# Contents

How to use the Toolkit

Introduction

Further resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activity 1</td>
<td>Self-assessment</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity 2</td>
<td>Clear learning goals</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity 3</td>
<td>Understanding the three main behaviours</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity 4</td>
<td>Assertiveness workout</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity 5</td>
<td>Tools and techniques</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity 6</td>
<td>What makes us behave the way we do?</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity 7</td>
<td>Inner dialogues and rights</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity 8</td>
<td>Developing your self-esteem</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity 9</td>
<td>Desk rehearsal</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity 10</td>
<td>Handling manipulation</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity 11</td>
<td>Dress rehearsals</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity 12</td>
<td>Overcoming the implementation problem</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Handouts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Handout</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Handout 1</td>
<td>Assertiveness and the three main behaviours</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handout 2</td>
<td>Assertive techniques</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handout 3</td>
<td>What makes us behave the way we do?</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handout 4</td>
<td>Handling manipulation</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

**Why we need this Toolkit**

If you look at any organisation, whether in the private, public or voluntary sectors, large or small, highly technical or fairly simple, you will find one constant – performance hinges on the way people interact. Customer loyalty, quantified measures, employment brand values, competencies, staff retention, conflict resolution, speed of response, quality of product etc, etc, rely on the way people interact.

Interaction between people attracts a variety of labels – influencing, selling, negotiating, counselling, coaching, mentoring, mediating, etc, etc. But, whatever the label, it is underpinned by our ability to communicate clearly, honestly, openly and confidently, which – for reasons ranging from evolution and brain architecture to upbringing and learned responses – is actually quite rare. Such is the fundamental and all-embracing nature of assertiveness, I have found – in over 20 years of teaching communication skills, leadership and performance management – that it provides valuable learning in any ‘people’ subject being learned by anyone at any level.

It is, however, an easy subject to get wrong. I meet many people who know someone who has ‘been on an assertiveness course and is now horribly pushy’. Genuine assertiveness is not about simply asserting oneself; aggressive, arrogant and selfish people can do that. It means standing up for your rights but accepting that others have rights too. Every right is balanced by a responsibility. Genuinely assertive people are open, honest contributors; they are also positive thinkers, good listeners and tolerant team players. That is the theme linking every activity in this Toolkit.

Like most trainers, I have experimented with alternative approaches to make learning easier, more efficient and more permanent. The activities in this Toolkit are not only the culmination of that refining process; they have been tried and tested by the most rigorous assessors of all – the workshop participants who, to learn assertiveness skills, have to change the way they think as well as the way they behave. Feedback at the end of workshops, and sometimes several years after workshops, tells me we’ve got it right.
Making the case for assertiveness training

Of all the soft skills subjects, training in assertiveness can be the most difficult to sell to senior management. ‘Selling’, ‘negotiating’, ‘resolving conflict’ all have a worthy ring to them, but assertiveness sounds as if we are compensating for the inadequacies of someone’s personality. Added to that view, quite a few managers secretly want submissive, compliant staff who will do as they are told. So how can you make the case for investing in assertiveness training? Here are some tried and tested ideas:

- **Relate your proposal to strategic concepts and priorities to which senior decision-makers have already committed their support**, such as increasing market share, reducing costs, swift integration after a merger, reducing the number of staff grievances, corporate values, competencies or the relationship between employees’ sense of well-being and performance. (CIPD reports and surveys will give up-to-date hard data to support this.) The reason for this approach is that if they agree with your first point (market share, costs, and so on), it is difficult to resist your second point (that you need to do something about it).

- **Present your case in the most effective sequence**, that is, move from the issue, concept or priority you need to address to your recommendation of targeted training on assertiveness skills. Show them the costs of inaction (that they will want to avoid) and the benefits of action (which they will want to gain) and then introduce your recommendations.

- **Relate your proposal less to a general term, such as ‘assertiveness’, and more to specific terms, such as teamwork, customer satisfaction, individual contribution, high-performance culture**. If you want, you can be even more specific and talk about the relevance of giving your people: better communication skills and more confidence than the salespeople, suppliers and competitors they encounter; the skills of customer-facing staff to convert angry customers into happy ones; or the benefits of giving managers the skills to motivate and coach staff better.

