Assertiveness, Managing Conflict and Feedback

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ICE Breaker ...

Everybody up!
Definition

• What is Assertiveness?
  – A “mid-point”

Passive – Assertive – Aggressive
Assertive behaviour allows us to;

• Refuse requests.
• Ask for favours and make requests.
• Express positive and negative feelings.
• Initiate, continue and terminate general conversations.

Lazarus AA, Behaviour Therapy & Beyond. (McGraw-Hill 1971)
Why be assertive?

To help individuals to:

- Ensure personal rights are not violated
- Deal effectively unreasonable requests from others
- Recognise the personal rights of others
- Change the behaviour of others toward them
- Avoid unnecessary aggressive conflicts
Modes of communication

• Face to face
  – In a face to face situation it takes 60 seconds to make an initial impression ...

Modes of communication

• Telephone
  – On the telephone it takes just 10 seconds to make a good or bad impression!

![Bar chart showing the importance of tone of voice vs. words in telephone communication.]

- Tone of voice: 86%
- Words: 14%
Response

• **Initial response can be emotional**
  – Irrational, anger, fear, excitement, love, fight or flight etc. ...

• **Rational responses are slower**
  – Calm, relaxed.
  – Involves higher brain function
Pause

• We need to be able to
  – Take a mental breath
  – Calm the situation down
  – Take control

• Rather than succumbing to a “knee-jerk” response.
Not always easy ...
Good communications skills will help ...

• **Phone manner**
  – How you answer the phone Very important – sets the mood.

• **Inflection and tone of voice**
  – Critical

• **Pacing**
  – To help control the conversation

• **Volume**
  – Beware background noise that may make you or the caller have to raise their voice
Defusing conflict –
when dealing with conflict we need to:

- Detect early signs of escalation
- Employ self control
- Focus on a solution
- Use active listening
- Signal non-aggression
- Empathise
Detect early signs of aggression

- Remember fight/flight symptoms
- Lack of basic courtesy
- Interruptions and over-talking
- Pitch of voice starts to rise
- Volume increases
- There may be vulgar / abusive or threatening language
Employ self control

- Control your own fight / flight response
- Take a deep breath (don’t hold it!)
- Do not get pulled into a conflict
- Do not ‘bite’ in response to personal abuse or threatening language
- Retain your state of independence
- Maintain your professionalism!

“ANGER IS AN EMOTION THAT MAKES YOUR MOUTH WORK FASTER THAN YOUR BRAIN.”
Focus on a solution

• Move the debate on to the future and the solution, rather than dwell on past occurrences

• Involve the caller in finding a solution

• If possible, offer choices or options to the caller

• If they have asked for something that you cannot provide, tell them what you can do instead
Use active listening

• Focus your attention on them
  – don’t just spend the time when they’re talking composing your reply

• Use verbal prompts such as “I see” and “I understand” rather than “OK”

• Be patient & don’t interrupt

• Ask open questions (when, where, how etc.) to enable you to fully understand the situation

• Summarise your understanding of the situation back to the caller when they have finished talking.
Signal non-aggression

- **Remember, the caller, cannot see you,**
  - so it’s best to:
- **Talk clearly at a steady pace**
- **Keep your tone of voice calm and relaxed (inflection)**
- **Avoid interrupting,**
  - show what they have to say is important to you
- **Don’t be condescending**
- **If you need to address their conduct – be ASSERTIVE**
Empathise

• It is about being able to see and understand another’s viewpoint, putting yourself in their shoes

• It is not to be confused with sympathy
  – It is not about feeling sorry for someone or pretending to feel sorry for them

• It is a good way of building rapport
  – ‘I am sorry that you are disappointed/unhappy with…’
  – ‘I can hear that this has upset you’
  – ‘I understand how you must feel about this’
Use the correct language

• Try not to be negative
  – Try not to say “Unfortunately ...” or “I’m afraid ...”

• Don’t apologise
  – or say “can’t”, explain the facts and give information, “I’m unable to because ..., Offer a solution

• If you don’t think you can help
  – Suggest someone who can, if you can, put them in touch rather than giving them the run-around

• Empathy
  – ‘I understand your position, however...’
Don’t forget to thank them ...

• Thank you for bringing this to my attention’
• ‘Thank you for giving me the chance to put things right’
• ‘Thank you for being so patient’
Being Assertive

SUBMISSIVE
THEY WIN

Ineffective performance
Accepting abuse
Mumbling
Apologising for what you are doing

ASSERTIVE
WIN - WIN

Clear, steady and firm speech
Remain calm
Point out issues without triggering aggression
Professional

AGGRESSIVE
YOU WIN

Giving orders
Raising voice
Admonishing
Hanging up
Failure to resolve
**Typical statements**

“I’m sorry but it’s not my fault, it’s hospital policy…”

“I can see that this is important to you and I really want to help, but your shouting is making it difficult for me to do that. If you can stay calm, I will do my best to help”.

