THE ART OF

SPEAKING CONFIDENTLY

200 Examples of Assertive Communication

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The Art of Speaking Confidently

200 Practical Examples of Assertive Communication for Work and Everyday Life

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The Art of Speaking Confidently: 200 Practical Examples of Assertive Communication for Work and Everyday Life

An Executive Class Series by Ron Taylor

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Introduction: Speaking Confidently Means Speaking Clearly

The title of this book promises confidence, so it is worth saying what confidence means here. It does not mean a loud voice, a hard tone, or the appearance of certainty. It means being able to say what is true, ask for what you need, and stay steady while the other person responds.

That is assertive communication: expressing your thoughts, needs, concerns, and expectations clearly while respecting the rights and perspectives of others. It is especially valuable when you need to disagree, set a boundary, ask for clarification, respond to criticism, negotiate an agreement, or make a decision under pressure.

Assertiveness is not aggression. It does not require you to speak loudly, eliminate uncertainty, or insist on getting your way. Nor does it mean avoiding disagreement to keep other people comfortable. It means communicating honestly, deliberately, and respectfully.

THREE COMMUNICATION PATTERNS

PASSIVE Often leaves important needs, opinions, or boundaries unexpressed.

AGGRESSIVE Expresses a position in a way that unnecessarily dismisses, intimidates, or blames others.

ASSERTIVE States the relevant information, position, or request clearly while allowing others to respond.

These are patterns, not fixed personality types. The same person may communicate assertively in one situation and passively or aggressively in another.

HOW TO USE THESE EXAMPLES

Each example presents a situation, contrasting responses, and a more constructive alternative. The passive and aggressive responses illustrate common pitfalls; they are not intended to represent everyone who communicates in those ways. The assertive response is a model to adapt, not a sentence to memorize. The objective is not simply to sound confident. It is to communicate effectively and improve the outcome.

For example, "I'm not sure" may be entirely appropriate. "I'm not sure, but I'll check the figures and get back to you tomorrow" is useful when a follow-up is needed and you can realistically provide it. Assertiveness involves choosing the response that best fits the circumstances.

HOW THIS BOOK IS ORGANIZED

The book has two parts. **Part One: At Work** (Examples 1 to 100) covers confidence, boundaries, meetings, managing up, clients, negotiation, leadership, difficult conversations, change, and long-term growth. **Part Two: In Everyday Life** (Examples 101 to 200) covers family, friends, housing, shops and services, money, health, children and school, travel, written messages, and apologies and repair.

You do not need to read the book in order. Start with the situation you are facing this week. The index at the back, **Find Your Situation**, groups the examples by theme, and it includes a list of the situations where English itself is the obstacle.

WORDS ARE ONLY PART OF THE MESSAGE

Your voice, your pace, and your face carry as much meaning as your words. Speak a little slower than feels natural. Let your voice fall at the end of a statement instead of rising like a question. Pause before the key sentence. In English, a short phrase of courtesy before or around your main message is normal and does not weaken it. The page **Softeners and Openers** shows how to use these phrases without hiding your message behind them.

IF ENGLISH IS YOUR SECOND LANGUAGE

Read each assertive line aloud, then change one detail so it fits your own situation. Choose three examples a week and practise them until they sound like you. Notice how short most of the lines are: assertive English is usually plain English. You do not need long or difficult words to be clear.

WHEN ASSERTIVENESS IS NOT ENOUGH

Assertive communication works best between people who are willing to listen, even when they disagree. It is not a tool for situations involving threats, harassment, or abuse, or where speaking up would put you in danger. In those cases, protect yourself first and use the formal channels available: a supervisor, human resources, a professional body, or the appropriate authority.

Softeners and Openers

English speakers often place a short phrase before or around the main message. These phrases are not weakness. They tell the listener that you are being respectful, and they make it easier for the other person to say yes, to listen, or to change their mind.

The skill is balance: **one softener, then a clear message.** If you pile up apologies and qualifiers, the message disappears. If you leave them out entirely, the same message can sound harsher than you intend.

OPENING A DIFFICULT POINT

- "Before we move on, I'd like to raise one point."
- "Could I add something?"
- "I want to make sure we're aligned on this."
- "May I share a concern?"

