

**‘This is terrific. A friendly and sensible guide for anyone
needing to give their confidence a boost.’**

***Dr David Lewis, Chairman and Director of Research,
Mindlab International Ltd***

POWER UP YOUR CONFIDENCE

A red rocket with a white smoke trail is launching upwards from a large, dark blue, stylized cloud. The rocket is positioned centrally, pointing towards the top of the frame. The cloud has a textured, layered appearance, resembling smoke or a large pile of something.

**How to master the
ultimate business skill**

Alice Muir

'Packed from cover to cover with practical things you can do to improve your confidence, and in work, as in life, confidence is everything. A book you can't afford to ignore.'

Kenneth Hambly MB, Bch, BAO, General Medical Practitioner

'Essential reading, especially in today's challenging and stressful society.'

Ann Burnett, writer and tutor

'This is terrific. A sensible guide for anyone needing to give their confidence a boost.'

*Dr David Lewis, Chairman and Director of Research,
Mindlab International Ltd*

'Packed full of easy-to-use gems, helpful hints, tips and observations to enhance your confidence at work and beyond.'

*Ann McCracken, Managing Director, AMC2 and
Vice President, ISMAuk*

'Powerful approaches that work – highly effective and well worth reading!'

*Nicki Beveridge, Fellow CIPD, member ISMA,
business coach and HR consultant*

Here are four ways of behaving that are not assertive:

1. **Aggressive.** Angry, rude, noisy, verbally abusive, threatening, domineering, violent, in your face, competitive, using ridicule, dogmatic, insisting on having own way, winning, talking over other people, not listening to colleagues, insisting on being right ...
2. **Over-confident or arrogant** (minor aggression). Nothing is a problem, loud, knowing best, full of ideas, interrupting colleagues all the time, knowing everything, one-upmanship, knowing everyone ...
3. **Manipulative** (or indirect aggression). Getting your own way by making colleagues feel guilty or by childish behaviour, plotting, sulking, sarcasm or put-downs ...
4. **Passive.** Dropping hints, making excuses, being unable to say 'no', the dogsbody, difficulty making decisions, the doormat, a push-over, being unable to say what they want, apologising all the time, putting other colleagues or clients first all the time ...

KEY POINT

What does 'passive-aggressive' mean?

People often use the term 'passive-aggressive' in everyday conversation to describe behaviour such as sulking, put-downs or sarcastic behaviour, when this is used to get what you want or to criticise someone. But there is a personality disorder called 'passive-aggressive personality disorder', which can be serious and require treatment, so I feel it's better to stick with the terms 'indirect aggression' or 'manipulative behaviour' when describing that kind of everyday behaviour.

Let's pretend

If you're presenting yourself with confidence, you can pull off pretty much anything.

Katy Perry, American singer-songwriter, b. 1984

So, if you want to be more assertive, where is the best place to start? Change your attitude? Learn how to deal with typical scenarios? Memorise phrases and responses to use? Actually, no. The easiest place to start is with the impression you give with your body and physical behaviour. So, before we go on to think more about attitudes, and about the sort of things assertive people say, let's take time to gain a better understanding of the silent language that speaks volumes about us in the blink of an eye – our body language.

The good thing is, you don't actually have to be confident to look confident. The acting profession pretends to be something they're not every day – and, alright, an Oscar or BAFTA may be beyond your abilities, but just looking confident is not too difficult. You can be like an actor and you can take on the body language of a confident person. You can practise this when no one's about, until you get a feel for it. A couple of practices, like the previous activity, and you're good to go. A bit more practice, and it will almost feel real, not pretend, and you won't even need to think about it. The best of it is, it's a win-win situation. Because if you stand and walk confidently, you will actually feel and be more confident. People will immediately react to you in a more attentive and interested way, reinforcing your confidence, and so on. The next section will tell you how to do this (and there's more about body language in Chapters 4 and 5).

IN THE ZONE

Be active

Let your hair down whenever you can. Join a drama group or take up bowling, yoga, tai chi, archery, dancing, kick-boxing or singing, anything you enjoy that involves using your physicality or your voice in a positive outgoing way.

