Training Manual

FOR THE Virtual Workshop Series and Self-Study Program:

Module 4:
Assertiveness Skills

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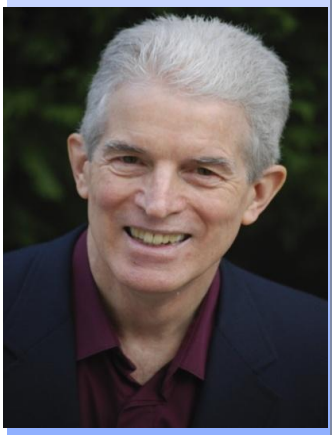

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Module 4:
Assertiveness Skills

Introduction

This collection of articles **reinforces and supplements** Module 4, "Assertiveness," of my **Tele-Workshop Series**, Emotional Intelligence for Resilient Leaders and Professionals.

These articles can increase your ability for **leadership** and your **professional effectiveness.** If you enjoy and learn best by reading, they can stand alone. If you do nothing more than read these articles, you will miss the skill-building exercises of our Program, but you will gain much knowledge. An intellectual understanding of emotional intelligence can be the first step toward better performance.

These articles will also profit you after you have completed Module 4 of the Tele-Workshop for they will remind you of key points you have learned. If you have missed any sessions, they will help fill you in.

Even if you attended all the sessions, these articles will reinforce your learning. You will see the learning points in new contexts.

These articles will also reinforce and supplement your learning if you take the **Self-Study Program** version of my **Tele-Workshop Series**, Emotional Intelligence for Resilient Leaders and Professionals. This program gives you **over 80 audio recordings** of live Tele-Workshop sessions to listen to on an MP3 player at your leisure—anywhere, anytime.

In short, these articles will **enrich your learning experience**. They will help make it stick—and last.

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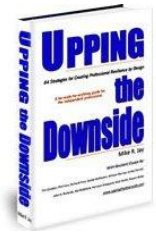
Bonus:
My published book chapter, *"Emotional Intelligence for Resilience,"* is available for free on our web site, http://www.EagleAlliance.com. Look for the book cover of the Amazon best-seller, Upping the Down Side:



Assertiveness - Dog in a Rut

In my neighbor's yard is a dog that used to jump over their wood fence and roam. They then put an electric fence around the inside of their wood fence. I watched the dog learn about this electric fence. Whenever he went over the electric invisible line, he got shocked and jumped back with a whimper. In a few days he never ventured over the invisible electric fence. His fence jumping days were over.

Some months later, my neighbor took down the electric fence to remove the chance that his toddler might get shocked. The dog continues to this day to pace back and forth, observing the invisible line. He never ventures over it. **He never experiments** to see if the electric fence is still there.

Observing this out my window, makes me wonder if we humans do the same thing. Some constraint stops us from doing what we like. Then the constraint disappears, **but we never notice our new freedom.**

Can you think of examples of **observing constraints that no longer exist?**

A friend of mine works for a company that has always had an open and trusting culture. They talk things over and make quick decisions verbally. Her company merged with another company that has a guarded and cover your fanny culture. Her new colleagues write endless emails to document their reasons for every move. She complains that it is very hard to get them to make a decision and move on anything because they are so busy writing to cover their fannies. They are afraid to make decisions that might turn out to tarnish their image.

My friend notes that they could loosen up in the new merged company. Their old culture is being replaced by a more open culture. But they don't notice or believe it. They continue to observe their old constraints about being cautious and documenting every detail before they move.

Are there any cases where you are **being too cautious?** Are you observing old constraints that no longer exist? For example, a prior boss or authority figure used to cut you down if you ventured to make an assertion with gusto. You learned to be circumspect, humble in your expressions. But now you have a boss who tells you to speak up, assert yourself. Can you make the shift?

I once coached a **woman** to do exactly that, **speak up more** often in meetings with vigor. Her boss paid me to coach her to stand up more to the men who tried to put her down. It took her a while to see that the invisible electric fence was no longer there. She started to get more assertive and out argue the men. Her boss liked this and promoted her to a position where she supervised some of these old guard men.

