

Improve How You Learn

Assertion and Assertiveness

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Ten Steps

In this Module you will be taken through the 10 steps to effective learning as they apply to your desire to improve the way you learn **Assertion and Assertiveness**. Steps 1 to 3 are designed to increase your motivation. The remaining steps are designed to help you succeed.

1. Be clear about what it is you want to learn

This step helps you clarify and define exactly what it is you are trying to learn and to what level of competence

2. Be clear about why you want to learn

This step helps you fully understand your reasons and the likely benefits to you of improving how you learn Assertion.

3. Envision the end-point

This step helps you imagine and visualise as concretely as possible having succeeded in achieving your learning goals.

4. Create learning targets

This step helps you formulate your learning goals in a practical way.

5. Understand how you best learn and the types of learning needed

This step introduces you to the different approaches to learning that you can adopt (learning styles) and the different kinds of learning involved in learning to improve your learning.

6. Explore tactics, tools, and techniques

This step introduces you to 10 Powerful Learning Tools, Tactics and Techniques you can use to improve the way you learn. The exercises will help to *think* and deepen your understanding of the area you want

to improve and actually suggests specific tasks you can *do* at your computer and away from it (in your work and life environment), to dramatically improve your capability.

7. Create a Personal Learning Plan

This step introduces you to a structured planning process to help ensure that you are clear about what you want to do and by when. The plan promotes commitment and the monitoring of progress.

8. Get going

This step helps you with the practicalities of starting to carry out your plan.

9. Keep going

This step helps you with the practicalities of keeping going especially in the face of disappointment, frustration, setbacks and pressure from other sources.

10. Celebrate success

This step encourages you to mark not only completion of the plan but key stages along the way. The message is simple. Give yourself the treat you promised yourself!



1

Be clear about what it is you want to learn



What are your objectives?
Tick the ones that appeal to you most.

I want to understand why I don't have more impact on people	
I want to have more impact on others without antagonising them	
I want to be able to participate more in discussions at work and influence outcomes	

I want to be noticed more	
I feel that I don't get my way as often as I should	
I want to have my say and not bottle it up	
I want to be able to face up to pushy or aggressive people	
I want to avoid be bullied at work or at home	
I want to learn to say no without offending	
What other aspect of Assertion and Assertiveness would you like to learn?	

Does your employer already have a definition of **Assertion and Assertiveness**? (For example in a management competency model or framework) Other possible headings might be Personal Impact or Personal Effectiveness or Influencing Skills

If so, insert the definition here

Are there Positive and Negative Indicators to support the Definition?

If so, copy then into the box below.

My employers Indicators for Assertiveness	
Positive Indicators	Negative Indicators

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If you do not have access to a company definition of Personal Impact you can do a number of things. First look up a definition in <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assertiveness>

Write your own definition here

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Or use this definition

Personal assertion is the ability to influence others in order to meet personal needs and goals in a manner that engages their interest and encourages a positive response
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Now you need to write Positive and Negative Behaviour Indicators. They are very important as they give meaning and concreteness to the definition and personalise it to your needs. Guidance on writing personal Positive and Negative Indicators is provided in [10 Steps to Improve Your Learning](#) in the free Download area. Some examples are provided below to get you started. Only use them if you think they apply to you.

Assertion and Assertiveness	
Positive Indicators	Negative Indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Always speaks up in meetings• Gives views without waiting to be asked• Responds to what is being said• Seeks to clarify before responding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rarely speaks up at meetings• Gives own views, ignoring what has been said• Is not clear what he/she intends to say before speaking

<p>Can you think of more?</p> <p>Here are some more for you to consider. Choose the ones that apply to you.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identifies the needs of others and relates argument to these• Uses facts and information to support arguments• Prepares in advance of meetings and encounters• Thinks in advance what counterarguments might be used• Adapts the argument to the people and context• Shapes presentations to suit different audiences• Speaks up at meetings• Disagrees constructively• Stays calm• Looks and behaves in a confident manner	<p>Can you think of more?</p> <p>Here are some more for you to consider. Choose the ones that apply to you.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Uses the same argument regardless of the people involved• Does not think ahead to possible opposition• Does not have relevant facts available• Disregards the needs or interest of others• Pays no attention to the wider context• Does speak up at meetings or when in disagreement• Reacts strongly and emotionally• Appears to 'opt out of discussions'• Body language shows disapproval
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Re-phrase your overall goals in terms of the behavioural change you would like to see in yourself by referring specifically to the Indicators most relevant to you.