- **Get the framing right**. Try and avoid titling a report, email or presentation ‘assertiveness training’ because that first impression might cause decision-makers to mentally file it in the ‘outbox’ and they may continue reading or listening with a closed mind. Try titling it with the ‘strategic’ term. That way they mentally file it in the ‘important’ or ‘to do’ box and consider your proposal in that light.
• **Help them picture the outcome.** Sometimes we need to cut to the chase and ask decision-makers what kind of staff they really want: the shy, submissive, under-performing ones who have to be mollycoddled; the arrogant, persistently critical, back-biting ones who have to be constantly controlled; or the open, proactive, positive ones who perform well and help others perform well? Is there really a choice when you put it this way?

**Evaluating assertiveness training**

Return on investment, and consequently evaluation of training, is a serious issue in many organisations, yet evaluating assertiveness training can be tricky. So here are some ideas to help.

During, and especially at the end of, a learning activity ask participants to specify situations in which they can use the skills they have learned, why those situations, and how they will know if their application of those skills is beneficial. Ask them to deliberately target some of those situations for practice. You can also ask them what people in those situations (manager, colleagues, customers, and so on) might notice as they develop their assertiveness skills.

Encourage participants to keep a brief record of their experience in those targeted situations.

One and three months after the training ask a selection of participants (and the other relevant people mentioned above) what differences they have noticed. Depending on the type of work and situations, some of this feedback will be quantifiable but most will be anecdotal. That will be sufficient as, for most evaluation, describing successful results is as accurate a measure as quantifying them.

**Overview of skills and activities**

Becoming more assertive often involves learning new ways of thinking as well as new ways of behaving. Consequently, the activities covered here include both vital aspects of assertiveness:
Activity 1 Self-assessment
This activity is a self-assessment questionnaire with an optional version to be completed by a third party. It helps people assess how they behave and establish learning goals.

Activity 2 Clear learning goals
This discussion-based activity will help people identify precise and balanced learning goals.

Activity 3 Understanding the three main behaviours
This group activity helps people understand the subtle differences between aggressive, submissive and assertive behaviour. It also explains passive-aggressive behaviour. You can also use this activity to help participants see how their behaviour might be seen by others.

Activity 4 Assertive workout
This series of short, fun, yet revealing role-play exercises will help people better understand and develop assertive behaviour in practice.

Activity 5 Tools and techniques
This activity introduces the tools and techniques that make it easier to be assertive, demonstrating them in example dialogues and exploring the body language ‘packaging’ essential to make them effective.

Activity 6 What makes us behave the way we do?
This activity helps people understand how the way they think affects their behaviour. It shows how our thinking can make it easier to feel and be assertive and how it can undermine our good intentions.

Activity 7 Inner dialogues and rights
This activity explores what makes us behave the way we do in more detail and gives people two powerful tools with which to make profound and lasting change.
Activity 8 Developing your self-esteem

Self-esteem is central to our existence as a human being, our performance and what we are like to be with. Understanding and developing self-esteem is a big topic, but this activity will give people something to think about and start the ball rolling.

Activity 9 Desk rehearsal

This activity helps people understand the real and powerful links between our thinking, our behaviour and the outcomes we experience. It gives people an opportunity to see how they link together in a situation of particular relevance to them.

Activity 10 Handling manipulation

Our assertiveness can be tested in many situations but none more so than when confronted with someone using manipulative tactics to get what they want. This activity shows people how to use simple and effective techniques to protect themselves, to stay assertive and even to help the manipulator communicate openly and honestly.

Activity 11 Dress rehearsals

This activity provides a structured approach to developing assertive behaviour in situations related to participants’ goals. It also improves transfer of learning from classroom to workplace and provides useful information for evaluation.

Activity 12 Overcoming the implementation problem

Soft skills can be very difficult to transfer from classroom to workplace, especially if, like assertiveness, they involve changes to thinking as well as changes to behaviour. This activity explains the implementation problem and provides tried and tested solutions to it.

