

## EVERYONE CAN WIN audio script edition

### SKILL 4. Appropriate assertiveness

Podcast time codes:

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3:56	Assertive checklist
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**Need something to change?**

**Say what you will do. Say what you won't do.**

**But don't put them out of your heart.**

This is Appropriate Assertiveness. It's skill number 4 from the book, *Everyone Can Win*, about handling conflict constructively. Appropriate Assertiveness is a careful balance between respect for yourself and respect for the other person.

#

We all have the right to ask for our needs to be met. We won't always get what we want, but it's absolutely fine to raise it. Assertiveness is being skilled in how to express our needs, feelings and perspectives, and do so proactively, not reactively. So let's do it.

You'll know it's worked when you have respected yourself enough to express how it is for you and you've been respectful of the other person. 'Assertive' is not passive, and it's not aggressive. You'll know you *haven't been* assertive if afterwards you say to yourself, '*If only I'd said...*' or '*I wish I hadn't ...*'

Of course, sometimes there will be issues where it's safer, wiser or best to leave alone. Clearly deciding that it's just not appropriate at this time is part of assertiveness. However, if you're *always* saying: 'Better not. It's not wise,' or 'It's not safe' you're probably *avoiding*. Perhaps you're scared of making things worse, or anxious about damaging the relationship. Upgrading your skills of appropriate assertiveness can really help.

### **So, assertiveness: Time to think about your personal history?**

- As a child, did you have to fight for your rights with quarrelsome brothers or sisters?
- Perhaps you learnt that demanding louder or longer got you your way?
- Were you criticised or ridiculed for speaking up?
- Were you told not to feel what you felt?
- Maybe you learnt that you shouldn't have personal needs, because it upset a delicate balance in your family?

### **And now ...?**

- Are you silent on what you want or how you deserve to be treated?
- Do you avoid raising issues because you don't know how to say things well?
- Uncomfortable setting limits on other people? For example, in their use of your time. Do you do too much yourself because it feels too hard to delegate?
- Or perhaps you're the opposite: do you lay down the law just fine, then find others react badly?

When we feel threatened, adrenaline launches us into fight, flight or freeze. We'll attack, defend or withdraw, all in order to stay safe. We need to shift our state: centre – mentally, emotionally and physically; take charge of our emotions; and move to clear thinking and calm action. We want to be *responsive, not reactive*.

Assertiveness is not an impulse. It takes planning, because we also want to invoke a response, not a reaction from the other person. Our aim? To honour our needs and our viewpoints, and make the situation better, not worse.

## HERE'S A CHECKLIST

- Respect yourself
- Respect the rights and needs of others.
- Say how it is for you, not how it is for the other person. Let them speak for themselves.
- Respond early to clues that something needs addressing.
- Aim to create a constructive conversation.

There isn't a guarantee that you'll get what you want. So try to *let go* of demanding a *particular* outcome, just state your needs. Examine what need of yours you want to have met and then be open to a number of ways of achieving that.

### What's your intention?

Is it without blame? Are you centred? Are you using a collaborative approach? Most importantly, are you making your assertive statement with underlying goodwill?

You're after a successful two-way communication. Having told them how things stand for you, you'll want to know what they think. Find the opportunity to switch from talking to listening. Inquire about their needs, listen, check your understanding, implying: 'I want to be satisfied and I want you to be satisfied too.'

You want to make space for them to say 'no' without damaging the relationship. So avoid telling them what they should do. If you have to clarify your limits, it's best done well before resentment or stress boils over. Say 'no' or set your boundary politely, but firmly. They may not see their behaviour as a problem at all. So you may have to stand your ground.

Sometimes it helps to be clear also about what you are *not* saying. Like, '*I'm not saying you're a bad mum!*' '*I'm not saying you don't have the right. I'm just hoping that in this situation ...*'

We have the problem, we want change.

While we're using assertiveness appropriately, we'll want

### **PROACTIVE rather than REACTIVE language.**

We're careful about *how* we address the issues we are raising. We are monitoring what we're saying before we speak out. Even in the heat of the moment we make sure we sound respectful. We make it hard for others to challenge what we say, because

we're talking about our needs – and we're entitled to those. Also, we're steering the conversation towards the positive. With these principles in mind, we might want to *reframe* what we were about to say.

