Stepping up and speaking out

Penny Barker

Are you able to say 'no' to people when you need to, or to ask for what you want without anxiety? Do you sometimes feel steam-rolled by pushy clients or find that people don't do what you ask them? Would you like to feel more confident, more of the time?

Confidence and assertiveness are essential to feeling in control and being effective both at work and in our personal lives. They go hand in hand; if we lack confidence in ourselves we are unable to be assertive and this can not only hold us back, but further damage our self-belief, creating a negative spiral.

Confidence comes from knowing our strengths and capabilities, focusing on the outcome that we want to achieve and being able to recognize the challenges that we may face. It requires us to be realistic in the expectations we set ourselves and others. Confidence is not about always knowing the answer or how to fix every problem, it's about believing that you have the ability to handle whatever comes up.

Our ability to be assertive is directly related to how we handle conflict; our so-called 'fight, flight or freeze and play dead' response. Some people lack confidence and self-esteem, not believing that they have anything to offer and that everyone else is always better. This leads to overly passive behaviour and avoidance of conflict. Others are more aggressive, focusing on their own needs and unaware of the impact that they are having on others. Passive-aggressive people are not open about how they feel, looking after their own interests but avoiding confrontation.

Many people confuse assertiveness with aggression, often because the more aggressive people are the ones that seem to get their own way, although often only in the short term. Being assertive, however, is about being open

and honest about what's important to you and what your values are and then communicating this confidently and clearly. It requires us to respect the values and needs of others whilst knowing that we are not responsible for how they respond. Assertiveness allows us to create choice, both for ourselves and other people, and encourages collaboration towards a successful outcome.

KEY LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Understand the importance of knowing our strengths and values in both our personal and professional lives
- Know what confidence is and how to develop it
- Learn why being assertive is important and how to develop an assertive approach

MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. What do you need to do to be confident?
(A) Look at the evidence for your competence to handle a situation
(B) Know everything
(C) Have all the answers
(D) Stick your chest out and talk loudly
2. Which of the following is true about assertive people?
(A) They express what is important to them whilst respecting other people
(B) They get what they want every time
(C) They are aggressive
(D) They don't take responsibility for their actions
3. What will being more assertive help you to do?
(A) Get more of what you want and need
(B) Never have to do anything you don't want to
(C) Avoid any form of conflict
(D) Spend less time with clients