

Recognize This Woman?

You know her: The woman who wears high heels so she can stand taller and look down on the staff in a menacing manner. The woman who violates personal space. The woman who talks nonstop or with a tone that brooks no difference of opinion.

Sarcastic or deadly quiet, she controls the room and sucks the life out of everyone around her.

She also is losing business.

Recognize her? Possibly recognize yourself?

The goal of professional communication is assertiveness, not aggressiveness. Assertive behavior means speaking up for yourself without diminishing someone else's rights. You are able to convey appropriate self-interest while maintaining integrity and respect for the other person.

When you are aggressive, you express yourself at the expense of others. You diminish someone else's rights by behaving in a selfish or controlling manner.

If you are a woman who has moved down the assertiveness continuum toward being a world-class witch, it's time to take a step back. How likely are you to get what you want if people run from the room or get out the garlic pouches?

What kicks you into overdrive? Two aspects of your background mold your daily work habits – your belief systems and gender. What did you learn as a child? Perhaps it was easier to get what you wanted from mom if you threw a fit and bullied your siblings. Or perhaps as a girl, you were raised to serve others and be nice, so you are trying to systematically wipe out all of these tendencies.

Consciously or not, you have made a decision that being aggressive is the only way to get what you want. Nonsense! Here are some tips for adopting a more appropriate – and effective – style:

Back Off

This is not rugby. Try to be conscious of your physical demeanor and how you may be affecting others. Step back a little if you have any doubts about someone's comfort zone and personal space. When possible, sit down so you are at a colleague's eye level, not looking down at them. Try to monitor your gestures and don't roll your eyes.

Practice Appropriate Messages

Before launching into a long tirade, think about what you really want. What exactly is the heart of your request or statement? Try to get it down to five words and hold that in your mind before you speak. Be specific and clear when you begin to talk, then own your message and take responsibility if someone does not understand. Ask for feedback if you have any questions about the exchange. For example, you might say, "I'd just like to be sure that my directions made sense." This gives the other person a graceful way to ask for clarification.

Just Don't Do It

Think honesty is always the best policy? Depends on how it is delivered. If you have learned that expressing every thought that flies through your head is your personal right and expect the world to openly embrace all of your gems of wisdom, get ready for some heartache. Choose your moments. More importantly, choose your words and actions so clean communication occurs. Use simple, neutral words that neither blame nor belittle. Expressing anger can be constructive but should not be used as a weapon.

Ask for Help

Changing behavior takes much practice, and it can be lonely. In some cases, your attempts to change may be met with suspicion or resistance. So it may be more effective to enlist the help of a friend or colleague who can give you feedback. Or, you might want to use the services of a professional coach who specializes in this type of work. These communication issues may be so deeply rooted and emotionally loaded that a therapist is the best source of guidance.

Do you think you might be too aggressive? Time to shoot for new “A” words like *assertive*, *appropriate* and *anchored*. Please.

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