When we're asking for a change, we don't want them defensive. So before it pops out all wrong, think of a better way to say it.

- Instead of **blaming**, just say your side: 'I need the information on time'.
- Don't **generalise**. Weed out 'always', 'never' or 'you keep on doing...'
- And by the way, you can't assume you know their attitudes or motives. *You don't know they ignored you*. You do know you want to feel heard.
- Find neutral descriptions. No one likes being judged.
- Don't blame people for what they can't change. Focus on what they can.

Your assertive statement invites them to respond. Invites them into a positive conversation.

So, stick to neutral specific facts. Where, when, what did you actually see, not what you interpreted. There's no value in triggering their opposition. If they're not defensive, they're more likely to listen. Deliver a **clean** statement with no hidden judgements. And be **clear**:

- You might be thinking: '*This report is totally unprofessional!*' But pause and find a neutral description instead. Perhaps: '*This report has no charts or statistics.*'
- Not '*Your report is too long!*', perhaps suggest: '*Could you get all the key facts into the first two pages?*'

And hey! You shouldn't be long-winded either! You want them to remember what you said later and not lose the point.

So hang onto this rule when you need to be assertive. What you say should be:

## *Clean, clear, and concise!*

And there's more:

### **Reframe your demands into an invitation.**

- So: *'You'll have to ...'* or *'You should!'* or *'Stop being a pest!'* can be switched to: *'How would it be if ...'* or *'Would you be able to ...'* *'find something else to do until I'm finished?'* Then check that out with them.
- Say what you *can* do, rather than what you *can't*. Like, *'I can't see you now!'* try, *'I can see you at 3pm. Will that work for you?'* Switch your grumpy *negative* to a calmer *positive* wherever you can.

### **Include the objection rather than oppose with it.**

- For example: *'You can't do that; John would be offended.'* could be said as *'What do you think we can do that won't offend John?'*  
Or *'That's a great idea, but it is too expensive,'* becomes, *'I like that idea **and** I wonder about the expense.'*

### **Include the other person's point of view**

- in what you're contemplating together, especially when it appears quite opposite to your own. It's a factor to be working *with*, rather than against. 'AND' not 'BUT' is a useful rule of thumb. Then allow discussion so that a totally new option has a chance to emerge – one that better addresses all the issues involved. When we dictate solutions it ultimately backfires.

### **Can we turn the problem into a positive opportunity?**

- *'This storage is terrible,'* becomes *'Let's design a better storage system.'* Reframing it as a creative challenge transforms it into something you can work on together. It's proactive.

### **Discuss the future, not the past.**

- Not *'I've told you a thousand times ...'* Instead: *'From now on ...'* Work towards changes in the future, rather than hammering past mistakes.

So, to reframe your assertive conversation, you want it clean and clear and reasonably concise. You include all the factors, not just the ones that suit your case, and you offer an invitation to future change. At first, you'll have to think hard before you speak, but after a while these principles will flow naturally.

### **Act early on DISCOMFORTS**

If a situation is making you uncomfortable, pay attention, don't just push it aside.

Trust your intuition. How and where could you begin to address the issue?

Set the scene for a good conversation. For example:

- *'Is there anything we need to discuss before the meeting so that it will all flow smoothly?'*
- *'I know I've agreed to the plan, but it doesn't sit well with me. I think I need to re-negotiate.'*

Such statements sound simple, but they do take a bit of thought beforehand. On the surface they hardly seem assertive, but a prompt proactive response to a niggling concern will avoid bigger problems down the track.

### **Value your own personal opinions, and be willing to share them.**

Assertive people make it safe for everyone, including themselves, to add to the pool of shared meaning. They value each person's unique perspective, including their own. So if they're seeing it differently, they may well speak up. Even when the other person is pushing their point hard, they'll *add* their own. They do it respectfully, quite aware that everyone is contributing to the whole. They might start it off with: *'Here's what I think ...'* or *'I am concerned by...'* or *'I respect/appreciate your view that...and the way I see it is...'* Then they get feedback and encourage the conversation to continue. If they do it well, the other person will often soften or broaden their outlook – at least a bit.

