

# How to become more assertive

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By Louise Baty [6/10/2010](#)

**Calling all people-pleasers! It's time to stop being such a pushover and start thinking about number one with our guide to becoming much more assertive.**



If you let people walk all over you, you're not alone.

Many people shudder at the thought of offending others by voicing their opinions and find themselves saying "yes" when they really mean "no".

Perhaps you give in when your boss asks you to stay late, or you'd sooner cancel a night out than refuse to babysit for your friend? But behaving in such a passive way can actually cause more harm than good.

Teacher Susan Hadfield, 58, from Brighton, is author of self-help book *How to be Assertive in Any Situation*. She runs adult assertiveness classes, and is stunned by people's reactions to what they learn.

"People have told me the classes changed their lives," she says.

"Modern life can batter selfconfidence and sometimes we all need a bit of help to regain it.

"Some people feel confident dealing with their children but struggle to speak up at work. Then there are those who are self-assured in friendships but fall apart when they have to send food back at restaurants."

Susan says women struggle more than men with assertiveness.

"We are taught to nurture and take care of others from an early age and saying 'yes' can become a habit.

"We sometimes mistake assertiveness for aggression.

"But asserting yourself means letting people know what you do and do not want in a confident, honest and direct manner.

"Assertive people don't manipulate others. They are positive by nature and want a fair deal for everyone."

### **How to assert yourself..**

#### **With a grumpy colleague**

If a co-worker snaps at you, don't take it personally. Be confident and, if it's appropriate, make a joke of it. Try saying: "I can see I'd better leave you alone today." Don't apologise. If you say sorry for their bad mood you're being passive.

When your boss criticises you One in four people suffers bullying at work so it's a big problem. But you must learn to identify the difference between bullying and criticism, which can be taken positively.

Ask your boss to explain exactly what you have done wrong. If you see their point, take it on board and promise to make changes. But if you feel that it's unjust tell them that you don't agree with them. Saying 'no' can be very empowering.

#### **With your stroppy teenager**

It's your decision what they do, not theirs. So whether you negotiate, compromise or stand your ground, make sure you stick to that decision. Make it clear what the consequences will be if they go against what you have agreed.

With strangers in a social situation Treat people positively. Pay them little compliments to make them feel good and use confident body language: look people in the eye and don't fiddle with your hair as you will just look nervous.

With demanding friends It's nice to do favours but when you can't help out, be firm. If your friend tries to persuade you, you may need to repeat: "I'm sorry, I can't" several times, especially if you usually say "yes".

Try suggesting a compromise. Perhaps you could help out another day? If your friend gets angry, do not blame yourself. Assertive people should be able to speak their minds without fear of falling out with friends.

With shoddy customer service Before you resign yourself to putting up with it, decide what it is you want. Stand confidently, speak clearly and simply say: 'I want...', and explain yourself calmly. Don't get angry.

***I'm not afraid to speak up at work - Sharon Abel, 37, from Llanelli, South Wales, is a single mum to Roxy, 16, and Ruby, six. She works in social care.***

During arguments I tend to back down rather than make myself heard. I also take on more than I can cope with - at work and home - and take criticism very personally.

After reading Sue's book I decided to tackle my daughter Roxy's refusal to help with housework - something that's been stressing me out. Usually our 'chats' end in arguments. But this time I sat down and calmly told her how much I loved spending time with her and said, 'If you do help around the house now and then we'll have more time for fun stuff'.

Amazingly, she's been helping me out more and we've been arguing less.

Out shopping, I found a discounted top for £5. But when I took it to the till the sales assistant said that it was labelled incorrectly and was £7. Usually I would have accepted it, but not now. Standing tall and speaking clearly I explained that, as it was advertised at £5, she should honour it. My confident manner worked and she backed down.

I also stood my ground when a friend asked me to babysit for the day. As I already had plans for the morning, I offered a compromise - taking the kids for the afternoon.

I now feel more positive. I'm even feeling less stressed about work and won't be afraid to speak up next time I feel that I can't cope.

*How To Be Assertive In Any Situation by Sue Hadfield and Gill Hasson is available at Amazon, Waterstones and WHSmith.*