Assertiveness Goals

In order to be maximally successful, you **need superb assertiveness skills**. What are **your goals** when you are being assertive? You need strategic and tactical goals.

Strategic goals include getting something you really want and value. **You need to know** what that is before you start a crucial conversation. As negotiators insist, you must know your bottom line. I have address this in several articles.

Secondly, you need to **seek a win/win outcome**. Adopt a win/win attitude and be clear to the other person or group that you seek a win/win. When they perceive that you are not just out to get your own way, but also seek for them to get what they want, they become more cooperative. In a spirit of collaboration, you have the best chance of finding solutions that offer you both a win/win.

Tactical goals include how you handle yourself. You must **avoid being too aggressive or too passive**. We all know that people get defensive when someone is aggressive toward them. They back away and put up their guard. Some people will push back with their own aggressiveness. Others will avoid you as much as possible.

Neither response will not be good for you in seeking a successful outcome.

On the other hand, if you are too passive, seeking too much to avoid conflict, you will also engender negative results. People will tend to respond weakly with little commitment because you are not stating your case well. And conflicts will remain buried instead of getting ironed out. Buried conflicts lead to people withholding their best efforts from your project.

So tactically, you must aim for the middle ground between aggressiveness and avoiding. This parallels what I have written in other articles about **avoiding the fight/flight syndrome**. We are programmed by our human biology to respond to threats with either fighting of fleeing. In the office that means being aggressive or avoiding. We have to stay calm and centered in order to avoid this biological response. And we have to treat the other person with assertiveness that does not trigger them into fight or flight.

In summary, in order to be maximally successful, you need superb assertiveness skills that include the above strategic and tactical goals and the ability to implement them.

You can **improve your ability to implement** these assertiveness goals in our individual or group **Executive Coaching**. Our **Web-conferencing Tele-Workshop**, Emotional Intelligence for Resilient Leaders and Professionals has a full **Module on Assertiveness**. For more information call me, Bill Murray, at 919-240-7924 or visit our web site, http://www.EagleAlliance.com .6

Assertiveness Behaviors

To improve our appropriate **assertiveness skills**, we need to **be aware of 3 types** of behaviors on a continuum: Avoiding, assertive, and aggressive. See the chart "Being Assertive," in the Appendix on p. 19.

We usually need to behave in the middle range with assertive behaviors. However, in some situations it may be wise to avoid things. And on very rare occasions we might want to choose to be aggressive. The trick is to be able to choose. Most of the behaviors we later on regret, resulted from impulsive actions.

Our goal should be to have the awareness of choices and usually choose assertiveness. Now let's look at the common goals people have for each type of behavior.

Avoiding:

Goal is to please others and be liked. You hope someone will guess what you want.

Assertive:

Goal is to get what you really want and value. Also to respect other's wishes. And to **strive for a win/win** outcome. When you add this last item, you seek to collaborate versus just be victorious.

Aggressive:

Goal is to dominate, get your own way, be in charge.

When might you choose each of these types of behaviors?

Avoiding:

We often choose to avoid simply because it does **not seem worth the effort** to assert. We weigh payoffs and decide that it is easier or safer to keep quiet. For example, when your boss says something dumb, do you want to correct him? Maybe, if it impacts strongly on your work. But probably not, if it is about someone else's project.

Even with our friends, we usually avoid confronting them with unpleasant facts about them because we want to be liked. Why risk that your friend may get his/her feelings hurt?

Some people are really passive and rarely speak up on their own behalf. Often their parents or other authority figures have trained them to be passive. Again, in this case they are not really choosing among the 3 types of behaviors. They miss opportunities to get what they really want.

Aggressive:

the opposite side of the continuum, some aggressive people consistently act aggressively and are not choosing among the 3 types of behaviors. They miss opportunities to encourage engagement by others.