Of course, sometimes silence will be the best communication – not agreeing but not actually voicing your disagreement. Silence sometimes speaks more effectively than words... Just don't overdo it.

When you need to change someone's behaviour or when one of you is defensive or angry, you will need to speak up.

**There's a handy formula called  
AN 'I' STATEMENT.**

It sets you up with a structure for how to say things respectfully. An 'I' statement tells the other person how *you* are affected by the situation. A good 'I' statement won't blame or *demand* change. It's an objective news report on your internal state of affairs. It names the behaviour or event, the resulting problem, how you feel and how you'd like it to be. 'I' statements help you to hold your ground. Use them when you need to raise difficulties that are affecting you personally.

**So, with an 'I' statement you own your own feelings.** You give yourself the right to feel as you do without *blaming others for how you feel*. You don't want their outright rejection of what you're saying. The format minimises the other person's defensiveness, but if you hear back something like: '*You shouldn't feel like that,*' or '*You're stupid to be upset,*' confirm that *you're not blaming them*. Taking responsibility for your feelings, keeps you on target.

But be careful. There are plenty of ways we put things in English that can trip us up. We'll say:

**'She hurt my feelings.'** Can you hear the blame?

- Your 'I' statement reframe goes something like: '*I am feeling hurt.*'

**Or 'He drives me mad.'** Again, reeks of blame!

- Own your feelings with, '*I get mad when...*'

**'You're not listening'** You don't know that they're not, but you do know:

- '*I need to feel I'm heard.*'

In some circumstances, you may not want to talk about your feelings. Say in business, it's often better to stick to facts and sound calm. So: don't even imply blame.

**'You're off track' could be ...**

- '*Could you connect that to the topic for me?*'

## ***You've overcharged me'***

- *'I think this charge is more than we agreed.'*

An 'I' statement is an opener to a conversation on the problem. Don't expect it to fix the problem immediately. But when it is appropriate to discuss it, it's a good beginning.

You might need to work it up beforehand. It isn't always easy to extract all blame. As we've been discussing, it's ingrained in how we speak to each other.

When you recognise that demands will trigger resistance in the other person, you just say what's true for you. You don't *demand* change, but you do want them to pay attention. So you won't always be soft or nice as you deliver it. Just hold your intention: to start a constructive conversation on the problem.

Learn the principles and get those right. Once you're familiar with the 'I' statement format, you'll probably let the structure go. It's like a recipe, mixing cooking ingredients. Start with a guide, so the result will be palatable.

There are five ingredients:

1. **The action...** that is ...      What happened?
2. **My response...**      How is it affecting me?
3. **My preferred outcome is ...**      How would I like it to be for me?
4. **A constructive consequence...**      What is the benefit?
5. **An invitation to respond, followed by active listening.**

You won't always use all five of these ingredients, just one or two may be enough.

You may change their order or sprinkle them through a conversation.

You'll find a written summary of 'I' Statements in the notes for this audio on the Conflict Resolution Network website. Here's how they work:

### **Firstly, The Action**

It's a **specific and objective description** of the action or situation that's causing you the problem. It's *specific* because you don't use generalisations. It's *objective*, because you don't use *blaming* words to describe the issue. It's a *factual* description of what happened, rather than your interpretation. It can serve the other person if they



didn't understand what they were doing, or how it affected you. For example, they may simply have meant to emphasise something, while you are cringing from them shouting at you.

Here are some ways you might rephrase your statement to reduce the chances of the other person becoming defensive, rising to the bait:

**'When you leave me out of things...' is bait. Change it to ...**

- *'When I'm not included in planning...'*

**And 'When you accuse me...' becomes...**

- *'When you say I did that...(whatever it was)'*

When we are angry with someone it's quite a challenge to describe their behaviour objectively. So ..., if they leave their junk all over my desk, the problem for me is that my papers get mixed up with theirs. If they keep interrupting me, my problem is that I can't finish what I'm doing. That's your personal objective description.

If you're having trouble, start at least by owning it, *'When it seems to me...'*

*'When you rant and rave at me ...'* could become *'When it seems to me that you are repeating your point loudly ...'*

**The second ingredient in the 'I' statement recipe is 'My Response'**

People don't always know how you are affected unless you tell them. They can underestimate how hurt, angry or put out you are. It's no good saying 'they ought to know'. They *don't* necessarily.

