

# ASSERTIVENESS AS AN IMPORTANT SOCIAL COMPETENCE POSITIVELY AFFECTING EMPLOYEE RELATIONS

*SIERPIŃSKA Małgorzata (PL)*  
*Częstochowa University of Technology, Poland*

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## ABSTRACT

One of the most important social skills is assertiveness. It is social skills that contribute to an effective relationship with the environment. An assertive employee is a person who concentrates on the problem, trying to quickly resolve it without arguing and engaging in pointless discussions.

An assertive employee is the creator of his or her own choices and decisions, being open to the suggestions of others but also pointing out boundaries wherever it's necessary. Those attributes are generally associated with the attributes of an effective manager because, being "assertive" allows the maintenance of both the order and the care about relations; in other words it allows the building of success. It is a popular belief that being a good subordinate means following orders without discussions or inquiry, which could be the reason of displeasure or even aggression between a manager and his or her employee. But the enforcement of respect itself is not a right reserved just for the managers or those from higher and more elite social groups. This article tries to answer the question about employee assertiveness, especially subordinates. Should it be considered a positive attribute or treated as a negative attribute which hampers the relations at work.

**KEY WORD:** assertiveness, submissive attitude, aggressive behavior, manipulative behavior, social competence, employee relations

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## THE CONCEPT OF ASSERTIVENESS AND ITS UNDERSTANDING

Assertiveness is one of the types of social competence or social skills that contribute to an effective relationship with the environment and to achieving the intended purpose by the individual, with retaining the good quality of this relationship. It is also linked to the successes experienced when dealing with people. (Sęk H.,1988). Other social competences include: mitigating conflicts, ability to motivate others and coping with stress.

M. Król-Fijewska, one of the forerunners of research on practical applications of assertiveness in Poland, defines assertiveness as the ability to fully express oneself when dealing with another person or persons. When specifying assertive behavior, she states that it is direct, honest and firm expression of one's feelings, attitudes, opinions or desires, while respecting the integrity of others' psychological territory, i.e. in a way that respects the feelings, attitudes, opinions, rights and desires of the other person. (Król-Fijewska M.,1993) In other words, assertiveness is a form of contact with another person which does not pose a threat to freedom of speech and thought for any of the interlocutors.

A very important issue that is the essence of assertiveness is the problem of laying out clear limits of ones own psychological territory.

According to P. Fijewski, psychological territory is who we are, what is ours, what concerns us. It is our privacy and intimacy, feelings, needs, objects that belong to us, and often people that are close to us. ( Fijewski P.,1997.,)

## **UNASSERTIVE AND ASSERTIVE BEHAVIOR AND THEIR CHARACTERISTIC**

Unassertive behavior can take a form of submissive or aggressive behavior. People with **submissive attitude** are people who lack self-confidence, which in turn causes them to tend to compare themselves with others and notice their own shortcomings.

Mączyński states that such people do not believe they have the right to their own beliefs, opinions and feelings and in a way reject the fact that we are all equal and that everyone should be treated equally. Therefore, such people can not defend their rights and oppose their unjust treatment by others. (Mączyński J., 1991,; Mączyński J., 1994)

Second form of unassertive behavior is **aggressive behavior**. They are aimed at protecting one's individual rights and the achievement of one's objectives in a manner that violates the rights of others and diminishes or reduces the value and importance of their objectives and their capabilities. (Mączyński J., 1994) .

The literature also mentions one more type of unassertive behavior - **manipulative behavior**. This type of behavior is a specific hybrid, a mix of passive and aggressive behavior.

In comparison with submissive, aggressive or manipulative attitudes, the assertive attitude is definitely a constructive attitude. According to Alberti and Emmons, **assertive behavior**: foster the formation of equality in interpersonal relationships, cause the person to act in one's best interests, e.g. by taking independent decisions, taking the initiative, asking for help. In addition, an assertive person can defend one's own position (say "no", set boundaries, respond to criticism, defend one's own interests). Assertiveness is characterized by the free and frank expression of feelings, ability to use one's rights but also to respond to the violation of the rights of others. (Alberti R., Emmons M., 2002.)