Assertive:

When you have flexibility and can consciously choose to be assertive in appropriate situations, you stand the best chance of getting what you really want. If you know what is important to you, you can choose to stand up for it in a self-confident manner. Usually, others will respect you for this.

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How to Be Assertive

How to be more assertive?

Make a conscious choice of both verbal and non-verbal behaviors. See the chart "Being Assertive," in the Appendix on p. 19.

Assertive:

Express what you honestly want, think, and feel in direct ways. Usually start your sentence with "I", not you.

Non-verbal behaviors include listening closely. Stay calm, relaxed, assured, and firm. Also if possible, be caring, warm, and expressive. Look directly without staring. Have an erect posture and sometimes lean forward to show a high level of attention.

If you are not being assertive, you usually are either avoiding or aggressive.

Avoiding:

You avoid saying what you want, think, or feel. Or you say them in such a way as to put yourself down or minimize their importance.

Your non-verbal behavior includes: Voice is weak, hesitant, soft. Your eyes are downcast. You come across as overly agreeable.

Aggressive:

You say what you want, think, and feel at the expense of others. You judge, blame, label, threaten and accuse.

You non-verbal behavior includes: Exaggerated show of strength, superiority. You are tense, loud, cold, demanding. You stare. You appear angry by pointing your finger or banging your fist.

How do these behaviors **affect others?**

Assertive:

Others feel respected and valued by you. They tend to respect you back and trust and value you. If you invite them to collaborate, they tend to accept.

Avoiding:

Others tend to pity and disrespect you. They may take you for granted. Obviously, we all expect a certain amount of avoiding to occur. However, if you consistently avoid with little other behavior, you will eventually lose people's respect.

Aggressive:

Others feel humiliated, hurt, disrespected. They react by being defensive, resentful, distrustful, fearful, or vengeful. Yes, if you have enough power to be aggressive, others will obey you in the short term. But they react with a desire to get you back, maybe with an aggressive behavior of their own or just with foot dragging. Aggressive leaders may appear to succeed over the short term. But over the long term, results decline and good people leave them. Some companies value aggressive leaders as turnaround executives. But their performance declines if they stay anywhere too long, so companies move them around.

Obviously, in the long run, the best way to get what you really want is to be assertive.

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Assertiveness Feelings

Would you like a little guide as to when you are being assertive? One way is to **monitor your own feelings and desired emotional payoffs.** See the chart "Being Assertive," in the Appendix on p. 19.

Assertive:

When you are being assertive, you usually feel confident and good about yourself. Often you are aware of your own feelings and also aware of what is important to you.

Avoiding:

When you are avoiding confrontations, you usually feel anxious, hurt, disappointed or resentful. You are afraid that negative outcomes will result if you assert yourself.

Aggressive:

When you are being aggressive, you usually feel self-righteous, controlling, and superior. You are enjoying getting your own way.

I have written in other articles how each of these three approaches has different outcomes. Avoiding and aggressive behavior rarely pay off objectively in the long run. However, from an emotional perspective, each approach does have a sort of payoff.

Assertive emotional payoff:

You develop healthy relationships that you enjoy and are productive. You consciously make choices about what is important and how to get it. You feel self-confident. You notice that others tend to respect you.

Avoiding emotional payoff:

You avoid unpleasantness, conflicts, tensions, and confrontations. This is a short-term gain that usually does not last. The conflicts come back to haunt you. You are able to avoid taking responsibility for situations. This seems easier than other alternatives.

Aggressive emotional payoff:

You are able to vent some anger. You enjoy being in control. You feel superior. This too is a short-term payoff because many people dislike being controlled and look for ways to subvert you.

The trick is to **be self-aware** so that you can **recognize** how you are feeling now and what emotional payoffs seem attractive to you. Then you can see if you are being assertive if you wish to be. For example, if you notice that fear is your dominant feeling,

then you are probably going to avoid something. Or if you notice that you feel angry or superior, you may be tempted to act in an aggressive manner. If you notice that you are 11

feeling good about yourself, aware of your feelings and making conscious choices, chances are that you can be assertive.