MAKING A REQUEST

- "Would it be possible to...?"
- "Could you...?"
- "I'd appreciate it if you could..."
- "Would you mind...?"

SAYING NO

- "Unfortunately, I can't..."
- "I'm not able to do that this week."
- "That doesn't work for me, but I can..."
- "I'd prefer not to."

DISAGREEING

- "I see it a little differently."
- "I understand the point. My concern is..."
- "I take your point, and I'd like to add..."
- "What makes you say that?"

BUYING TIME

- "Let me think about that and get back to you by Thursday."
- "I'd like to check the details first."
- "I need a little time before I decide."

CHECKING THAT YOU UNDERSTOOD

- "Just to make sure I understood..."
- "Could you say that again, please?"
- "Could you give me an example?"
- "Could you write that down for me?"

HOLDING YOUR POSITION

- "As I mentioned, I can't take this on this week."
- "I do need an answer by Friday."
- "I'd like to come back to my earlier point."

ASKING FOR HELP

- "Do you have a few minutes to look at this with me?"
- "I'm stuck on one part. Could you point me in the right direction?"
- "Could you show me how you did it?"
- "I'd value your opinion on this."

GIVING FEEDBACK

- "Here is what worked well, and here is one thing I'd change."
- "Can I share an observation?"
- "When this happens, the effect is..."
- "What would help me is..."

CORRECTING A MISTAKE

- "I made an error in the figures. Here is the corrected version."
- "I need to correct something I said earlier."
- "That was my mistake. Here is how I'll fix it."
- "Let me clarify what I meant."

ENDING A CONVERSATION POLITELY

- "I need to get going, but thank you for your time."
- "Let's pick this up tomorrow."
- "I'll let you go. Thanks for the call."
- "Before we finish, let me confirm the next steps."

SAYING THANK YOU AND ACCEPTING THANKS

- "Thank you. That was helpful."
- "I appreciate you telling me."
- "Thank you. I worked hard on it."
- "You're welcome. I'm glad it helped."

TOO SOFT, TOO HARD, JUST RIGHT

SITUATION *You need a report by Thursday.*

> **TOO SOFT**
> "Sorry, I know you're busy, but if there's any chance, maybe, when you have time..."

> **TOO HARD**
> "Send me the report by Thursday."

> **JUST RIGHT**
> "Could you send me the report by Thursday? I need it for the client meeting."

SITUATION *You have a concern about the cost.*

> **TOO SOFT**
> "I might be wrong, but I kind of feel like this possibly isn't ideal..."

> **TOO HARD**
> "This won't work."

> **JUST RIGHT**
> "I have a concern about the cost. Could we look at it before we decide?"

SITUATION *You are asked to take on more work.*

> **TOO SOFT**
> "It's fine, don't worry about it."

> **TOO HARD**
> "That's not my job."

> **JUST RIGHT**
> "I can't take that on this week. I can help next Monday."

SITUATION *You disagree in a meeting.*

> **TOO SOFT**
> "Maybe it's just me... never mind."

> **TOO HARD**
> "You're wrong."

> **JUST RIGHT**
> "I see it differently. May I explain why?"

SITUATION *You want to discuss your salary.*

> **TOO SOFT**
> "I was wondering, if it's not a bad time, whether possibly..."

> **TOO HARD**
> "I deserve a raise."

> **JUST RIGHT**
> "I'd like to discuss my salary. Could we schedule time this week?"

SITUATION *A product you bought stopped working.*

> **TOO SOFT**
> "Sorry to bother you, it's probably my fault..."

> **TOO HARD**
> "Your product is garbage. Refund me now."

> **JUST RIGHT**
> "This stopped working after two days. I'd like a refund or a replacement."

Part One: At Work

What do you say when the moment arrives?

One hundred situations from working life: meetings, managers, clients, negotiations, leadership, and change.

Chapter 1: Confidence, Uncertainty, and Clear Thinking

EXAMPLES 1–10

EXAMPLE 1

When you don't know the answer

SITUATION *A colleague asks you a question you cannot answer immediately.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "I don't know. Sorry."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "How should I know?"

