

# Are You Talking to Me?

## What is the difference between an *aggressive* and an *assertive* tone?

In the English language, it is possible to communicate very different messages using the exact same words. For example, take the phrase *'Are you talking to me?'*. Said assertively, it may advance your career, said aggressively, it may do the opposite. But the line between assertiveness and aggressiveness can be fine.

For those whose second language is English, understanding the difference between aggressiveness and assertiveness can be a challenging skill to learn. So have a think about people you have worked with who demonstrate the following characteristics:

- They like to be in complete control of both themselves and others.
- They are quick to get angry when activities are not to their liking.
- They typically find the fault in work rather than the good.

The above list is an indicator of the aggressive worker. As you may imagine, their negativity can have a debilitating effect on those around them. However, by far the biggest sign of an aggressive worker is the non-verbal communication style they use. Their words are often delivered with a loud voice, forceful body language, and a quick temper. You may have heard phrases such as:

- *'You have to win at all costs in the business world'*
- *'Caution is weak – high achievers make decisions quickly and know exactly how it's going to be'*.
- *'Grow up! Show people your leadership skills and don't be swayed by anyone!'*

Chances are we have all worked with an aggressive worker. Maybe you have that tendency too?

However, it doesn't have to be that way. There is a positive alternative to aggressiveness. It is assertiveness, and while initially seeming similar can produce vastly better results, assertiveness can help both at the office and also in life relationships. The good news is that with a few minor tweaks, the aggressor can convert those negative tones into a positive communication style.

Firstly, an assertive person is confident and calm. They know their opinion is valuable. They feel empowered to share their view at the appropriate time, even if it is not asked for. Assertiveness is not demonstrated by saying 'No' all the time, but it is grounded enough to propose alternative options that may not have been considered.

The Assertive worker remains true to their convictions and stands up for the ideas they believe in. Assertive people use persuasive language to convince others of the merits of their ideas. Through their considered tone and their genuine workplace achievements, they earn the respect of their co-workers, their boss and their workplace organisation.

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