, comment on the person's *behavior* rather than attacking the person. For example: "Please don't talk to me that way," rather than, "What kind of jerk are you?"
15. **Use "I" statements** when commenting on another's behavior. For example: "When you cancel social arrangements at the last minute, it's extremely inconvenient and I feel really annoyed."
16. **State what you want.** If appropriate, ask for another behavior. ("I think we'd better sit down and try to figure out how we can make plans together and cut down on this kind of problem.")
17. **Look for good examples.** Pay attention to assertive people and model your behavior after theirs.
18. **Start slowly.** Express your assertiveness in low-anxiety situations at first; don't leap into a highly emotional situation until you have more confidence. Most people don't learn new skills overnight.
19. **Reward yourself** each time you push yourself to formulate an assertive response. Do this regardless of the response from the other person.
20. **Don't put yourself down** when you behave passively or aggressively. Instead, identify where you went off course and learn how to improve.