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I'll look into it and get back to you tomorrow."

WHY IT WORKS *You acknowledge what you don't know and establish a clear next step. Only make a commitment you can keep.*

EXAMPLE 2

When you need time to think

SITUATION *Someone asks you to make an important decision during a meeting.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "Whatever you think is best."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "I'm not making a decision under pressure."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I'd like some time to consider the options before deciding."

WHY IT WORKS *You protect the quality of your decision without turning the request into a confrontation.*

EXAMPLE 3

When you make a mistake

SITUATION *You discover an error in a report you submitted.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "I'm terrible at this. I don't know how I missed it."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "The information I received was wrong."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I found an error in the report. I'm correcting it and will send the revised version by noon."

WHY IT WORKS *You accept responsibility and focus on correcting the problem rather than blaming others or criticizing yourself.*

EXAMPLE 4

When you are asked to do something unfamiliar

SITUATION *Your manager assigns you a task you have never performed.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "I don't think I can do that."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "That's not in my job description."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I haven't done this before. Could we clarify the expected result and the resources available?"

WHY IT WORKS *You identify the gap in your experience while establishing what you need to proceed effectively.*

EXAMPLE 5

When someone challenges your opinion

SITUATION *A colleague disagrees with your recommendation.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "Maybe you're right. Forget what I said."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "You clearly don't understand my point."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I see it differently. My main concern is the effect this could have on costs."

WHY IT WORKS *You maintain your position and give the other person a specific reason to consider.*

EXAMPLE 6

When you have an idea but lack confidence

SITUATION *You see a possible improvement but hesitate to mention it.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "This is probably a stupid idea, but..."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "I've got a better idea than everyone else."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I have an idea that might improve the process. Could I explain it?"

WHY IT WORKS *You contribute without undermining yourself or assuming your idea is automatically superior.*

EXAMPLE 7

When you need to correct yourself

SITUATION *You realize you gave someone incorrect information.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "I might have said something wrong. Sorry if I did."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "You misunderstood what I said."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I need to correct something I said earlier. The deadline is Friday, not Thursday."

WHY IT WORKS *A direct correction prevents confusion and demonstrates professional reliability.*

EXAMPLE 8

When someone asks an unexpected question

SITUATION *During a presentation, someone asks about a subject you have not prepared for.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "I'm sorry, I'm not prepared for that."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "That's outside the scope of this meeting."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I don't have that information with me. I'll confirm it before giving you an answer."

WHY IT WORKS *You avoid guessing and establish a responsible way to obtain accurate information.*

EXAMPLE 9

When a guess is presented as fact

SITUATION *A colleague presents an unverified explanation as fact.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "Yes, that could be what happened."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "You're just making things up."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "That's one possible explanation. What evidence do we have to support it?"

WHY IT WORKS *You challenge the conclusion without attacking the person who proposed it.*

EXAMPLE 10

When you must act without complete information

SITUATION *A decision cannot wait until every detail is known.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "I can't decide until we know everything."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "We're deciding now. No more discussion."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "We have enough information to make a preliminary decision, provided we review it when the remaining data arrives."

WHY IT WORKS *You acknowledge uncertainty while establishing how the decision will be reviewed.*

Chapter 2: Boundaries, Requests, and Commitments

EXAMPLES 11–20

EXAMPLE 11

When you need to decline a request

SITUATION *A colleague asks you to take on an additional task.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "I suppose I can try."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Do it yourself."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I can't take that on this week without delaying my current work."

WHY IT WORKS *You communicate a clear limit and explain the practical constraint.*

EXAMPLE 12

When someone keeps pressuring you after you say no

SITUATION *A colleague continues asking after you have declined.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "Well, maybe I can make an exception."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "How many times do I have to tell you?"

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I understand that you need help, but my answer is still no."

WHY IT WORKS *You acknowledge the other person's need without abandoning your decision.*

EXAMPLE 13

When you are asked to work overtime

SITUATION *Your manager asks you to stay late on short notice, but you have an important commitment.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "Okay, I'll stay."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "You can't expect me to work all the time."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I can't stay late tonight. I can pick this up first thing tomorrow."

