

Interpersonal Confidence

In sport, you'll often be thrust in uncomfortable situations. Perhaps a new coach will come to the club and you don't see eye to eye. You may be asked by a manager to play out of position or teammates may criticise you unfairly.

How do you communicate in these types of situations?

Do you approach conversations and meetings with no hidden agendas and ensure that your ego is parked to one side? When this does occur other people are more likely to be happy with the way conversations have been handled and more accepting of decisions that you make when they are positively or negatively affected.

To ensure that this happens the ability to deal confidently when challenged from different people is important. To do so you will be assertive and communicate your expectations and important messages in a more open and honest manner.

The next sections will allow you to recognise patterns of behaviour, good and bad that you display.

What does it mean to be assertive?

Raising your voice or shouting is what one footballer said when I asked him what assertiveness was.

But that is not the case, assertiveness is not about being loud or threatening people. That is what you call being aggressive. Obviously, if you want to control a stressful situation keeping quiet and going along with the wishes of other people isn't the best way to behave too – that's called being passive. Manipulating others by lying to them and avoiding responsibility to get your own way could be argued to be an unfair way to behave too as it is passive-aggressive behaviour.

To be assertive is very different, it is an approach to meet your needs. It is about letting other people know what you do and do not want in a confident and direct way. Such as during a team meeting where fingers are being pointed at different players, you can explain what you feel is acceptable behaviour and what you feel is inappropriate.

If you get into a cycle of overly passive and aggressive behaviour you may get caught up in your own self-importance whereas, assertive players will be concerned about ensuring everyone gets a fair deal.

You may think of assertiveness on a continuum between passiveness and aggressiveness however it is also important to recognise that assertiveness includes understanding the boundaries between different behaviour and communication styles.

Assertiveness

- Is being confident and direct when communicating with other people.
- You can choose how you communicate and are able to let other people know what you expect and do not expect in a calm manner.
- You can handle criticism without losing your cool.
- You do not let fear of conflict silence you and are prepared to take the consequences of communicating your feelings and wants.
- You feel that you do not have to prove anything. That you set the boundaries and feel entitled to defend yourself from being exploited, attacked or any form of hostility.
- You have the confidence to make decisions and take responsibility for what you say and do. You do not blame other people when things do not go your way.
- You can give and receive both compliments and criticism.

Exercise:

Reflect and make a note in the box below of situations that you and other people that you know have handled well. Where you or others have interacted in an assertive manner that link with the above statements.

Aggressiveness

- Is if you are being overly forceful in your communication and body language. Determined to let other people know that you are in charge and you will get your own way.
- Aggressive behaviour and communication involves expressing your feelings, opinions and needs but in a way that threatens, dismisses or controls other people.
- When you are aggressive you may feel that you have to prove things and push a point. If you feel you are treated badly you react with anger and hostility.
- Rather than being honest and direct, you are rude, sarcastic and put the blame on others.
- Aggressiveness is a win-lose situation. You win and everyone else loses. It is a one-way process where you say what happens and do not listen or take into consideration the needs of others.
- If you are aggressive you talk over and interrupt other people.
- Aggression is about dominating other people and being disrespectful to their personal boundaries.

Exercise:

Reflect on the statements above and make a note in the box below of situations where you have found yourself or you have seen other people displaying aggressive behaviour.

Passiveness

- Clearly this type of communication won't work as it means you give up your own needs and wishes in favour of other peoples needs and wants.
- Being passive means that you let other people dominate you and tell you what to do and what not to do.
- You are easily manipulated by other people and let their needs overrule yours.
- You find it difficult to tell people how you want to be treated.
- You often go along with others even when you don't agree with them.
- If you are passive you avoid friction of any kind. You may fear the reaction of others so stay quiet and agreeable.
- The way you communicate can be misinterpreted where on one hand people may feel uncertain about what you want so ignore or disregard you. And on the other hand it can lead to other people taking advantage of you.
- It's easy for other people to disrespect you.
- If someone is unfair towards you, you will keep those feelings of injustice buried inside.
- You can feel the world of sport is very difficult and not a nice place to be. Where other people's needs and opinions are more important than your own.

Exercise:

Reflect on the statements above and make a note in the box below of situations where you have found yourself or you have seen other people be too passive in and around your club or when communicating with others.

Passive Aggressive Behaviour

- Is when you are indirect and manipulate other people by the way that you communicate and behave.
- Passive-aggressive communication is an indirect and dishonest expression of your feelings, opinions and wishes. It involves an avoidance pattern of behaviour, avoiding saying what you really do and do not want.
- If you are passive-aggressive you manipulate people to get your own way.
- When you are at work you will likely find excuses and create a sense of unease.
- You may suppress your anger or frustration giving people the silent treatment or dirty looks.
- You may be a person who uses sarcasm to avoid confrontation.
- You can be deliberately obstructive and manipulate decisions to work for you.
- You may blame other people for your errors, with a 'you lose I lose' mentality. Avoiding taking responsibility.
- You may be great at devising ways to catch the attention of other people. Perhaps by ensuring that others have to wait for you to give decisions or arrive late for meetings to give you a sense of importance.
- You feel that being a senior player is very difficult and an unfair role so you avoid responsibility and blame other people.

Exercise:

Reflect on the statements above and make a note in the box below of situations where you have found yourself or seen others displaying passive aggressive behaviours in and around your club.

Is it OK to act in an aggressive or passive manner?

Being assertive could be argued to be the most effective way as a coach or player as it's a positive way to behave and communicate. The reality is as a human being involved in sport there will be times when you carried away with the emotion that the pressure of results can bring.

Exercise

In the box below I'd like you to make a note of when it is OK for you to aggressive or passive when communicating with other people.

Having read and completed the exercises above I'd like you to make a note of a minimum of 3 things that you have learned and intend to use in your sport and life in future.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.