I would like to change FROM
TO



2 Be clear about why you want to learn to improve your Assertion



Why do you wish to improve in this area? Here are some common reasons. Tick the ones that apply to you.

Increased confidence at work	
Greater self esteem	
Admiration/respect from others	
Overcoming frustration	
Holding back my job performance	
Holding back my career	
I stay too quiet in meetings	
People don't listen to what I say	
I have been told by my boss	
I have been told by my colleagues	
I just feel I want/need to improve	
Other reasons? Record them here	



3 Envision the end point



The next step is to imagine, as concretely and specifically as you can, that you have achieved your learning goals and picture yourself at the desired level of performance. Imagine yourself in a specific situation or scenario. Try and be as detailed as possible.

When? Weeks, months ahead?	
What will you be doing?	
What will you be saying?	
Where will you be doing this?	
How will you feel?	
How will others regard you?	

Can you imagine another situation or scenario?

When? Weeks, months ahead?	
What will you be doing?	
What will you be saying?	
Where will you be doing this?	
How will you feel?	
How will others regard you	



If you are that way inclined draw a picture of yourself being **Assertive**. Be creative, have fun with it. Try to capture the changes you want to see in yourself.

Create a Change Shield for yourself or better still have fun with

friends or colleagues at work creating your personal shield. For guidance see [10 Steps to Improve Your Learning](#)

4 Create specific learning targets

Now the time has come to set formal learning targets. Learning targets are derived from the overall aim and

- Create greater precision
- Give you a sense of being in control and managing the process
- Help you monitor your own progress
- Give you the satisfaction of seeing progress
- Help you know when you have arrived



First you need to define your current level of performance.

In your own words describe your current level of performance in terms of **Assertion and Assertiveness**. Focus on things you do and don't do, say or don't say:

- Absolute beginner (no real experience or understanding)
- Beginner (some competence)
- Intermediate (sometimes competent but performance is often unsatisfying)
- Advanced (on the whole competent but a few areas need improving)
- Mastery (able to teach others but still learning)

I would describe myself as

-

I want to progress to (Initially it should be the next one up)

-



Think of some of the things that will help indicate that you have achieved your goals

	Examples
Things I will know	
Things I can say or do	
How I will feel	
Qualifications achieved	
I know I will be making progress if.....	

This self-assessment is subjective but it helps you be specific and also realistic



5 Understand how you best learn and the types of learning you need

Learning styles

In order to learn well you need to



- Have experiences and plenty of them
- Review and reflect on the experience
- Draw lessons and insights from the experience
- Plan to gain new experiences that result in improved performance

Most of us have strong preferences for one or more of four styles of learning. From your knowledge of yourself, do you know which your preferred learning styles are?

Activist	
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• This is me• Not really sure• No idea
Pragmatist	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• This is me• Not really sure• No idea
Theorist	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• This is me• Not really sure• No idea
Reflector	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• This is me• Not really sure• No idea

If you are not sure about your preferred learning styles, go to [10 steps to improve your learning](#)

If you have a strong preference for one or more of these modes that will indicate how you are likely to begin but it is important not to get stuck in one mode at the expense of the others.

Different kinds of learning are involved

The types of learning involved in improving your **Assertion and Assertiveness**

Practical Skills requiring practice and feedback to get right
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ability to perceive and interpret the behaviour of others• Ability to moderate one's own behaviour to the context• Speaking at meetings and in one-to-ones• Debating• Mental preparation and rehearsal (clarifying your thoughts)• Sensitivity to the feelings and behaviour of others• Modifying ones' own behaviour as situations change• Presentation skills generally

Feelings, and attitudes you need to get right
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Self-confidence in social settings• Self-control in the face of opposition• Empathy
Understanding of concepts and theory
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The nature of Assertion (defined by the Positive and Negative Indicators – see Step 1)• Importance of preparation
Knowledge of facts, things to memorise
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Facts relevant to the argument or issue• Aides-memoire to guide performance

By understanding the different kinds of learning involved in improving your **Assertion and Assertiveness** you can choose appropriate learning tools, tactics and techniques to help you improve.