WHY IT WORKS *You state your availability and offer a realistic alternative.*

EXAMPLE 14

When work intrudes on personal time

SITUATION *A colleague regularly sends non-urgent messages late at night.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You keep responding immediately despite resenting it.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Stop messaging me after hours."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I usually respond to non-urgent messages during working hours. If something is genuinely urgent, please mark it clearly."

WHY IT WORKS *You establish a practical communication boundary without treating every message as an offence.*

EXAMPLE 15

When someone asks a personal question

SITUATION *A coworker asks about a private financial or family matter.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You disclose information you would rather keep private.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "That's none of your business."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I prefer to keep that private."

WHY IT WORKS *You protect your privacy without unnecessarily damaging the relationship.*

EXAMPLE 16

When a favour is treated as an obligation

SITUATION *A colleague assumes you will help because you did so previously.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "All right, I'll do it again."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "I'm not your personal assistant."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I was able to help last time, but I can't take this on today."

WHY IT WORKS *You distinguish previous assistance from an ongoing obligation.*

EXAMPLE 17

When someone uses guilt to influence you

SITUATION *A colleague says, "I thought I could count on you."*

> **PASSIVE**
> "I'm sorry. I'll do it."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Don't try to manipulate me."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I understand you're disappointed, but I still can't commit to this."

WHY IT WORKS *You recognize the other person's feelings without allowing guilt to determine your decision.*

EXAMPLE 18

When you need clarification

SITUATION *Your manager gives you an ambiguous instruction.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You guess what is required and hope you are right.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "That instruction makes no sense."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "Could you clarify which outcome you want? I want to make sure I'm working toward the right goal."

WHY IT WORKS *You resolve ambiguity before it becomes a costly mistake.*

EXAMPLE 19

When you need to end a conversation

SITUATION *A colleague continues talking when you need to return to work.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You remain in the conversation and become increasingly frustrated.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "I don't have time for this."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I need to get back to work now. Let's continue this tomorrow if necessary."

WHY IT WORKS *You end the conversation clearly while leaving room for further discussion when appropriate.*

EXAMPLE 20

When you need help

SITUATION *You are struggling with a task that could be completed more effectively with guidance.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You struggle silently because you do not want to appear incapable.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Nobody has explained anything to me."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I've worked through the first two steps, but I'm stuck on the third. Could you help me understand it?"

WHY IT WORKS *You identify the specific obstacle and make it easier for someone to provide useful assistance.*

Chapter 3: Meetings, Disagreement, and Decision-Making

EXAMPLES 21–30

EXAMPLE 21

When a meeting goes off track

SITUATION *A discussion drifts away from its main purpose.*

> **PASSIVE**
>
> You wait for someone else to redirect it.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
>
> "Can we stop wasting time?"

> **ASSERTIVE**
>
> "Could we return to the main decision we need to make today?"

WHY IT WORKS *You redirect attention to the task rather than criticizing the participants.*

EXAMPLE 22

When you have an important point to add

SITUATION *A discussion is moving forward, but a relevant issue has not been considered.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You stay silent because you do not want to interrupt.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Everyone is overlooking the obvious."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "Before we move on, there's one issue I think we should consider."

WHY IT WORKS *You signal that your contribution is relevant without dismissing the discussion so far.*

EXAMPLE 23

When you disagree with a senior executive

SITUATION *A senior leader proposes a strategy you believe carries a significant risk.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You agree publicly despite your concerns.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "That strategy is a mistake."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I understand the objective. My concern is that the current plan may expose us to a risk we haven't assessed."

WHY IT WORKS *You recognize the objective while clearly identifying the risk that needs attention.*

EXAMPLE 24

When one person dominates the discussion

SITUATION *A colleague repeatedly speaks over others.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You give up trying to contribute.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "You don't let anyone else talk."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I'd like to hear the other views before we settle on a decision."

WHY IT WORKS *You create space for broader participation without turning the discussion into a personal confrontation.*

EXAMPLE 25

When you disagree with the majority

SITUATION *Everyone seems to support a proposal except you.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "I'm probably overthinking this, but..."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "You're all making the wrong decision."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I know the group is leaning toward this option. I have a concern about its long-term cost."