But when you explain how the issue has impacted you, they will usually reconsider their behaviour. They may even apologise – so long as you have not attacked them in the process.

Your response might be either:

**An emotion:** *'I feel hurt/angry/helpless/resentful or guilty.'*

OR

**An action:** *'I withdraw'; 'I lose my train of thought.'*  
*'I scream at you.'*

OR your response might even be:

**Your impulse:**

**What you feel like doing:** *'I feel like ignoring you'; 'I want to walk out.'*

*'I wish I could give up.'*

Beware of statements like *'I feel that ...you don't care about me.'* People may react badly and may feel manipulated! Why? *'I feel that ...you don't care about me'* is actually a 'you' statement, thinly disguised as an 'I' statement. It's your *interpretation* of them. Your response is only about *you*. Get into your own space and report how it is inside you. When I think someone doesn't care about me, I actually feel alienated and disconnected from them. And rather alone, even lonely. I'd do better to report one of those feelings.

It depends on the situation whether you describe your response in terms of how you feel, what you do or what you feel like doing. With a family member it is important to share how you feel. That's intimacy. In a work situation however, you might not want to tell your manager or colleagues about your feelings. It may be culturally inappropriate. But it might be acceptable to describe the impact on your situation or your job.

We're still preparing those 'I' statement ingredients. We've laid out 'The Action' and 'Your Response'. Now for ingredient no. 3:

### **My Preferred Outcome.**

That's not the solution. 'I' statements don't tell about solutions. They tell about your preferred internal climate. At this point in your statement you say what conditions *you* would like to have or what you'd like to be able to do. For example: *'I need **more help** with the cleaning up'* rather than *'I'd like **you to help me** with the cleaning up.'* That's a "you-should-solution". It invites resistance, the very thing you're trying to avoid.

Your 'I' statement invites the other person to join in coming up with solutions. So, you too have to open up to possibilities. Otherwise they won't feel free to choose.

In fact, there are several ways to get more help with cleaning up: one family member helps per night, or you all eat out more often, you might make a roster. **Or maybe** the person you are talking to does volunteer themselves. Give them the space to consider who could contribute and how.

The 4<sup>th</sup>, ingredient is a

### **Constructive Consequence.**

It's optional, but it often helps to sell the **benefit of a change**. So make it attractive.

- *'That way I won't be feeling so tired and cranky each night.'* or
- *'That way our team can be more effective.'*

Lastly, ingredient number 5:

### **An Invitation to Respond**

**Always** include this one. Remember, your 'I' statement is just an opener, so it needs to **invite** a two-way conversation. You'll finish with:

- *'How would that be for you?'* or
- *'Is that OK with you?'* or
- *'Perhaps that's not what you intended?'*

Sometimes you include a recipe variation. You might want to

**Add your reasons ... *the because* ... *why it's a problem*.**

*'...because...I wake up and can't get back to sleep', or '...because... I waste time looking for the papers I need.'* *'...because I may not have the time to read the whole report.'*

Beware, *'I get annoyed because I shouldn't have to do all the cleaning'*. Or *'I shouldn't have to wade through 30 pages to get the point'* That's not really a 'because', it's a judgement. Actually, it's a moral lecture.

**OK! Those key principles you want to absorb:**

**An 'I' statement is an opener, not a resolver.** The best 'I' statement is free of expectations. It delivers a clean, clear statement of *your* side of things and how you'd like it to be **for you**. Then you need to really listen to what the other person has to say. Perhaps you'll follow on with another 'I' statement, or part of one. You're giving and getting the information you both need to develop options together.

Phew! That's a lot to take in!

Let me tell you how Maria used this in her family.

#

## MARIA

Maria had recently married. She and her husband, John were both in their 40s, and this was a second marriage for both of them. Before the marriage, Maria had been living with her ageing mother, who was now alone.

Now back from their honeymoon, Maria and John were putting a lot of energy into renovating their new home and enjoying their relationship. That meant Maria was spending a lot less time with her mother.