## **ASSERTIVENESS – AN OBSTACLE OR ASSISTANCE IN RELATIONS WITH EMPLOYEES ?**

Assertive behavior in the work process fosters good relations with others, as it leads to increased self-esteem, reduced anxiety, achieving more of one's life goal, through initiative and spontaneity. Assertiveness usually leads to getting more reinforcements since positive behavior towards others, both verbal and non-verbal, provokes others to reciprocate the reaction. Authentic relationships with others appear, thanks to clear communication, the level of understanding oneself and others increases.

Despite the benefits of assertive behavior, it may happen that the effects of such behavior will be different. The employee risks the lack of sympathy for expressing his or her feelings directly and may be labeled as a man who walks through life daringly. So it is possible that the relations with other employees will change for the worse. Whether assertive behavior will be a hindrance or help in relations with other employees depends on the particular person and particular situation. For example, a manager who is used to submission may take such behavior as aggressive. He or she may be unpleasantly surprised if employee who was previously submissive, suddenly creates boundaries. Such manager may try to exert pressure on the employee to make him or her return to the "old" behavior which was so comfortable for him.

Another manager will value employees who know what they want, who have clear objectives and are able to honestly and assertively communicate their views.

Therefore it is important to do this from the beginning, make the employer know that he or she is dealing with someone who honestly and openly expresses one's opinions and feelings, defends one's rights but also respects the rights and opinions of other people.

An additional difficulty that is deeply rooted in our society is the belief that one should not talk about his or her achievements (hammered into our heads for years, regardless of sex). An

employee who is assertive in other areas, may have trouble in communicating their successes, because it will be hindered by the instilled norm of being modest. He or she will then be taught the use of spurious behaviors, such as maneuvering between wanting to show off and respecting the norms that "it is not proper," which can encourage dishonesty and manipulative behavior.

Thus it seems that it is difficult to find indisputable criteria, some are even contradictory. In the end, each situation must be evaluated independently.

H. Cloud and J. Townsend claim that the demarcation of boundaries can contribute to the resolution of typical problems through:

1. Lack of consent to taking the consequences of carelessness and laziness of one's colleagues.
2. Dealing with excess duties by demarcating the boundaries of one's work, understanding the responsibilities and talking to the supervisor about the duties.
3. Dealing with the wrong hierarchy of tasks, e.g. demarcation of boundaries for inappropriate behavior of colleagues.
4. Dealing with a difficult co-worker by, for example, focusing on changing the response, thereby denying that person any effect on us.
5. Dealing with a critic. It boils down to the preservation of autonomy and internal distance to the critical opinion, although sometimes it requires an open confrontation.
6. Dealing with authorities. The relationship with one's supervisor may reveal problems of attitude towards authority. (Cloud H., Townsend J., 1995)

The above examples show that assertiveness of an employee helps in relations with other workers, both in a symmetrical employee - employee relation as well as in a much more difficult, unbalanced type of employee - manager relation. However, as it was mentioned before, it is important to do this from the beginning, make other employees and the employer know that they are dealing with someone who honestly and openly expresses one's opinions and feelings, defends one's rights but also respects the rights and opinions of other people.

## **CONCLUSION**

Assertiveness is one of the possible behaviors that should be used because it is often very helpful in relationships with other employees, giving the feeling of confidence, peace, integrity and effectiveness. It allows an individual to make informed choices, take responsibility for his or her fate, which in turn helps to achieve a state in which all actions are consistent with one's core values and priorities, serving one's vision and goals. Assertive person will not allow others to violate his or her dignity while respecting the rules of *fair-play* in relations with the environment, trying to act in a way that does not violate the rights of others, and fostering equality in interpersonal relationships. With clear communication, the individual's relationships with other employees will be more authentic, which in turn will lead to an increase in the level of understanding.

Despite the benefits of assertive behavior, it may happen that assertiveness will become a stumbling block in relations with others. The employee risks the lack of sympathy for expressing his or her feelings directly and may be labeled as a man who walks through life daringly or as an egoist who exposes his or her needs.

Important to note that we have the right to use (or not) our rights and that assertiveness is also our right to conscious resignation from assertive behavior at some point.

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