

# Co-operantics

## Co-operative skills for everyone

### Giving feedback

Being assertive can really help us in difficult situations such as giving critical feedback. Talking to a colleague about their unsatisfactory work is a challenge, many of us shy away from it or let it build up until we make a remark which is angry or resentful. It's better to deal with the situation assertively.

1. The first step is to **check that your goal is clear** in giving feedback. It is not just an end in itself. The aim is to change some aspect of the way your colleague carries out their job.

2. Let's take the example of a colleague whose job it is to bring you monthly accounts. He is never on time with them and you have to keep chasing him up. The aim is to get him to change his behaviour and to bring you the accounts on time.

**Rights:** *You have some rights in this situation. You have the right to expect people to perform their work adequately. They have rights too. They have the right to expect you to behave in a way which doesn't put them down, attack them or make them look small. Their mistakes do not give you the right to behave aggressively.*

3. **Be specific** about the change you want. Raise the problem at the time. Try not to let it build up. Choose a suitable time and place away from other colleagues: *"Ted, I'd like to talk to you about the accounts"*

4. **Talk about behaviour you can see, talk about facts:** *"I notice your accounts are three or four days late each month"* Don't make personal statements which could be seen as an attack such as *"You're so sloppy"* or *"your attitude is too laid back ..."*

5. **Make sure you are speaking for yourself by using 'I'**. In this way you are speaking about your own feelings and perceptions, you are not attributing blame, you are being direct and honest and you will build better relationships with the other person.

6. **Get a response to your feedback.** This is about getting agreement. Ted might not agree. Use phrases such as *"Do you agree?"* or *"Have you noticed this?"* or *"Is that the way you see it?"* or *"Why is this happening?"*

7. **Ask for suggestions** to bring about the change you want. *"How could you improve this situation? What changes could we make?"*

8. **Summarize** the suggestions to be carried out: *"So, we're agreed that in future you'll..."*

Following these steps means you're more likely to get the change you want. You have been assertive and it's more likely that you'll get a response which isn't aggressive or passive from your colleague.

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### Receiving feedback

When receiving feedback it is also helpful to behave in an assertive way. The following steps will enable you to hear feedback without allowing it to become a personal attack. Your response will be more considered and will help repair or maintain a good relationship with the other person. The first step is to decide whether the feedback is accurate and fair. It might be justified, unjustified or just a put-down. You may need to think for a minute before you reply.

**If it's justified:** For instance, you have arrived late too often. Whatever it is, you know it's true and it does apply to you. It helps to use negative assertion. Negative assertion means acknowledging the truth in what your critic is saying: *'Yes, I have been late quite a few times recently'*. In doing this, you'll feel less defensive and more accepting of yourself.

**If it's unjustified:** You've received some criticism which is completely untrue. You could say *"That's really not true"* or *"I don't accept that"*. But say it with conviction, without apologising. Make sure your body language expresses certainty, not doubt.

**If you're not sure:** There might be some truth in it, but it's an exaggeration. You could ask for more information: *"You say I'm always late. Could you clarify when I have been late?"* If the person is vague or incorrect, you might say *"Well, I have been late twice this month (acknowledging the truth), but it's not true to say I'm always late."*

**Put-downs** If you're feeling put down by a remark, the assertive way to deal with it is to say that you feel put down, and what your reaction to it is. For example, you've been told in a jokey way that you have no sense of humour. You might say: *"I find what you say hurtful"* and add *"I'd like you to stop"*. Sometimes you only realise afterwards that something was a put-down. It's assertive to confront the person later in the same way as above.