Then - just when she really didn't want to have her new life pressured - her mother broke her arm and became very needy.

Maria's Italian upbringing stressed strong family values, but her brothers and sisters were getting on with their own lives and her relationship with their mother had always been rather special.

She felt very conflicted and asked John what to do. She told him all about the issues for her siblings: "Vince and his family live too far away. Franco is in America. Angela has three young children and lots of problems. And Liliana has just got a job and she needs the money - with that lazy her husband of hers." She thought it was pointless asking **any** of them.

John talked her through her own options. Should Maria drop everything for her mother and they put the renovations aside for a while? Maybe they could pay someone to look after her mother (which they could hardly afford). Could she put some pressure on her brothers and sisters who ought to share this responsibility?

Finally, he suggested she could just discuss the situation with each of them without asking anything of them. Just listen and acknowledge their problems and stresses. And leave them to think about what they could **all** can do to help their Mum right now.

Maria told us how she contacted her brothers and sisters, even Franco in America. She started each conversation with her prepared 'I' statement: 'I'm worried that I won't be able to give mum all the support she needs.' She went on to explain the situation and, as expected they told her all about how hard it was for them right now. But she listened, though she felt a bit 'dumped on' and defeated after all the calls. She told John: 'Oh well, at least I tried.'

But within the next few days each member of Maria's family offered to do **something**. Vince promised to phone each weekend. Angela offered to call in on their mother in the early afternoons before she picked up the kids and bring in a bit of shopping. Liliana offered to take over some prepared meals. And her so-called 'lazy' husband was willing to transport Mum to hospital for her treatments (he was a taxi-driver, after all). Even Franco in America helped. He sent some money for a housekeeping service.

Maria wasn't sure what had made the change until later, when Angela commented to her, 'I felt like doing something this time because you seemed to care about me. This time you weren't judging my lifestyle - unlike the others! I felt needed and included in the family and what we all had to work out.'

Maria's 'I' statement had been an opener. She didn't know what would happen, but the response, she said, was more positive and more far-reaching than she had been hoping for.

**Check your intent.** If your assertive communication is not well received, check and perhaps state, your intent. You might say: *'I just want us to fix this so we can' .... 'really enjoy our night out.'* Generally, it's best to come clean about your underlying motivations.

If you think the 'I' statement formula is going to make you sound stilted, just use your own words, keeping the principles in mind. You are *not forcing* them to fix things, and you're *not imposing* your values or opinions. You are just letting them know, to improve the relationship or the job. You can't predict how the other person will take your communication, so just focus on your intent. And make very sure it's not to humiliate, or intimidate. Remember:

***For things to change, first I must change.***

Even when you're furious, take a second to **refresh your underlying goodwill** towards the other person. It's going to show up in your tone of voice.

**Sometimes the most important person you are developing your 'I' statement for is yourself!** It's a way to examine what the problem behaviour really is – putting any judgements about the other person to one side. You might realise that the problem isn't really their behaviour– it's your reaction. That could mean that there's something quite different that you'd now prefer to say. Instead of being annoyed and expecting them to fix it, you're now looking squarely at your own need and what else you can do about it. As long as we're waiting for others to change, we're not taking charge of our lives.

**Also don't expect to solve the problem straight away.** The other person may not respond immediately or with the answer you'd like. You have placed your issue on the table. Maybe there *is* no answer, but at least you're clear with each other. Relationships grow cold in a climate of undelivered communications.

Sometimes it's best to stop pushing and warm up the empathy climate a little. It may need something like: *'I've said my piece. We both want the relationship to work, so let's agree to differ on this.'*

**'I' statements do take practice.** You can work them up just for yourself. It can be fun and very enlightening. The key to good 'I' statements is to make them so

often that they become second nature. If you couldn't quite get your 'I' statement out of your mouth or it didn't come out right, make another opportunity.

### **Here's some examples:**

To your manager who's not giving you enough feedback.