How to walk the walk at work

- 1. Aim for an open and relaxed posture**, making good eye contact, and preferably with little or nothing in your hands. Smile if it's appropriate (not too much if you're a woman, as men can mistake this for sexual interest). Open posture means comfortably upright, shoulders back, head up, with no barriers formed by your hands or arms. Arms relaxed by your side or open hands resting easily on your lap when sitting convey quiet relaxed confidence. This overall picture is particularly helpful if you want to have more authority during meetings with colleagues or clients. Any kind of relaxation technique will make this posture easier to achieve, and you'll find one in each chapter. So make sure to practise these, and choose those you like. They really do help.
- 2. Make good eye contact**, not too much so it is threatening to others, or too little, which appears nervous and uninterested.
- 3. If seated, sit up well and lean forward a little** towards others you might be talking to. This shows interest and encourages people. Slouching back into a chair or a corner can be comforting, but this will appear defensive and aloof or, worse still, apathetic to your colleagues or potential clients, and makes it harder to contribute to a discussion and put your point across.

4. **Don't let your hands give the game away.** Lack of confidence can make you form a fist with your hands or cling to a folder, briefcase or drink, like a comfort blanket. This will be noticed unconsciously or even consciously by those around you. Too many hand or arm gestures also distract and reduce your credibility. If your hands tend to tremble, use relaxation to ease tension – also, imagining your hands being very heavy and comfortably warm is very effective.
5. **Bring down barriers.** Holding one or both arms across your body is a common way of reacting to nerves because you're almost hiding behind them and giving yourself a comforting hug. But this creates a barrier, too, and can be interpreted by your manager or other team members as a lack of interest or, most commonly, as disagreement or disapproval.
6. **Pointing** or staring at someone while you speak appears aggressive and threatening.
7. **Stop fiddling.** Nerves and lack of confidence can make even the best of us fiddle with objects – pens, earrings, coins in your pocket, your hair, your paperwork.
8. **Try making a video-recording** of yourself, or ask a trusted friend or colleague for their take on your body language.

In action

Keep a note of the really useful stuff

1. Go right to the back of your journal and start a new page by writing a heading at the top, 'Useful stuff' (or any other title you prefer).
2. As you work through the book, when you find a particularly helpful idea, thought or explanation, you can make a short note of this, along with the page it was on.

Do you know your rights?

One of the reasons for acting in a submissive or passive way and finding it difficult to assert yourself is not realising that it's not just other people who have rights, but that you have them, too. It's not legal rights or your rights as a member of staff I'm talking about here, just the everyday rights we all have as human beings. Lack of belief in these personal rights grows gradually if you've spent your childhood in circumstances that encourage a lack of belief in your rights. Your workplace environment, past or present, can do the same thing.

Here are some examples. Read them through slowly, one at a time, and make a note of any rights that you're currently finding difficult to apply to yourself.

Your workplace bill of rights

I have the right to:

- ➡ my own point of view;
- ➡ have my own values;
- ➡ be treated as an equal;
- ➡ ask others to listen to me;
- ➡ express myself in my own way;
- ➡ make a mistake;
- ➡ say 'no';
- ➡ fail if I try;
- ➡ try again;
- ➡ be a leader;
- ➡ be treated with respect;
- ➡ ask for what I want.

Always remember:

- ➡ Each of us has all of these rights.
- ➡ We deserve these just like everyone else.

Talking the talk at work

Don't let the noise of others' opinions drown out your own inner voice.

Steve Jobs, co-founder of Apple Inc., 1955–2011

With your body language sorted, and an awareness of your rights in place, you're ready to talk the talk. Here are some of the basic assertiveness techniques that will be invaluable in helping you to do that. There is nothing particularly magical or clever about these. Other people use them all the time when communicating with you. Think of colleagues and managers you've found to be fair, respectful and approachable to you. They will be using assertive techniques like these without you even noticing.

Really useful assertiveness techniques	
Respect	The most basic skill of all is to be respectful of yourself and your needs and, equally, of the other person and their needs. This is of fundamental importance in being assertive, and forms the groundwork for all the other skills.
Be short, specific and direct	Always be clear and specific, especially in meetings. Say simply what you are trying to say. Don't start with lots of unnecessary explanation, don't pad things out or waffle. Get to your point and make it clearly.
Ask for information or clarification	This is a good way to make a start to speaking up at meetings, indicate interest or to give yourself time to think. It's also essential for knowing exactly what's being discussed.
Don't be distracted from your point	Don't allow yourself to be 'hooked' by the comments of others, such as 'It's all right for you ...', or 'What about that time you ...'. You'll end up spending precious time arguing over some other fractious or trivial issue, and not addressing the point you were trying to make.