WHY IT WORKS *You acknowledge the group's position while ensuring that a relevant concern is considered.*

EXAMPLE 26

When you didn't catch what was said

SITUATION *In a fast-moving meeting, a colleague gives an instruction and you miss an important detail.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You nod and hope to work it out later.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "You're talking too fast."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I want to be sure I have this right. Could you repeat the last point, or send it to me in writing?"

WHY IT WORKS *Checking at once takes a few seconds, while guessing can cost days.*

EXAMPLE 27

When someone interrupts you

SITUATION *A colleague interrupts before you finish explaining a point.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You stop speaking and never return to the point.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Let me finish for once!"

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I'll finish this point, and then I'd like to hear your response."

WHY IT WORKS *You protect your opportunity to speak while making room for the other person's response.*

EXAMPLE 28

When a meeting ends without a clear decision

SITUATION *Everyone has discussed the issue, but nobody knows what happens next.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You assume someone else will follow up.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "This meeting achieved nothing."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "Before we finish, can we confirm the decision, who owns each action, and the deadlines?"

WHY IT WORKS *You turn discussion into clear responsibilities and next steps.*

EXAMPLE 29

When you need to correct misinformation in a meeting

SITUATION *Someone cites an incorrect figure that could influence a decision.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You let it pass to avoid embarrassing the speaker.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "That number is completely wrong."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I have a different figure in the latest report. Let me check it so we can use the correct number."

WHY IT WORKS *You protect the accuracy of the discussion without unnecessarily embarrassing a colleague.*

EXAMPLE 30

When you are asked to take sides

SITUATION *Two colleagues are in conflict, and each wants your support.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You agree with whoever spoke to you most recently.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Neither of you knows how to work with people."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I'd rather understand what happened before reaching a conclusion. What outcome are you each looking for?"

WHY IT WORKS *You avoid premature judgment and redirect the conversation toward facts and resolution.*

Chapter 4: Managing Up and Professional Credibility

EXAMPLES 31–40

EXAMPLE 31

When your manager changes priorities

SITUATION *Your manager assigns a new urgent task while you are working on another priority.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "Sure," while attempting to complete everything.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Make up your mind."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I can switch to the new task. Which of my current priorities should move back?"

WHY IT WORKS *You make the trade-off explicit instead of silently accepting an unmanageable workload.*

EXAMPLE 32

When two managers give conflicting instructions

SITUATION *Two senior colleagues expect different outcomes from you.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You try to satisfy both without telling either about the conflict.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "You two need to sort this out yourselves."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I've received two different priorities. Could we agree on which one takes precedence?"

WHY IT WORKS *You identify the conflict and ask the people responsible for the priorities to resolve it.*

EXAMPLE 33

When your workload is underestimated

SITUATION *Your manager believes a project will take two hours, but you estimate two days.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "I'll try to get it done."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "You have no idea how long this takes."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "Based on the work involved, I estimate two days. I can explain the steps behind that estimate."

WHY IT WORKS *You replace a vague objection with a reasoned estimate that can be evaluated.*

EXAMPLE 34

When a deadline is unrealistic

SITUATION *You are asked to deliver a complex project by Friday, although essential information will not arrive until Thursday.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "I'll do my best."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "That's impossible."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "With the information arriving Thursday, Friday isn't realistic for the full project. I could deliver the initial analysis Friday and the complete version Tuesday."

WHY IT WORKS *You explain the constraint and offer an alternative that preserves progress.*

EXAMPLE 35

When your contribution is taken for granted

SITUATION *You repeatedly handle additional responsibilities that are not acknowledged.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You continue doing the work and hope someone notices.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Nobody appreciates anything I do."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I've taken on the additional reporting and client coordination this quarter. Could we discuss how these responsibilities fit into my role?"

WHY IT WORKS *You make your contribution visible and open a discussion about your responsibilities.*

EXAMPLE 36

When you disagree with a performance review

SITUATION *Your manager gives you a rating you believe does not reflect your work.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "Okay, if that's what you think."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "This review is unfair."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I'd like to understand how this rating was determined. Could we compare it with the objectives and results from the review period?"