- *'When I don't get your opinion on how I am tackling the project, I feel unsure about what to do next. I'd value some feedback so that I know if I'm going in the right direction or if I need to make some adjustments.'*

What about children who are too slow getting ready in the mornings:

- *'When I have to leave for work at 8.30 and you're not ready, I get really frustrated. I'd like us to work out ways to be more organised. That way we'll start our day better and I won't get cranky. Can we talk about it?'*

Alright, if you have the right to ask for your needs to be met, you need to give others the same right too, but what if you want to:

### **REFUSE THEIR REQUEST?**

It can be difficult to turn someone down, but that's better than saying 'yes' and then being resentful or not actually doing it. That's not assertive. Know your limits and speak up for them. So, if you need to turn someone down, apologise briefly and give an honest *reason*, not just an *excuse*.

Here's an honest refusal to a dinner invitation:

*'I'd love to have dinner with you and tonight I desperately need some quiet time to myself. Could we make it another night?'*

When you have too many demands on you, don't snap, don't grumble, just explain briefly why you can't do it.

*'I'd like to be able to do that. At the moment I have too many things on my plate, so I can't do it now.'*

Possibly check the deadline with them – *'When do you need it done by?'* Or perhaps offer a "can-do" alternative: *'What I can or am willing to do is....'*



At times people might ask you to do things that just don't sit well with you ethically, or where you are not negotiable, not willing or not interested.

### **THERE ARE TIMES WHEN YOU'LL HAVE TO SAY A VERY FIRM 'NO.'**

It's a moment to be: *Clear and precise, firm, not furious.*

*'NO.'* or *'No, I am not willing to do that.'*

If 'no' is not sufficient, give the reason, but don't ramble on.

*'No, I don't want to move my office. I need to be near the accounts department.'*

If the person persists, just repeat your refusal – like a 'broken record'.

*'No, I don't want to do that.'*

*'No, I'm not able to....'*

*'No, I intend to stay where I am.'*

#

There will be times when your carefully worded *invitational* 'I' statements appear to fall on deaf ears. Hard-line situations call for a tougher approach. You may need to use your power to invoke a

### **CONSEQUENCE CONFRONTATION.**

If you're a manager, you have the authority to dismiss the employee. If you're a parent, you can ban all devices for a while if your child continues to misbehave. Even if you are not in a direct power relationship, you have the ability to initiate some consequences if the unwelcome behaviour warrants it: you can decide to leave the room, end a relationship or make a formal complaint.

When you are contemplating a major consequence, it's usually best to give a warning first. Confront the person and let them know what will happen if things don't change. It's still up to them. Your intention is to inform, not enforce.

It goes like this: give an objective description of the problem behaviour and talk about *why* it's such an issue. Go on to describe the change you need. Don't ask for the impossible. The person should be capable of making this change. Then for your consequence confrontation tell them what will happen if the change doesn't

occur. It's not a threat, it's a result – the inevitable outcome if the other person doesn't contribute to solving the problem.

Examples?

To a young teenage son:

- *'When you came home from the party way past your deadline, I was worried sick. I was contemplating calling the police. From now on I really need you to be home on time or at least phone in. If this happens again, I will collect you from all future parties at 11 pm until I think you've matured enough to take the responsibility and respect my concern.'*

To a team member:

- *'When you are late for meetings, we have to repeat information we've already covered to help you catch up. There are some sarcastic comments flying around and I don't want my team talking that way. I also don't want them thinking that lateness is okay. Unless there is a major crisis, I need you to be on time for all future meetings. If you can't commit to that, I'll have to remove you from this project, so you're not expected at those meetings at all.'*

**The last part of any consequence confrontation is that immediately you switch to reflective listening ...** Perhaps with: *'Can you commit to that?'* or *'How are you feeling about that?'* You may hear an apology, justification or the person may be upset or angry. Without putting them out of your heart or being vindictive, you may need to tell them again the consequence they're facing. It's the required cost of their unwillingness to adapt their behaviour.

Consequence confrontations are 'big' moments in the relationship. You only make them to avoid a bigger crisis.

Of course, you might offer a *carrot* before you resort to the *stick*. In other words, offer the person a *positive* consequence if they *are* willing to change. It's certainly gentler.

