

Lack of Assertiveness

When we think of assertiveness the first thing that comes to mind is our ability to communicate and our self-confidence. If our communication skills are toned and our self-esteem is high we will be able to draw on our strengths, making decisions and communicating concerns effectively. In our day to day jobs as technicians many of us are afraid to make decisions and speak the truth. Then we wonder why we are faced with unpleasant, awkward, or unplanned situations.

Assertive has been defined as standing up for rights and expressing feelings in an honest, open, appropriate and direct way which do not violate another person's rights. Assertiveness takes the view that all individuals can pursue their own goals, protect their own rights and achieve results without violating the rights of others.

The following is a listing of rules to help shape a more assertive philosophy not only in the workplace, but for other facets of life as well.

The Seven Golden Rules of Assertive Philosophy

1. By trying to govern our lives so as to never hurt anyone, we end up hurting ourselves and other people.
2. Sacrificing our rights usually results in destroying relationships or preventing ones from forming.
3. If we do not tell other people how their behavior negatively effects us, we are denying them an opportunity to change their behavior.
4. When we do what we think is right for us, we feel better about ourselves and have more authentic and satisfying relationships with others.
5. We all have a right to express ourselves as long as we do not violate the rights of others.
6. There is more to be gained from life by being free and able to stand up for ourselves and from honoring the same rights of other people.
7. When we are assertive, everyone involved usually benefits.

Assertiveness is the middle ground which takes the best of aggressiveness (without the negatives) and the best of nurturing and autonomous behavior (without loss of self). For most individuals, it is a learned skill. The action is genuine, complete and involves the direct communication of goals and ideas. It is the conviction that one's position can be expressed strongly without dominating the other. Assertiveness is based on the observation that every individual has "rights" and can act in accordance with these rights.

List of Rights

- The right to have and express your own feelings and ideas
- The right to be listened to and taken seriously
- The right to ask for what you want
- The right to get some of your own needs met
- The right to be treated with respect
- The right to say "no" at times and not feel guilty
- The right to ask for information from others

Assertive behaviors allow individuals to achieve results. They help individuals to be clear on what they want and to act in a positive, honest, direct and self-enhancing way without diminishing self. It allows a person to be sensitive to other individuals' viewpoints and positions without having this diminish one's own ideas and alternatives. Individuals behaving in this manner feel confident about themselves during the situation and afterwards. There is also a high level of respect for the other individual.

Over the years of human factors awareness training many of the programs include a behavioural analysis in the workshop that provides the individual with an insight on their behavioral style. When we look at the individual's behavior style we can identify how their character affects their judgement throughout the day, not only when things are going well but when things are not going well. Everyone is different and there is no right or wrong behavioral style to embrace. Just realizing how our behavioural style effects our judgment provides us with an important understanding of how we interact with events and other individuals.

How can we improve our ability to be assertive? In order to have the best of both worlds, between the nurturing and aggressive behavioral styles, we must become aware of our own weaknesses and turn them into positive behaviors.

We know that there are positive and negatives to each behavioral style and if we focus on the negatives and try to make them a positive, the positive character will bring us closer to being an assertive person which ultimately is our goal. Looking at assertive behavior in this light, we can define an assertive person who is adept in both human relationships and task accomplishment.

When we look at the relationship side of the equation we see that communication is very important. We have to learn how to communicate which includes the ability and tolerance to listen. There are many good books, tapes, videos and seminars that will influence us and show us how to become effective communicators. We can take a Dale Carnegie course or join a local chapter of Toastmasters, both good programs which have lasting effects.

On the other side of the spectrum is the task at hand where a good technical knowledge base is required. We need to understand our aircraft and what is required to keep current in our field. We must take pride in our work and be able at the end of the shift to go home with confidence, realizing what we have done was completed to the best of our ability without compromise. If we do not have this feeling, then we were not being assertive enough.

Many of us seem to be short-changing ourselves because of our lack of assertiveness. We find that the maintenance departments are the last in many cases to get the budget for staff, training

and resources. Because the flight crews are generally more extroverted they seem to have always been able to obtain the staff, training and resources required. The maintenance department frequently finds itself in a compromising position. "If you invite people to kick you ultimately there will be someone who will accommodate your request." As I communicate within the industry today there are four concerns:

- Shortage of qualified technicians
- Poor salaries
- Lack of recognition
- Budgets for resources and training being slashed.

Consider why we can have our private brand new \$150,000 Cessna 172 worked on at a shop rate of \$45.00 per hour and when we take our brand new \$27,000 Ford Mustang in for repair, the shop rate is \$60.00 per hour? Why is it that when I talk to my cousin who is a mechanic at an automobile dealership and try to convince him to become a licensed aircraft technician to work at a local airline for \$21.00 per hour he laughs? Why is there a shortage of aviation technicians?

In order to get the recognition we deserve in all areas, it would help if we were a little more assertive. This does not mean to become demanding and a whiner, but rather to speak boldly and with conviction about our goals and concerns. Maintenance Managers need to recognize their roles in not only their influence on the success of the company, but also their role in the development and recognition of their own staff. They need to communicate to the company owners that a strong and knowledgeable maintenance department is the key to a successful and sustaining flight operation.

Maintenance Managers must be familiar with the behavior style of the people they supervise and utilize their talents, experience and wisdom. As the employees become aware of behavior styles and understand their own behavior they see how they unwittingly contribute to some of their own problems and how they can make adjustments.

Assertive behavior may not be a skill that comes naturally to many individuals. It is, however, a critical skill to achieve effectiveness, particularly in conflict resolution. Assertive behavior is a learned skill that demands practice and diligence. The most important factor effected by assertiveness is "to refuse to compromise our standard". Instead of swallowing one's frustrations and giving up too easily, the technician's role is to state his point of view clearly and make his frustrations and dissatisfactions known. The technician should give management the kind of feedback required to ensure that management will be able to assist the technician to do their job.

If we develop the skills of being assertive, then we can do our jobs with pride and vigor and be rewarded accordingly.