6 Explore learning tools, tactics, and techniques

You should choose according to



- Your preferred learning styles
- Feasibility
- Time available
- Cost implications
- Accessibility

10 things you can do to improve HOW you learn Assertion and Assertiveness

1. Brainstorm Assertion as a concept



Spend a few minutes writing down words and short phrases that come to mind in response to these questions.

What are the possible benefits to me of increasing my Assertion and Assertiveness?

Here are some additional answers you might or might not have thought of

- Career advancement
- Less frustration
- Less emotional at work
- People will cooperate with me more
- More impact at meetings
- Say no when I mean no
- Say yes when I mean yes
- More active in meetings

What are the consequences for me of failing to improve my Assertion and Assertiveness?

Here are some additional answers you might not have thought of

- Bottled up emotions
- Constant frustration
- Being forced to go behind people's backs

- Not knowing what really is going on
- Unsatisfactory meetings
- Dreading to go to some meetings
- Getting dumped on
- Feeling pushed around

What is the difference between Assertion and Aggression? What do you think?

Here are some thoughts to consider.

Assertion is

- Getting what you need while allowing other people to get what they need
- Working cooperatively wherever possible
- Going for the win-win
- Being concerned for the quality of relationships as well as results
- Looking to the longer term relationship

By contrast Aggression is

- Using force without for the needs of others
- Bullying
- Using anger to win arguments
- Threatening manner
- Pushing for results on aggressor's terms only
- Saying "Just do it!" without any justification

2. Observing and shadowing



Identify people in your organisation whose assertion and personal impact is good. If possible select two or three different people to observe.

Watch what they do. Notice what they say.

At the time or shortly after write down what you think it is they do or say that contributes to their Personal Impact. Write down exact examples. She said... He did...

If you cannot observe them in the normal course of your work ask for opportunities to shadow, especially in contexts that are relevant to you e.g. team meetings, group discussions. This applies to work as well as social situations,

community groups, clubs you belong, voluntary/charity activities.

3. Asking and seeking explanation



Asking and seeking explanations is one of the most powerful yet under-utilised forms of personal learning and development.

Having identified a number of colleagues ask for a few minutes of their time, explain your reasons, and ask them the following questions

- What do you think is important for ensuring personal impact? Give me some examples of what you mean.
- What in your opinion is the difference between personal impact and being aggressive?
- What tips can you offer me that work well for you?

4. Modelling



Try putting their tips into practice. Set yourself small goals to emulate or copy their behaviour. It will not always work at first and be modest with your initial goals but gradually you will become more comfortable, especially if you also do some of the exercises below.

You could consider practising at home or in another supportive or safe context before you go for real.

5. Analyse your discussions



Consider the possibility that you may go to formal meetings or one-to-one discussions insufficiently prepared.

Use this checklist to Preparing for a Meeting.

What is likely to happen at the meeting?

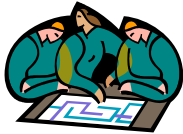
What is the purpose of the meeting or encounter?

What do I need to get out of the meeting?

Do I have relevant information that I might need?

What arguments and counter-arguments are likely?

What are my own views?



Show this to a friend or colleague whom you trust and respect.
Encourage them to challenge your thinking.

Use this checklist to **analyse what happened at a meeting.**

Following a discussion or a meeting that you have been involved in, write down a summary of the issues that were raised.

What worked well from your point of view?

What did not work so well?

What opportunities for assertion by you were missed? What could you have done?

What will you do differently next time?

Show your analysis to someone you trust and seek his or her feedback. Do this several times until you feel more confident. Instead of leaving it until after the meeting, raise the points in the meeting itself!

6. Coaching in assertion skills



Coaching is a powerful way to improve your personal impact. Ideally this should be from someone who can see you in action or is reasonably close to your work. Alternatively arrange personal sessions with a coach (it could be a work colleague whom you could offer coaching in another skill area or expertise).

A professional coach can carry out an assessment of your personal learning needs and design a programme of practical exercises and sessions specifically geared to you.

7. Mentoring



Mentoring is probably less effective in development of practical skills though is still relevant especially if the mentor encourages you to seek opportunities for trying new behaviours and skills. By talking through issues of importance to you, you can clarify your thinking and adopt more clearly stated positions during discussions. Your involvement with the mentor can also help with issues such as personal confidence and self-esteem.