Handouts

Background information on assertiveness has been summarised in four handouts: Assertiveness and the three main behaviours, Assertive techniques, What makes us behave the way we do? and Handling manipulation.
How to get the best out of the activities

Some participants will have been nominated to attend because they are too shy. Some will have been nominated for the opposite reason; they are too aggressive. Many will have uncomfortable memories of role-play exercises. All of which adds up to not the most positive starting point for a workshop. So, rather than running through the skills needed by trainers and facilitators generally, here are some suggestions relating specifically to assertiveness training that I have found genuinely beneficial.

Establish some rules and display them throughout the workshop. The ones I use are:

1. Only do and discuss what you’re comfortable doing and discussing.
2. Treat what other participants say as confidential.
3. Whatever we do, if you want me to demonstrate first, just ask.
4. Feel free to ask questions at any time.
5. Relax and enjoy learning.

Check worries and concerns. Once, and only when, I have established a good atmosphere, I ask if anyone has any concerns. The question, ‘Will we have to do any role-plays?’ always comes up. Here is my response:

No. Absolutely, categorically and emphatically no. No way. In no shape or form. No. [Pause to let that sink in and watch participants relax and then say quietly] However, we might do a bit of skills practice. [Pause to let that sink in and for the good-humoured reaction that always follows.] If you mean role-plays where you have to make nervous, shivering wrecks of yourselves in front of everyone else, no. However, assertiveness is a skill and we’d be a bit daft if, at some stage, we didn’t have a go at it and, if we’re going to do that, we might as well do it in a nice, safe, supportive environment. So the only practice sessions we do will be in small, self-contained learning teams. And anyway, rule number 1 is sacrosanct. So is rule number 3. So you can relax knowing that you’re in complete control of both what and how you learn.

Practise techniques, not solutions. With the best will in the world, role-plays are not real. A success or a failure in a role-play guarantees nothing in the real world. Too often, potential learning in role-plays is wrecked by comments such as, ‘But my boss isn’t like that,’ or ‘But our senior managers just don’t listen,’ or ‘Yes... but... it’s just not that
easy where I work.' So get participants to pinpoint the techniques (such as eye contact, the broken record, and so on) they want to practice in a particular role-play. Keep most role-plays very short. Less than a minute is enough to practise a technique. This also keeps feedback tightly focused. Then get them to repeat the role-play, several times if necessary, mastering that technique. This is the way people improve their performance in sport, music and many other areas. Why should assertiveness be any different?

**Use positive words and phrases.** Which of the following words and phrases are more inviting?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role-play exercise</th>
<th>Skills practice, or Dress rehearsal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You’ve all got to do a role-play.</td>
<td>Let’s have some fun trying this in practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This is what I want you to do...</td>
<td>Here’s an opportunity to...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...in syndicates.</td>
<td>...in cosy, self-contained learning teams.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Refer to behaviour rather than people.** Label someone aggressive or submissive and change will become difficult for them. Label their current learned behaviours and change becomes easier.

**Address implementation obstacles.** Most trainers are familiar with the ‘conscious competence’ model. As a reminder, here it is.
At steps 1, 2 and 4, we behave by habit. Our behaviours are ‘programmed’ into our subconscious. At step 3, however, we have to think about what we are doing. The important points as far as implementing ‘soft skills’ learning are that:

- When you are learning something, you have to use the conscious part of your brain.
- When you have learned that something, it becomes part of the ‘programming’ of the subconscious part of your brain. It is the journey from steps 1 or 2 to step 4 that we call learning. Step 3 is a temporary stage in which you have to think consciously about your new skills.
- As it is very difficult to consciously think of two things simultaneously (your new skills and everything else you have to get on with), our behaviour is often controlled by our subconscious. While on step 3, therefore, it is easy to ‘revert to type’.
- Consequently, on the narrow ledge we trainers call conscious competence, it is easy for learners to stumble. Those who gravitate towards submissive behaviour will think they can’t do it and give up. Those who gravitate towards aggressive behaviour will claim the workshop was okay in theory but doesn’t work in practice.
- Progressing from step 3 to step 4 takes about 30 days of regular practice.

So, emphasise that during the conscious competence stage, they will get it wrong sometimes and get it right sometimes, but gradually, as they persevere, the balance between the two will shift in their favour – just like everything else they have ever learned.