“We don’t tolerate that sort of request doctor, so you’ll have to calm down or I will terminate the call”
Remember…

• DO\'T SAY ‘SORRY’ FOR ENFORCING POLICIES / PROCEDURES
  – but you can say sorry about how you\’ve made them feel.

• NEVER apologise for doing your job!

• DO\’T SAY ‘CALM DOWN’ – try instead ‘I can hear that you are upset. Let\’s stay calm.’

• BE POSITIVE and proactive

• KNOW what you want and understand what they want
The Dual Concern Model

- **Assertive**
  - Self
  - Not Assertive

- **Not Co-operate**
- **Co-operate**

- **COMPROMISE**
Managing Feedback
Objective and Subjective Feedback

OBJECTIVE

FACT

THOUGHT

FEELING

SUBJECTIVE

Information
Description
Detail

Analysis
Reflection
Meaning

Emotion
Value
Belief
“Evidence Checklist” for appropriate feedback

✓ Reliable
✓ Relevant
✓ Important
✓ Objective

✓ Factually based
✓ Comprehensive
✓ Open
✓ Transparent
✓ Fair
Imagine …

• You recently gave some feedback to a member of your team. You told him that their meeting agendas looked great, but they needed to improve their presentation skills.

• You follow up a few weeks later to find out why they haven't made any changes.

• You discover that they didn't understand what they could do to improve – your feedback simply prompted more questions.

• They were left thinking "What's good about my agendas that I can transfer to other documents?" and "What's wrong with my presentation skills?"
The Situation – Behaviour – Impact (SBI) Feedback tool

- An aid to deliver more effective feedback.
- It focuses comments on specific situations and behaviours, and then outlines the impact that these behaviours have on others.

Situation

• When you're giving feedback, first define the where and when of the situation you're referring to.
  – Put the feedback into context,
  – Give the other person a specific setting as a reference.
• For example:
  • "During yesterday morning's team meeting, when you gave your presentation..."
  • “When we were working in the clinic on Monday afternoon..."
Behaviour

• Your next step is to describe the specific behaviours that you want to address.

• This is the most challenging part of the process, because you must communicate only the behaviours that you observed directly.
• DON’T make assumptions or subjective judgments about the observed behaviours.
  – These could be wrong, and this will undermine your feedback.
• E.g. if you we’re giving me feedback on this ppt and I’d made mistakes;
  – don’t assume it was because of lack of preparation, simply comment that I’d made mistakes
  – ideally, note what the mistakes were.
• DON’T rely on hearsay,
  – It could contain the subjective judgments of others.
  – Again, this could undermine your feedback and jeopardize your relationship
Tip:

• Aim to use **measurable** information in your description of the behaviour.

• This helps to ensure that your comments are **objective**.

• "During yesterday morning's team meeting, when you gave your presentation, you were uncertain about two of the slides, and your calculations were incorrect."
Impact

• Final step; use "I" statements to describe how the other person's action has affected you or others.

• E.g.

"During yesterday morning's team meeting, when you gave your presentation, you were uncertain about two of the slides and your calculations were incorrect. I felt embarrassed because there were some quite senior people present. I'm worried that this has affected the reputation of our team within the organisation."
Next steps

• Encourage the other person to think about the situation and to understand the impact of his or her behaviour.

• Allow them time to absorb what you have said, and then go over specific actions that will help him or her to improve.

• Remember feedback should also be positive, so where someone has done something well, help them think about how they can build on this.
### Reactions to Feedback

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reaction</th>
<th>Response</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Defensiveness</strong></td>
<td>“I’m not the only one who does that”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Resistance</strong></td>
<td>“There’s no way I can change – why should I?”</td>
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<td><strong>Denial</strong></td>
<td>“I’m not to blame for that”</td>
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<td><strong>Justification</strong></td>
<td>“I can explain”</td>
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<td><strong>Attack</strong></td>
<td>“What about them, they’re not perfect”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Inward Focus</strong></td>
<td>“Is this what people have been thinking about me? And all the time I thought they liked me”</td>
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<td><strong>Refusing to Listen</strong></td>
<td>“Here we go again”</td>
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<td><strong>Excuses</strong></td>
<td>“That wasn’t my fault – I was told the wrong things”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Distrust of the Person/Process</strong></td>
<td>“It’s obvious – someone’s got an axe to grind”</td>
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<td><strong>Masking True Feelings</strong></td>
<td>“I’ll rise above this – I don’t care”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Pre-prepared Arguments</strong></td>
<td>“I knew they were going to bring that up. Well, let me tell you my side …”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Concentrating on the person behind the feedback</strong></td>
<td>“I bet I know who said that”</td>
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</table>
Feedback can be badly received when it’s:

- **Too generalised** – not specific enough for effective action to be taken
- **Too personal** – based on the person, not the issue(s)
- **Cannot be actioned** - Based on something which is beyond their power to alter
- **Heavily critical** – without suggestions for improvement
- **Focused exclusively on the past** – recent changes/improvements not taken into account
- **Based on hearsay and gossip** – not enough facts to support the arguments
- **An excuse to seek blame** – rather than seeking solutions
Plan the conversation …

• **Win/Win**
  – What is my real need here?
  – What is theirs?
  – Do I want the conversation to work for both of us?