8. Presenting



Seek as many opportunities as possible to get involved in forming and carrying out presentations, however small and insignificant. Any context will do – clubs, committees, working parties, etc. Volunteer to do part of a larger presentations. Get support from your colleagues. Always ask for feedback. There is no better way to learn than through repeated practice combined with supportive feedback.

It is only by doing them that you will improve. Set yourself small targets to begin with and seek feedback. As your confidence grows, aim for higher targets.

9. Mental rehearsal (without feedback)

This is critical to improved assertion. Imagine a scenario (as close as possible to a real situation), think what you want to say, and then say it.



- In your head several times, and then
- In front of a mirror
- Into an audio tape
- Into a video camera (tape or on-screen)
- Think of likely or possible reactions
- Make a response. Use actual words and body language.

How did it feel? Can you improve it? Do it again. Write guidelines to yourself. Do it again, applying the guidance. Improve the guidelines. Before doing it for real use mental rehearsal several times.

10. Rehearsing with feedback



Similar to the above except done in a small group of friends or supportive colleagues who provide structured feedback. It is important that they know what aspects of assertion you are trying to improve. You can provide feedback to them in return to help them with their learning goals.

7 **Create a Personal Learning Contract to improve your Assertion and Assertiveness**

Your personal learning contract is a statement of commitment to yourself and is also a means to monitoring progress.



The contract can be as detailed and as structured as you see fit (this varies greatly from person to person) but it should at least contain statements of

What you want to achieve overall (however you wish to express this) in the way you learn to improve your **Assertion and Assertiveness**

What do you want to achieve overall?
Why? (your motives)
The level you are starting out at (as precisely as possible)
The level you wish to achieve (as precisely as possible)

The specific actions you are going to take including the tools, tactics and techniques you are going to use	
This week	
Next week	
By the end of month one	

Month two	
Month three	
Month six	
Beyond six months	

Monitoring Progress

How you will know you are making progress?
How you will know you have succeeded?

Keep a record and look at it from time to time. If you can involve others in your commitment you will increase your chances of success.

8 Get going

If you have got this far you are already going, but the critical thing is to take action that enables you to feel you are actually improving. There are several ways to do this.



- Meet up with a friend or colleague whom you have not seen in a while and describe or demonstrate what you have done in the interim.
- Refer to your progress indicators and tick them off as you make progress.

- Aim for early success. It reduces the risk of giving up early on.
- Remind yourself of the expected benefits and potential rewards. Look back at your envisioning exercise or your Change Shield in Step 2

9 Keep going



Getting going is hard enough, but to keep going is often harder still.

- Refer to your progress indicators and tick them off as you make progress.
- Recognise that guilt and anxiety about progress is inevitable
- Re-adjust goals and timescales to be more realistic in the light of experience.
- List early warning signs that may block you progress and think about responses that would help

Danger signs	Responses



Meet up with a friend or colleague whom you have not seen for a while and describe or demonstrate what you have done in the interim

Identify your personal reinforcers that will help you to keep going regardless of

- Set-backs
- Disappointments
- Frustrations
- Unexpected problems

What might they be?

- Pressures from other sources

What might they be?

Reinforcers are REWARDS you can give yourself (treats) that you would not otherwise have had but for the progress you have made. They include a meal out, chocolates, an outing, champagne, a weekend away, etc etc or whatever takes your fancy.

Equally reinforcers can be PUNISHMENT that you inflict on yourself for lack of progress that you had committed to. This can be denial of the promised treats or something stronger like paying out to a charity. On balance rewards work better than punishments.

What support do I need and what can I put in place?

My personal REINFORCERS are

10 Celebrate success



Finally don't forget to mark the achievement of having moved from one level of performance to another. It is always a satisfying feeling to know that you have done it, but there is also the intrinsic satisfaction of performing at a higher level than previously.

Some forms of learning are acknowledged through accreditation and certificates, but vast amounts of personal learning and growth are not recognised in this way. Much of the most important learning (tolerance and understanding, effective parenting, leadership, teamwork) is not recognised in this way.

Learning to improve your assertion can make a significant difference to your work and personal life, how you behave, how you feel and how you are perceived. There is no formal recognition of this, but people you work and live with will see you as less stressed, more purposeful and more effective.

Try to find ways of expressing the pleasure of the learning you have achieved.

If I achieve my overall goals my overall REWARD will be

Ultimately, the best way is simply to think and act in new ways and feel the benefit for you and for others, and then commit yourself to further learning.