WHY IT WORKS *You seek the basis of the assessment and create an opportunity to examine the evidence.*

EXAMPLE 37

When you need resources to do the job properly

SITUATION *You are held responsible for a result but lack the necessary budget or support.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "I'll see what I can do."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "You can't expect results without giving me anything."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "To meet that target, I'll need either additional support or a narrower scope. Which option can we pursue?"

WHY IT WORKS *You connect the expected outcome to the resources required to achieve it.*

EXAMPLE 38

When you want career progression

SITUATION *You want more responsibility but have not been told how promotion decisions are made.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You wait for someone to offer you a promotion.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "I deserve to be promoted."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I'd like to work toward the next level. What specific results or skills would demonstrate that I'm ready?"

WHY IT WORKS *You turn an ambition into measurable criteria and a constructive conversation.*

EXAMPLE 39

When you need to challenge an established practice

SITUATION *Your team follows a process that appears unnecessarily complicated.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You continue using it without comment.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "This process is ridiculous."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "Could we review this process? I think we may be able to reduce the number of steps without affecting quality."

WHY IT WORKS *You challenge the process and propose an improvement without attacking the people who created it.*

EXAMPLE 40

When your competence is questioned

SITUATION *A colleague suggests you are not qualified to lead a particular project.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "Maybe I'm not the right person."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "You have no idea what I can do."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I'm confident I can lead this project. If you have a specific concern about my experience, I'm willing to discuss it."

WHY IT WORKS *You state your position while inviting a specific, substantive concern.*

Chapter 5: Client Relationships and Service Expectations

EXAMPLES 41–50

EXAMPLE 41

When a client asks for work outside the agreement

SITUATION *A client requests additional deliverables that were not included in the original scope.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "No problem. I'll add them."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "That's not what you paid for."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I can add those deliverables. They fall outside the current scope, so I'll outline the additional time and cost before we proceed."

WHY IT WORKS *You remain service-oriented while protecting the agreed scope and budget.*

EXAMPLE 42

When a client is dissatisfied

SITUATION *A client says the delivered work does not meet expectations.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "I'm sorry. I'll change everything."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "You approved the brief, so this is your problem."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "Thank you for telling me. Could you identify the main gaps so we can agree on the necessary revisions?"

WHY IT WORKS *You take the concern seriously while establishing what needs to change.*

EXAMPLE 43

When a client repeatedly changes the brief

SITUATION *The client keeps changing the desired outcome after work has begun.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You keep revising without discussing the impact.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "You can't keep changing your mind."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "The latest change affects the original plan. I'll revise the timeline and estimate so we can agree on the new scope."

WHY IT WORKS *You make the consequences of changing requirements clear before proceeding.*

EXAMPLE 44

When a client pays late

SITUATION *A client's invoice is two weeks overdue, and they keep saying payment is coming soon.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "No rush. Pay whenever you can."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Pay me today or I'm taking this further."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "Invoice 114 is two weeks overdue. Could you confirm today when the payment will be sent?"

WHY IT WORKS *A specific date turns a vague promise into a commitment, and the tone stays professional.*

EXAMPLE 45

When a client asks for a discount

SITUATION *A client asks you to lower your price.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "All right, I can reduce it."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "If you can't afford us, find someone else."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I can review the budget with you. If the price needs to come down, we can look at reducing the scope."

WHY IT WORKS *You negotiate the scope and value of the work instead of automatically reducing your price.*

EXAMPLE 46

When a client blames you for a delay

SITUATION *A project is late because the client supplied key information after the agreed date.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "I'm sorry. It's all my fault."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "You're the reason we're late."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "The timeline shifted because the required information arrived later than planned. Here's the revised schedule and what we need to keep it on track."

WHY IT WORKS *You explain the cause factually and focus on the recovery plan.*

EXAMPLE 47

When a client asks for a guarantee you cannot make

SITUATION *A client wants a guarantee of a business outcome beyond your control.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "Yes, I'm sure we can guarantee that."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Nobody can guarantee that. Be realistic."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I can guarantee that our work will meet the agreed standard, but I can't guarantee that market outcome. I can explain the factors that influence it."

