

Communicate assertively – Getting your message through!

From time to time situations arise where you need to communicate assertively – to ensure your message gets through!

A customer owes you money, but keeps promising “the cheques in the mail” – a team member takes inadequate care, leading to lost productivity and customer complaints or a supplier continually lets you down!

Often in these situations business owners are uncertain how to proceed – perhaps not tackling the issue as assertively, fearing to do otherwise could potentially damage a relationship or lead to consequences they would prefer to avoid.

The cost of non-assertive communication

Invariably when we fail to communicate assertively – all we do is encourage a repeat of the behaviour. For example if a client pays us in 60 days instead of the agreed 30 days – what is the motivation to change? They have access to an interest free source of finance, which makes it easier for them to manage their own cash flow!

Similarly, the team member who causes problems is unlikely to change their behaviour if the problems are not brought to attention and/or the consequences of a continuation are clearly spelt out.

The greatest impact of failing to communicate assertively is however how we feel when the behaviour is repeated!

The D.E.S.C. Script - A Powerful tool when you need to communicate assertively

The D.E.S.C Script (originally created by Sharon and Gordon Bower) is a powerful and very practical tool I have used for many years in situations where I need to communicate assertively and clearly.

D.E.S.C stands for:

- Describe
- Express
- Specify
- Consequences

Step 1 - Decide the outcome you want to achieve

Before taking action, the first step is to decide the outcome you are looking to achieve – both in the short and long term.

This step is crucial as it will frame the shape of the conversations and actions that follow – it will also help preserve relationships that may otherwise be damaged!

In most instances, when you communicate assertively, you will want to preserve the relationship.

Step 2 – Describe the Problem

Be specific as possible – important to stay focused on the problem or behaviour – avoid attacking the person!

Step 3 – Explain the impact of the problem or behaviour

Again, be as specific as possible – outline the impact the behaviour is having on the business, customers or other team members. If supporting evidence is available, use it at this point.

Step 4 – Specify the change you wish to see

Outline the changes you are looking for – be as specific as possible. Focus on the changed behaviour.

Step 5 – Outline the consequences

The final step in the process is to outline the consequences both positive, if the desired changes are made and crucially, negative should the problem or behaviour persist.

Some Tips

- Keep the focus on the problem and its impact – avoid attacking the person
- Always keep in mind the outcome you are looking to achieve
- Until you become familiar with the process it can be useful to write it out in full – this can help you organise your thoughts – and also has the added benefit of providing a record of what was discussed if there is a repetition
- Again, until you are familiar with the process try rehearsing what you have to say until it flows easily (Sometimes what we write does not flow when we try to use it verbally)
- The D.E.S.C Script works equally well both in verbal and written communication

Summary

When coupled with a desired outcome, the D.E.S.C Script is a very powerful tool business owners can use in a wide range of circumstances where you need to communicate assertively and still maintain relationships.

The key to its success is its simplicity – next time you need to get your message across, give it a try!

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