Finally, remember that assertiveness does not just improve our performance at work. It improves our relationships, self-esteem and well-being outside work too. Helping people see possibilities and potential in themselves and others is both rewarding and humbling. So be a role model. Practise what you preach and make assertiveness a permanent part of your own CPD plan. It’s a great journey.
Activity 1
Self-assessment

Overview

Very few of us think objectively about how we think, how we behave and how that behaviour might be seen by others. This activity contains two versions of a questionnaire participants can use to appreciate these issues more clearly and objectively. One version is a self-assessment and the other version is feedback by third parties.

You can use one or both questionnaires to help participants understand how they might come across to other people and, consequently, to determine valuable goals for your training or coaching.

Subsequent use of the questionnaires could include assessing progress and evaluating the training.

Trainer’s notes

Resources

- flipchart
- one questionnaire per participant
- handout: ‘Assertiveness and the three main behaviours’
- time: 40–45 minutes

Plan

You have several options:

- Send the self-assessment to participants in advance of your workshop or coaching session.
- Ask participants to send third-party assessments to a selection of people who will give them objective feedback.
• Give participants the self-assessment questionnaire at the start of your workshop or coaching session.

• Do a combination of the three options above.

Whichever option you choose, retain the score sheet(s) until the start of your workshop or coaching session.

(5–10 minutes) Issue the score sheets and give participants time to construct their assertiveness profile on the triangle.

(15 minutes) Lead a discussion covering the following points:

• While some of us have a habit of gravitating towards certain behaviours, we are all capable of all four behaviours at different times.

• It is more accurate, therefore, to think in terms of **behaviours** rather than personality because we tend to think of personality as fixed and ‘inherited’ while we tend to think of behaviour as variable and learnable. You can emphasise this point by asking how many participants could handle the same situation differently depending on who was involved, whether it was at work or at home, how they felt at the time and so on.

• Emphasise that assertiveness is more than behaviour; it includes feelings. Hence the questionnaire covers both feelings and how feelings affect our behaviour.

Discuss the four behaviours emphasising the distinctions from the handout most relevant to your workshop or coaching goals.

(15 minutes) You are now ready to help them specify clear learning goals. Arrange participants into pairs and ask them to take turns helping their partner clarify assertiveness learning goals. They will provide that help, first, by asking:

• which behaviours (or perceptions of others, if using third-party feedback) they feel comfortable about and would like to build on and display in certain ‘challenging’ situations

• which behaviours (or perceptions of others, if using third-party feedback) they would like to improve on, especially in ‘challenging’ situations.
Second, for each answer, they use the words ‘exactly’, ‘precisely’ and ‘specifically’ to help their partner clarify their goals. For example, ‘What exactly do you mean by “less emotional”?’ ‘Precisely what makes that situation so challenging?’ ‘What, specifically, irritates you about that?’ Emphasise that, as the purpose of these questions is to help the partner clarify goals, three behaviours are completely ‘out of bounds’:

- sympathising how bad a situation is: ‘Oh that’s awful.’
- empathising with the partner: ‘I know what you mean; that happens to me too.’
- solution-seeking: ‘What you need to do is...’

(5 minutes) Reconvene the group and discuss a selection of goals and, if appropriate, link to the next part of your workshop or coaching session.
Self-assessment questionnaire

Instruction 1: Score yourself on each statement from 0 to 5, where 0 = never or not like me at all, and where 5 = always or exactly like me. Record your score in the box provided.