• **Creative responses**
  – What opportunities can this situation and conversation bring?
  – Rather than how it is supposed to be, can I see possibilities in what is?
• Empathy
  – What would it be like to be in their shoes?
  – What are they trying to say?
  – Have I really heard them?
  – Do they know I am listening?

• Appropriate assertiveness
  – What do I want to change?
  – How will I tell them this without blaming or attacking?

• Willingness to resolve
  – Do I really want to resolve the conflict?
  – Is my resentment being caused by something in my past that still hurts or something I dislike in them?
• **Managing emotions**
  – What am I feeling?
  – Am I blaming them for my feelings?
  – Will telling them how I feel help the situation?
  – What do I want to change?
  – Have I removed any desire to punish from my response?
  – What can I do to handle my feelings?
  – What can I do to help them handle their feelings?
• Designing options
  – What are the possibilities?
  – What options give us both more of what we want?

• Negotiating skills
  – What do I wish to achieve?
  – How can we make this a fair deal – win/win?
  – What can they give me/ What can I give them?
  – Am I ignoring objections? Can I include them?
  – What points would I want covered in an agreement?
  – Can I include something to help them save face?
  – Is saving face important to me or to them?
    – Do I need to do anything?
• **Mediation**
  – Can we resolve this ourselves or do we need help from a neutral third person?
  – Who could do that for us?
  – Can I create the right environment for people to open up, understand each other and develop their own solutions? What might help?
  – Is mediation the most appropriate role for me in this? If so: How would I set up and explain my role to both parties?

• **Imagine a point in the future where your issue is resolved.**
  – How did you or we get there?
Avoid Indecisive waffle … use DECISIVE words

Speak what you know with confidence. If your words express doubt, your listener will doubt you no matter how true your words are.

• Avoid
  – I should...
  – I’ll try...
  – I might be able to...
  – I sort of think...
  – It’s just my opinion...
  – I would tend to think...
  – You might want to consider...

• Replace with
  – I will...
  – I will...
  – What I can commit to is...
  – I know...
  – I believe...
  – I think...
  – I recommend...
Avoid Negative waffle … use POSITIVE words

Our minds find it easier to make sense of positives, focus on what you want, not what you don’t want. How will you solve a problem? How did you learn from a mistake?

• Avoid
  – Everything went wrong...
  – I’ll have to...
  – I can’t...
  – I am spending time...
  – I’m not good at...
  – You’ll have to excuse...
  – If only I had...

• Replace with
  – I learned from setbacks.
  – I’ll be glad to...
  – What I can do is...
  – I am investing time...
  – I’m getting better at...
  – Here it is...
  – Starting now I will...
Avoid Absolute waffle …

use ACCURATE words

We lose credibility when we speak in sweeping generalisations and absolutes. Stick to the facts. Don’t use *Always* or *Never*. Support assertions with specific examples

- **Avoid**
  - You always...
  - I never...
  - Everything you...

- **Replace with**
  - On several occasions you have...
  - Up until now I have not...
  - Many things...
Use words that place RESPONSIBILITY or EMPHASIS where it is due

• E.g. If a colleague is continually late, instead of saying
  “You make me angry when you come in late”
  Or
  “I get angry when you’re late”

• Use a phrase that puts the emphasis where it should be, e.g.
  “Starting late causes serious problems and needs to be addressed.”
• Do not say:

  – You are not being clear. (Accusatory)
  – I am not following you. (Makes you the subject)

• Instead put the emphasis where it should be

  • Please clarify this point
  • That last point is not clear to me.

Ask yourself what you are really talking about, and make that the subject!
Avoid Hints and vague waffle … use SPECIFIC words

• Avoid
  – I really wish you would...
  – I’d like to have something like...

• Replace with
  – Will you...
  – I want ___ by ___ because ___.

Avoid

Use SPECIFIC words
Avoid Emotional waffle … use INFORMATION and ACTION based words

• Avoid
  – I don’t like this idea of yours
  – I am angry about this delay from you

• Replace with
  – There are three serious problems with this idea.
  – First...
  – How do you plan to get back on schedule after this delay?
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<tr>
<th>Focus on the service not the person</th>
<th>Specific improvements on performance or behaviour you would like to give feedback on…</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>performance</td>
<td>could be enhanced by…</td>
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<td>impact</td>
<td>possibly will be improved if…</td>
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<td>outputs</td>
<td>can be Sharpened/ honed up…</td>
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<tr>
<td>relationships</td>
<td>should be better/bettered through if you consider…</td>
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<tr>
<td>outcomes</td>
<td>might become more superior if you consider…</td>
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<tr>
<td>results</td>
<td>ought to be more healthier by thinking…</td>
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<td>may be changed by trying…</td>
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Final Activity

• Non verbal signals, posture and demeanour can influence the way we are perceived, but also ...

http://www.ted.com/talks/amy_cuddy_your_body_language_shapes_who_you_are?language=en