

WHY WE NEED ASSERTIVENESS TRAINING

By Danielle Gault

How we assert ourselves with others often makes the difference in how far we progress in our careers. Do we stand up for our thoughts, back down, attack, compromise or ignore issues when they are difficult to confront? Assertive people get ahead in their careers because they face difficult issues, solve problems before they fester, create trust so that others are willing to take risks, are innovative and contribute their best.

Assertive behaviour can be learned but sometimes our personality preferences can become obstacles to expressing ourselves. Personality theory indicates we all have specific penchants for ways we would like to behave in the world. Others, however, often have opposite expectations for our behaviours, which can create tension.

There are two basic processes you can use to deal with others' expectations of your behaviour when they counter your own preferences:

- **Self understanding:** have an understanding of your personality preferences and your typical approach to dealing with difficult situations.
- **Willingness:** during difficult situations with others, combine your self understanding with a willingness to stay in a problem-solving mode.

These two basic processes can help us be more effective when the world and others in it don't conform to our expectations. According to Dr. Carl Jung, father of "type" psychology, the tension between opposing preferences is the very essence of life itself. Without tension, there would be no energy and consequently no personality. When it comes to any confrontational situation that requires that we maintain assertive behaviour, it helps to understand that the situation is creating a "learning" opportunity for us — a chance to grow.

Self understanding

An understanding of our personality preferences can assist us in developing a work style that best supports our natural tendencies, marshals our talents and facilitates our sharing them with others. Which preference is more like you?

- **Mental preference — the Dreamer:** The dreamer provides us with our life's purpose. When we feel that life is a bit rough, the dreamer pulls us through. The dreamer quality in us is all-seeing and unobstructed by reality or practical limitations. Standing above it all, the dreamer is free to create new things, new ideas and innovations.
- **Social preference — the Realist:** The Realist is that part of us that actively works through obstacles to overcome the barriers to achieving the dream. Through an interactive process the realist makes every obstacle an action item as it strives to drive the dream forward.

- Social preference — The Catalyst: The Catalyst is that part of us that makes connections with others. The catalyst moves in and out of the different elements with ease as it reacts and begins to shape the ideas of the dreamer and the actions of the realist. The catalyst part of us helps us reflect and assimilate our experiences.
- Physical preference — The Critic: The Critic is that part of us that lets us know what obstacles are blocking us from dream achievement. The critic in us understands the filters and obstacles required to achieve the dream as it strives to produce and manifest the idea.

Willingness to stay in problem-solving mode

Since we all are different in how we perceive and decide about the world around us, dealing with difficult situations can cause us discomfort especially when we have to confront others. Confrontation generally implies that there is some discomfort or apprehension about the *process* of communication. It suggests that we perceive that we have something either “*hard*” for us to say or “*hard*” for us to hear. If the tension of opposite preferences is the very essence of life itself and without tension there would be no energy and consequently no mature personality growth, then the question has to be asked, “How can we use this push and pull of opposites to create a win-win solution for dealing with differences?”

When we find it difficult to stand up for our ideas or if we are too aggressive in expressing our ideas, assertiveness training can provide the tools and insights for turning our heads toward a problem-solving solution. To maintain assertive behaviours requires that we are willing to focus objectively on the problem by stating both the facts as well as how the problem is affecting us. Once stated, we need to request help from the other person involved in how they think we can resolve the tension of opposing views. We can then make a plan and follow up with each other until the problem is resolved.

The benefit to employers

Unfortunately, our personality strengths can sometimes turn into personality blind spots. If issues are not addressed, the Dreamer withdraws into his/her lofty mental position and tends to justify confrontations as an unnecessary activity. When people do this, they tend to lose interest in projects if others can't see eye to eye with them about how to proceed. The Realist often feels that confrontations are a waste of time because they slow them down from moving their action-items forward. They lose patience and can get bored with the process. The Catalyst, depending on how much power and influence he/she has, will strive to bring feelings to the surface and assist others in addressing them. If such people don't think they have any power or influence, however, they shrink back into themselves, feeling helpless and demoralized. And Critics can feel threatened by the tension of opposites and may bury their heads in work to avoid confronting others. These non-assertive approaches do not help towards solving problems, building trust or creating an innovative, risk-taking environment. When problems are not addressed, employers pay