1. When confronting someone about a problem I feel very uncomfortable. □ □ □ □ □
2. I remain calm and confident when faced with sarcasm, ridicule or poorly handled criticism. □ □ □ □ □
3. It’s easy for me to lose my temper. □ □ □ □ □
4. I address problems directly without blame or judgement. □ □ □ □ □
5. I feel it is alright to ask for what I want or to explain how I feel. □ □ □ □ □
6. I feel comfortable with the amount of eye contact I make with other people and I believe they feel comfortable with it too. □ □ □ □ □
7. I am easily upset or intimidated by ridicule or sarcasm. □ □ □ □ □
8. It’s more important that I get what I want rather than that people like me. □ □ □ □ □
9. I like it better when people work out what I want without me having to tell them. □ □ □ □ □
10. I feel confident in my ability to handle positively most work situations involving confrontation with other people. □ □ □ □ □
11. I’ll use the volume of my voice or tough eye contact or sarcasm to get what I want from other people. □ □ □ □ □
12. I’ll use sarcasm or little ‘jokes’ to make my point. □ □ □ □ □
13. Patience with people is not one of my strong points. □ □ □ □ □
14. Being liked by people is very important to me, even if that means ‘buying’ their co-operation at times. □ □ □ □ □
15. I really don’t like conflict and will avoid it any way I can. □ □ □ □ □
16. I really don’t like conflict, so use other ways to make my feelings known, such as impatient or ‘cutting’ by-the-way remarks. □ □ □ □ □
17. I may not be very direct with people but they can tell what I think of them just by looking at me. □ □ □ □ □
18. I find it easy to poke, or wag, my index finger at other people. □ □ □ □ □
19. Any impatience I feel for other people comes out in my body language rather than my telling the other person about it directly. □ □ □ □ □
20. If asked to do something I don’t want to do, I’ll do it but deliberately won’t do it as well as I could. □ □ □ □ □

Instruction 2: Total your score for each column.
Participant’s score sheet – self-assessment

Column A score ___ Submissive (Passive)
Column B score ___ Aggressive
Column C score ___ Assertive
Column D score ___ Passive/Aggressive

Now imagine a scale on lines inside the triangle and transfer your score to the appropriate line. (Each line begins in the centre of the triangle at 0 and extends to a maximum of score of 25 at the edge of the triangle.)

Now join your scores and you will see your assertiveness profile. It shows which behaviours you tend to use most and which you use least. Does it point towards assertiveness or towards one of the other behaviours?
Third-party feedback

To ________________________  From ________________________

Date ________________________

I am shortly to attend some communication skills training and would find it valuable to understand how other people see my behaviour. Please complete the following questionnaire and return it to ________________________ by ________________________.

Thank you.

Please score my behaviour on each statement from 0 to 5, where 0 = never or not like me at all, and where 5 = always or exactly like me. Record your score in the box provided.

1 When confronting someone about a problem, they appear to feel very uncomfortable.

2 They remain calm and confident when faced with sarcasm, ridicule or poorly handled criticism.

3 It’s easy for them to lose their temper.

4 They address problems directly without blame or judgement.

5 They appear to feel it is alright to ask for what they want or to explain how they feel.

6 They appear to feel comfortable with eye contact – both making it and receiving it.

7 They appear easily upset or intimidated by ridicule or sarcasm.

8 It seems to be more important that they get what they want rather than that people like them.

9 They seem to like it better when people work out what they want without having to tell them.

10 They appear to handle positively most work situations involving confrontation with other people.

11 They will use volume of voice or tough eye contact or sarcasm to get what they want from other people.

12 They use sarcasm or little ‘jokes’ to make their point.

13 Patience with people is not one of their strong points.
14 Being liked by people appears to be very important to them, even if that means ‘buying’ co-operation at times.

15 They don’t like conflict and will avoid it any way they can.

16 They don’t like conflict so use other ways to make their feelings known, such as impatient or ‘cutting’ by-the-way remarks.

17 They are not very direct with people but you can tell what they think just by looking at them.

18 They poke, or wag, their index finger at people.

19 They show impatience in their body language rather than telling the other person about it directly but calmly.

20 If asked to do something they don’t want to do, they will do it but deliberately won’t do it as well as they could.

Total your score for each column.
Participant’s score sheet – multi-sourced assessment

Total column A score ___ from all respondents. Submissive (Passive)
Total column B score ___ from all respondents. Aggressive
Total column C score ___ from all respondents. Assertive
Total column D score ___ from all respondents. Passive/Aggressive

Now imagine a scale on lines inside the triangle and transfer your score to the appropriate line. (Each line begins in the centre of the triangle at 0 and extends to a maximum of score of 25 at the edge of the triangle.)

Now join your scores and you will see your assertiveness profile. It shows which behaviours you tend to use most and which you use least. Does it point towards assertiveness or towards one of the other behaviours?