



Understanding the Non-Assertive Personality

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Understanding the Non-Assertive Personality

Assertiveness is the target for professional communication: standing up for your own rights while respecting the rights of others. Assertiveness is challenging and even potentially threatening to someone who is not as confident of who has learned to win with manipulation.



Where do you tend to fall on the passive to aggressive continuum?

Signs of a Non-Assertive Personality

Indecisiveness, giving in, letting others choose, victimization, resignation, inhibition, being walked on.

- Weak eye contact; looking down or away.
- Fidgeting and shifting of weight from one foot to the other.
- Whining or hesitation when speaking.
- Martyrdom, Self-Pity, Veiled Hostility.

EXAMPLES OF NON-ASSERTIVE BEHAVIOR

Avoids Commitment or Gets Paralyzed at a Crossroads

- “Yes,” “Maybe,” “I don’t know,” “I don’t care.”
- Analysis paralysis, changing mind.

Agrees, Brokers Peace

- “That’s a good idea.”
- “If she agrees to this, will you do what she wants?”

Self Corrects or Accepts Criticism

- “I shouldn’t have said that.”
- “I know I could be quicker.”

Seeks Approval Before Taking Action

- “What do you think Ana wants?”
- “I wanted to check with you first...”

Stays Stuck in the Comfort Zone

- “I’m ok; I don’t need a promotion.”

Avoids Confrontation or Bottles Emotions

- “Let’s not talk about that now.”
- “I’m fine; it doesn’t bother me.”

Leaves It to Chance or Goes with the Flow

- “Let’s just see how it goes.”
- “Whatever happens, I’ll be fine.”

Mirrors the Personalities of Others

- Words, tone, nonverbals.

Defers to Others or Puts Them First

- “Whatever you want...”
- “I don’t need a ticket; you go.”

WHERE DOES NON-ASSERTIVE BEHAVIOR COME FROM?

Roots of the Non-Assertive Personality

- Low Self-Esteem and Self-Confidence
- Roles
- Past Experience
- Stress
- Social Anxiety

Who Tends to Have Non-Assertive Tendencies?

- Followers
- Nice People
- Introverts
- Risk Averse
- Societal Role Fitters

Responding Effectively in NON-ASSERTIVE Situations

“Listening” Skills for Uncovering the Real Message

Non-Assertiveness can be benign. There may not be any hidden agenda. Sometimes non-assertive personalities are holding back an underlying desire to express something.

The key to handling non-assertive behavior is to look behind the non-assertiveness to uncover and coax out the real message.

•**Words**—Words that indicate an unexpressed opinion or need.

Expressions of regret: “If only,” “I wish,” or “is it too late?”

Non-communication phrases: “I don’t know.” “I don’t care.” or “Nothing.”

•**Tone**—Upward “questioning” inflection, sighing, trailing off, or mumbling under the breath.

•**Nonverbals**—Fidgeting, looking away, sunken shoulders, dismissive gestures.

•**Behaviors**—Bringing up the issue after it is already “closed.” Wanting the scoop. Showing up even though they don’t need anything.

STRATEGIC ANALYSIS TOOL

Issue	Stakes	Goals	Indicators	Words	Tone	Non-verbals	Feelings	Outcomes?

What is the issue, and what is at stake?

What is their goal in the interaction? What is your goal?

What is under the surface?

Is it a win-win or win-lose proposition?

What words indicate conciliation?

Is there a “tell” in their tone?

Do their nonverbals contain a “hint”?

How do they feel about it?

What are the potential outcomes?

What is their payoff?

What tactics should you use?

Create an Environment of Psychological Safety

- Respect and appreciate (Adult to Adult)
- Lower the intensity; allow time
- Uncover hidden concerns
- Ask clear, specific questions
- Give them an “out”
- Pre-call and preview
- Be radically inclusive
- Provide structure and accountability
- Ask, “What happened” not “Who did it?”
- Use “Liked Best, Next Time” feedback

Frame Communication to Promote Sharing

Make Honesty Safe:

- Acknowledgment and Empathy
- Options and Information
- Sameness and Fairness
- Perspective

Confront Issues Hypothetically

“What would you say to someone who said...”

Focus in the Present and on the Solution

Separate the Person from the Problem

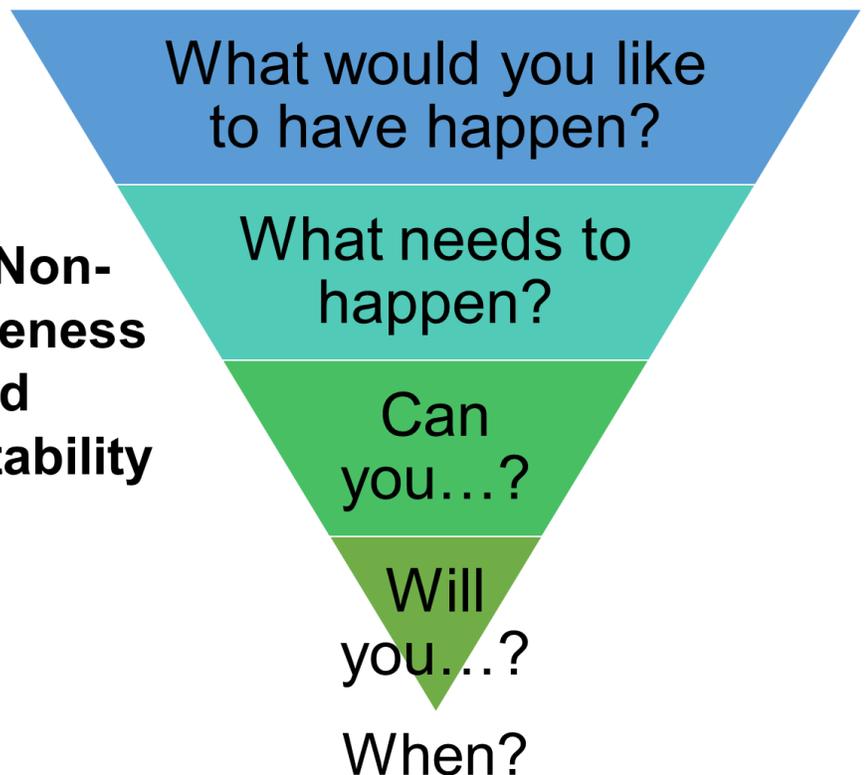
• Positive intent: “I’m sure you didn’t mean...” “I understand you were just trying to...”

• Impact: “What if I do it? What if I don’t?”

• Consequences: “What’s the worst thing that could happen?”

• Commitment: “I assume your silence means...”

Retrain Non-Assertiveness with Kind Accountability



Assertiveness Rights and Responsibilities

The idea of Human Rights originated as a political concept, but if we define aggressive behavior as violating others' rights and passive behavior as violating your own rights, then assertiveness carries with it some maxims of mutually respecting each other.

Individuals may have personal or cultural variations, but popular lists of assertive rights tend to include the right to:

- Personal freedom to be myself
- Express feelings, opinions, values and beliefs
- Make decisions
- Ask for what I want
- Ask questions
- Change my mind
- Disagree with others (even if they are above me)
- Take the time I need to respond
- Offer no reasons or excuses
- Make mistakes
- Make my own decisions and handle the consequences
- Say "I don't know," "I don't understand," and "no" without feeling bad or guilty
- Be non-assertive and still respected and not taken for granted
- Feel all of my emotions and express them appropriately
- My actions, my life, and my privacy

We are responsible for balancing our rights against the needs of others who are also entitled to the same rights.

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