Being assertive will have the most probable good outcome of the three approaches. While you may temporarily like the emotional payoffs of avoiding or aggressiveness, the only lasting good outcome is usually from asserting yourself.

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The Benefits of Assertiveness

Let's look at the **likely outcomes** of three types of behavior, avoiding, assertiveness, and aggressiveness. See the chart "Being Assertive," in the Appendix on p. 19.

Avoiding:

Lose/win: You tend to lose, others tend to win at your expense. Low results because you act small and get treated as small. Your avoiding posture usually results from fears and ironically it often causes the fears to come true. This is called a self-fulfilling prophecy. Avoiding often breeds low self-esteem and depression.

Assertiveness:

Win/win: You win and so do others. To some extent, the self-fulfilling prophecy works with assertiveness too. When you expect good results and assert yourself to get them, they often materialize. When you assert appropriately, you stand the best chance of getting what you really want and being happy about it.

Aggressiveness:

Win/lose: You get what you want and others have to give in to you. However, this often changes into lose/lose because others will drag their feet on your priorities or even sabotage them. They see ways to subvert you and when they succeed, you have a lose/lose, both parties have a less than optimal result.

Aggressiveness has this huge drawback of breeding passive or passive-aggressive behavior in response. It also breeds bad health such as heart attacks in people who are habitually aggressive. Research proves this, and it is described by Duke psychologist Redford Williams, in his book, Anger Kills.

Risks:

People often complain that there is a risk to being assertive, and they spell out a fear of a bad outcome such as their boss will take offense. What these people seldom recognize is that there is a risk with each of the three behaviors. Staying silent or avoiding has the risk of others not taking you seriously. Being aggressive has the risk of engendering subversive reactions. So weigh your risks with each of the three behaviors before deciding on one.

What you **need is to have a conscious choice** of one of the three behaviors, not a knee jerk reaction in favor of one. **Want to improve your ability** to weigh outcomes and **make good decisions** on when to assert yourself? Explore our individual or group **Executive Coaching**. Our **Web-conferencing Tele-Workshop**, Emotional Intelligence for Resilient Leaders and Professionals has a full **Module on Assertiveness**. For more information call me, Bill Murray, at 919-240-7924 or visit our web site, http://www.EagleAlliance.com .

Assertiveness - Demands vs. Requests

When you choose to be assertive, you can do it with **commands, demands, or requests**.

For a **command to be effective**, you need to have authority. You need to be an authority figure such as a parent or a boss or a representative of one. Military officers learn how to issue commands regularly. But experience often teaches them to **ask for input.** What do others think? Would it be a good idea to do such and such? I have read that this asking for input is much more common in combat. It just works better than straight commanding.

At work, we commonly make **demands**. For example, we say, "Please have your report done by Friday." If the person does not do it, there will be **penalties**. At the very least we may get mad at them. It is best to avoid demands except for important situations.

Finally, when possible, it works best to make **requests** such as, "Please have your report done by Friday." "Wait a minute," you say. "That is the same sentence as above for demands." Right. You cannot always tell a demand from a request until the person fails to do it. If it was a request, you do not get mad at them. It was **a bit optional**. You would prefer that they did it, but you will be OK if they do not.

So why use requests at all? Because you have a much better chance of others **complying with** your request with some **enthusiasm**. If others sense that you are making a demand, they may drag their feet and getting it done. They have so many other priorities, you know. You want to assert yourself and get a task done. But you need others to join in with enthusiasm and commitment. Make a request.

Also, if you **overdo commands** and demands, some people may **become passive** with you. They obey but not with creativity. You get their hands but not their minds. And with other people, continued coercion may **breed contempt** for you. These people may seek ways to undermine you.

