

Fact Sheet

Assertive Communication in the Workplace

For the webinar associated with this fact sheet, visit <https://youtu.be/fBod4zH8MRY>

Effective communication is so important in business, whether you're an employer or an employee. It helps us to relate to our colleagues, translate information efficiently, and foster positive culture and innovation. Your communication style essentially means the way you interact with others, whether it's your words chosen, the way you're acting, or the way you're reacting to others.

Here is some information on the four communication styles, and how they serve 1) your needs, and 2) the needs of the person you're communicating with.

1. Passive communication

When you're communicating in a passive way, you might notice yourself or another person blending into the background a bit, rarely saying no to things, working beyond personal limits, or apologising for things not yet done. You might also notice some indications in your or another person's body language, for example avoidance of eye contact or poor posture. This means you're essentially 1) not expressing your own needs, whilst often at the same time 2) prioritising the needs of another person. Over time, this can mean that people get resentful in the workplace and burnt out quite quickly.

2. Aggressive communication

When you're communicating in an aggressive way, you might notice yourself or someone else speaking overly loudly, interrupting others, or invading their personal space. Body language indications might be excessive use of hand gestures, using an overbearing posture, or maintaining intense eye contact. This style is also ineffective because whilst it does allow you to express your needs, you're doing it in a confronting way and often not considering the needs of the other person. You might feel as if you've gotten something off your chest, but they might feel anxious or upset, which can impede their comfort and productivity in the workplace.

3. Passive-aggressive communication

Passive-aggression, or passive-aggressive communication is characterised by appearing passive or quiet on the surface whilst showing aggressive motivations. For example someone might sound like they're agreeable to a particular task or plan but their actions don't align with this. They might mutter things, roll their eyes, use sarcasm, or give someone the silent treatment. This style of communication essentially means you're not meeting the needs of you OR the other person, and can be very frustrating for all involved.

4. Assertive communication

Assertive communication is the most effective style because it allows you to 1) express your needs whilst 2) considering the needs of the other person. This means you can get things off your chest as you need to, but in a productive way, and with respect to your colleague. Examples of assertive communication might be keeping boundaries at work and saying no when you need to, raising a mistake with an employee whilst acknowledging that this may not have been their intention, encouraging others to speak to you about their concerns and informing them that you'll take feedback on board.

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Body language is also quite different and could involve friendly eye contact, a clear voice, expansive gestures, and good posture.

Some people tend to feel quite uncomfortable about being assertive and worry that expressing their opinions or concerns, or saying no, might be perceived as negative by their employer. If you're an employer yourself, it might be worth communicating this to your employees and reminding them that it is okay to do these things and they won't be reprimanded for it. You can also model this to other employees in the workplace, as this will likely have a huge effect on the efficiency, culture, and innovation of your business.

Remember: assertiveness is NOT aggressiveness!

What do I do now?

- Consider providing your staff with some education on the above communication styles and model assertive communication

Need help? Contact Pinnacle People Solutions for tailored advice and support for your business by email to admin@pinnaclepeoplesolutions.com.au or call 1300 856 231

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