



Exercise: Sending Assertive Body Signals

Assertive communication is a method of clearly expressing your needs, desires, ideas and feelings while considering and respecting the needs of others. It requires open and non-defensive interactions. You aim for a win-win situation and therefore have the goal of balancing your own needs and goals with the needs and goals of others. This is an important skill in the workplace, where social situations are complex and perceived threats to our needs and goals can quickly result in negative emotional reactions.

Certain types of workplace situations can make it especially difficult to communicate assertively:

- When we face multiple workplace demands
- When we interact with someone engaging in a passive, aggressive, or passive-aggressive style
- When we are struggling with a personal issue or difficulty
- When we feel physically unwell or unhealthy
- When we are tired, sleep-deprived or hungry

These situations make it harder to be assertive, because they trigger a range of unpleasant emotional states, derailing our attempts at clear, nuanced and non-judgmental communication.

When in a less than ideal situation, it can be helpful to work on actively changing your bodily posturing and other non-verbal behaviours, because changing your **body signals** can trick your brain into “feeling” a certain way. So, *posturing* yourself assertively can increase the likelihood that you will *feel and act* assertively.

Throughout the workday, be especially mindful of doing the following:

- **Holding your body in a confident posture (stand up straight, head up, shoulders back)**
- **Maintaining eye contact with those with whom you are speaking**
- **Exhibiting an attentive and interested facial expression during interactions (lean slightly forward when listening, don't be distracted by your cell phone, emails, etc.)**
- **Maintaining an even tone, volume and rhythm in your speech**
- **Ensuring you pause and listen to others (do not interrupt)**
- **Maintaining a friendly and approachable facial expression**

Notice how posturing your body differently affects the signals you send to yourself and others, influencing your emotional state and your communication style.