Even if you have the necessary authority, consider **using fewer commands** and demands and use **more requests**. This will **improve your results** and others respond better with **more enthusiasm and commitment.**

You can learn about assertiveness in our **Web-conferencing Tele-Workshop**, Emotional Intelligence for Resilient Leaders and Professionals, which has an **entire Module on Assertiveness.**

How to Make Requests

In a prior article, I described reasons to use a request rather than a demand or command when possible. In short, people are **more likely to carry out a request** rather than drag their feet and they are more likely to respond with some enthusiasm.

So if you decide to use a request format to assert yourself, do it **with a light touch** such as "Would you be willing to….?" "Might you be able to….?" The light touch suggests that you can live with a "No" answer. You would prefer a "Yes," but you don't want to force the issue.

In this type of situation, you can invite others to join with you in setting up and implementing the task you are requesting. You **ask for their input and creativity**.

Also, make your request **in positive language**, not negative. For example, "George, would you be willing to get your report done by Friday?" A negative formulation to avoid would be, "George, stop turning in your report late!" Negative formulation puts people on the defensive. You are trying to recruit their best efforts with positive language.

I once experienced a big example of negative language when my boss said to me, "Bill, you are not a team player!" I responded with anger. He knew full well that my time was taken by his boss who had put me on a special project dealing with VPs. I suspected my boss was just jealous. I finally asked him for positive language, "What exactly do you want me to do?" My boss responded that I just needed to do a little bit of my regular job of leading a few workshops on leadership and communication skills to managers. His positive language was fine with me so I readily agreed with his request.

This story also shows a final aspect of a good request, **being specific and clear**. "Not a team player," is vague and not clear. "Lead a few workshops," is specific and clear.

The other person should know exactly what to do in order to comply with your request.

These guidelines for requests apply to our talking to ourselves too. For example, if you want to lose weight, make positive, specific and clear requests to yourself. Do not say to yourself, "Stop eating sweets!" in a self-scolding manner. Rather, make a request of yourself, "Eat more fruits for snacks." Diet experts say this positive approach works better.

Want to improve your ability to make good requests when you assert yourself? Explore our individual or group **Executive Coaching**. Our **Web-conferencing Tele-Workshop**, Emotional Intelligence for Resilient Leaders and Professionals has a full

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Appendix - Being Assertive

AVOIDING	ASSERTIVE	AGGRESSIVE
GOALS		
To please, to be liked. Hope someone will guess what you want	To get what you really want. To respect other's wishes.	To dominate.
VERBAL BEHAVIORS		
You avoid saying what you want, think, or feel or say them in such a way to put yourself down.	You say what you honestly want, think, and feel in direct and helpful ways. Use "I" statements. Evoke crucial conversations.	You say what you want, think, and feel at the expense of others. Judge, label, blame, threaten and accuse.
NON-VERBAL BEHAVIORS		
Voice is weak, hesitant, soft. Eyes downcast. Overly agreeable.	Listen closely. Calm, relaxed, assured. Caring, firm warm, expressive. Look directly without staring. Erect posture.	Exaggerated strength. Superiority, Tense, loud, cold, demanding. Staring. Appear angry.
YOUR FEELINGS		
You feel anxious, hurt, disappointed, resentful	You feel confident, good about yourself. Aware of feelings and values.	You feel self-righteous, controlling, superior
EFFECTS ON OTHERS		
Others pity and disrespect you. May take you for granted.	Others feel respected and valued by you. Others respect, trust and value you.	Others feel humiliated, hurt, disrespected. They react by being defensive, resentful, distrustful, fearful, vengeful.
YOUR EMOTIONAL PAYOFFS		
Avoid unpleasantness, conflicts, short-term tensions, confrontations. No responsibility.	Respected. Self-confident. Make own choices. Healthy relationships.	Express some anger. Feel in control and superior.
PROBABLE OUTCOMES		
You don't get what you want. Lose-win.	You get what you really want without hurting others. Win-win.	You get what you want at the expense of others. Win-lose.

(Workshops\EI for Profs\HOs\Being Assertive)