**'If you come home on time from the next three parties, then** we can extend your deadline by an hour.'

**'If you prove to me you will get your reports in on time, then I'll consider you for team leader.'**

*'If you tell me when something I've done is upsetting you, then I promise I will talk it through with you, without shouting or storming off.'*

#

Say, you've delivered your perfect 'I' statement and you've released a **PERFECT STORM.**

It happens! Your perfect 'I' statement is not a guarantee that you'll be well received. Say it didn't go as planned and now the other person is shouting at you, perhaps swearing. Perhaps they are questioning your judgement, nagging, inferring you are lying or describing your actions rudely. You might love to say: *'Don't you dare say that to me!' 'Don't call me an idiot - you're the one who is an idiot!'* It's satisfying in the moment, but it's not smart to retaliate like that. It certainly won't calm them. In fact, you've probably escalated the problem.

You need to pull out more tools from your toolkit of skills. Assertive people know how to switch them around. They flow with the situation and respond to its needs at that moment. Remember, while the other person is inflamed, they can't hear you. They want you to hear them! You'll need those empathy skills we've discussed in episode 3 of really listening, particularly while they're so angry. It will help them calm down. Then grab for win-win again as we discussed in episode 1. Stay on their side as well as your own. Include their perspective in whatever you say next, rather than demolishing them. Keep heading toward positive change. This situation demands you turn crisis into opportunity. Transform this into a perfect storm.

If they continue to block you at every turn, perhaps a touch more of assertiveness is needed.

**Consider educating them on some imminent consequences.**

*'If you want my help, I need to be allowed to finish what I am explaining to you.'*

If they are

### **Questioning your judgement**

They might say: *'You can't really believe that!'*

You respond: *'Yes, I do believe that.'*

Sidestep the insinuation. You're entitled to your beliefs.

### **OR if they're implying that you are lying**

They could say: *'Oh come on, you know that's not how it happened!'*

You say: *'That is how it appeared to me. Did I miss something? How do you see it?'*

Assert that that's *your* experience, but listen to their perspective too.

### **If they're nagging**

investigate the legitimate need underneath and respond to that. Take the emotion out of your voice and say: *'Why are you repeating that?'* If they've got a deadline, tell them yours and ask how that will be for them.

### **Perhaps they're being very rude about something you did wrong.**

They say: *'You were completely irresponsible not to let me know!'*

Your response: *'I accept that it was a mistake not to let you know.'*

Acknowledge your own errors, take responsibility for the facts, and don't grovel!

*'I learnt that it didn't work. I'll do it differently next time.'*

Focus on learning for the future, and exploring options. Perhaps you might need to apologise for the impact of your error.

Or if they tell you: *'You're incompetent!'*

You might respond: *'What specifically has happened?'*

Get precise on the issue they've taken exception to. Or if they're missing crucial information to round out their picture, you might need to inform them. A made-up excuse won't work. Fill them in with the truth.

So, when they're being aggressive, whether it's out in the open or hidden in their words: know when to stop and really listen, get clear on the specifics or their actual

need, add missing information, and apologise where necessary. Stick with win-win, and include their objections. And focus on the future and positive change.

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## **HERE'S THE SUMMARY OF THIS SESSION ON ASSERTIVENESS**

- Start off by getting centred. Stay connected and respectful. Take a moment to refresh your underlying goodwill. Don't put the other person out of your heart.
- Be proactive, not reactive. So, address discomforts and issues before they escalate.
- Speak up from your perspective when you disagree. You are adding your view to make the whole picture.
- Say how it is for *you*, not what the other person ought to do. You are *not forcing* them to fix things, and you're *not imposing* your values or opinions.
- Practise clean, clear and concise 'I' statements.
- Invite replies in a way that helps others to respond, not react too.
- Whenever you must refuse, be clear and precise, firm not furious.
- When they're being aggressive, pull out all your conflict resolution skills: listen, include rather than dismiss their objections and keep moving the conversation towards positive change.
- Assertiveness is about respecting yourself and improving the situation. It's not about proving you're right.

If you'd like more details on all of this, have a look at our website, at Conflict Resolution Network. Our headquarters are at [crnhq.org](http://crnhq.org). You can download a transcript and explore extra study notes on 'I' statements. There's a free manual for trainers there too.

Being assertive appropriately is not about using our power over the other person. It's about us sharing power with them. There's a lot more to say on this. So join me for our next skill, number 5, Cooperative power.