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From the Editor

Passive, Aggressive or Assertive?

by David C. Miller

"I know I should be talking to more people about what I do, but I don't want to seem pushy."

"I need to confront my boss (or partner or employee) on this issue, but I keep avoiding it."

"It's not worth the hassle to deal with this person, time to move on."

Do any of these comments sound familiar? They are examples of many that I hear when coaching professionals on how to succeed.

The tenor in which we approach our business or career can really make a difference. We all bring our personalities and relational styles to the table.

When it comes to promoting yourself, your practice, service or product and being who you are, are critical. However, there is another dynamic which overlays our personality. It's the way we communicate.

You can think of it as a spectrum spanning between being passive and being aggressive. In the middle somewhere is assertiveness.

You can be humorous or serious, concise or eloquent and come across in a way that's passive, aggressive or assertive.

It probably goes without saying that there's no room for passivity if you want to succeed. The world is not going to come knocking on your door just because you're qualified or competent. You must get your message out about the value you can provide. **Tentativeness will make you invisible!**

If you're toward the passive end of the spectrum when it comes to building your career, you probably feel that the alternative is to be obnoxious, self-promoting—in essence, aggressive.

But there is another choice (which happens to be the ideal choice)—assertiveness.

Assertiveness is vital whether you are promoting your business, impressing your superiors or dealing with a difficult customer.

What is Assertiveness?

In their book, *The EQ Edge*, authors Stein and Book define assertiveness as having three basic components:

1. The ability to express feelings (anger, warmth, etc.)



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2. The ability to express beliefs or thoughts openly. This means being able to voice opinions and take a stand, even if it's emotionally difficult to do so and even if you have something to lose by doing so.
3. The ability to stand up for personal rights. In other words, not allowing others to bother you or take advantage of you.

Assertiveness is Not Aggression

A very common mistake is to confuse assertive behavior with aggressive conduct. As a result, people shy away from the idea of assertiveness because they fear they'll seem pushy or even hurt others.

What's the distinction between assertiveness and aggression?

It really comes down to your regard for others. Assertiveness is characterized by a clear statement of one's beliefs (e.g., "I want to tell you about what I do because I believe it will help you"), accompanied by a consideration of the thoughts and feelings of others.

Aggression has no consideration for the dignity of others. By the way, it may surprise you that *passivity also lacks this same consideration!* So, remember that if you're tempted to "play it safe" by being passive.

Assertive people are positioned to attain their goals because they are willing to move out of their comfort zone for the benefit of others. They are masters at creating "win-win" results.

So, if you've been reluctant, be assertive about promoting your business or career and make sure you're not confusing assertiveness with aggression. Also, check your motives and find a way to advance professionally and help others (your customers, clients, colleagues, employer, etc.) win at the same time. □