WHY IT WORKS *You distinguish your obligations from outcomes you cannot control.*

EXAMPLE 48

When a client relationship becomes unproductive

SITUATION *Discussions are hostile, expectations keep changing, and progress has stalled.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You continue indefinitely, hoping things improve.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "We're done. I won't work with you anymore."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I don't think our current way of working is producing good results. Let's agree on clear expectations and a workable process. If we can't, we may need to end the engagement."

WHY IT WORKS *You offer a reasonable route to repair the relationship while being clear about the alternative.*

EXAMPLE 49

When a customer asks for an exception to policy

SITUATION *A customer wants you to waive a rule you are not authorized to change.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "I'll make an exception."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Rules are rules. There's nothing I can do."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I understand why you're asking. I can't authorize that exception myself, but I can check whether an approved alternative is available."

WHY IT WORKS *You remain helpful without exceeding your authority.*

EXAMPLE 50

When a customer criticizes you personally

SITUATION *An unhappy customer says, "You clearly don't know what you're doing."*

> **PASSIVE**
> "I'm sorry. I'm not very experienced."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "If you know better, do it yourself."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I want to help resolve the issue. Let's focus on what went wrong and what needs to happen next."

WHY IT WORKS *You redirect the exchange toward resolution without accepting a personal insult as a useful assessment of your competence.*

Chapter 6: Negotiation, Influence, and Persuasion

EXAMPLES 51–60

EXAMPLE 51

When an offer is below your expectations

SITUATION *You receive a job offer with a salary below the range you discussed.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "That's fine. I'll accept."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "That salary is insulting."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "Thank you for the offer. Based on the responsibilities and my experience, I was expecting a salary closer to this range. Is there room to discuss it?"

WHY IT WORKS *You express appreciation without abandoning your negotiating position.*

EXAMPLE 52

When someone pressures you to agree immediately

SITUATION *A business partner says the offer will disappear unless you decide now.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "Okay, I'll agree."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "I'm not falling for that."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I'm interested, but I need to review the terms before committing. If the offer requires an immediate decision, I may have to decline."

WHY IT WORKS *You protect your decision-making process and make the consequence of the deadline clear.*

EXAMPLE 53

When you are expected to make a concession

SITUATION *The other party asks for a lower price but offers nothing in return.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "All right, I'll reduce it."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "I'm not giving you anything."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I could consider that reduction if we also agree on a longer commitment or a smaller scope."

WHY IT WORKS *You make concessions conditional on a meaningful exchange.*

EXAMPLE 54

When your proposal is rejected

SITUATION *A decision-maker rejects your proposal without much explanation.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "Okay. Never mind."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "You haven't even considered it properly."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "Could you help me understand the main reason it doesn't meet your needs? That would help me decide whether a revised proposal would be useful."

WHY IT WORKS *You seek actionable feedback rather than treating rejection as a personal insult.*

EXAMPLE 55

When someone compares your price with a cheaper competitor

SITUATION *A prospective client says another provider charges less.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "I can match their price."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Then hire them."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "It's worth comparing what each service includes. My price reflects these specific deliverables and this level of support."

WHY IT WORKS *You focus the comparison on value and scope rather than price alone.*

EXAMPLE 56

When you need to persuade a skeptical decision-maker

SITUATION *A manager doubts that your proposed change will improve results.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "I just think it might work."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "You need to trust my judgment."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I suggest a small pilot with clear success measures. We can review the results before deciding whether to expand it."

WHY IT WORKS *You reduce the risk of the decision by proposing a test rather than demanding agreement.*

EXAMPLE 57

When a negotiation reaches an impasse

SITUATION *Both sides have repeated their positions without making progress.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "I suppose we'll just have to accept it."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "You're being unreasonable."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "We seem to be stuck on this point. Which conditions are essential for each side, and where might we have flexibility?"

WHY IT WORKS *You move beyond competing positions to examine the interests and constraints behind them.*

EXAMPLE 58

When someone asks you to reveal confidential information

SITUATION *A prospective partner wants details about another client's contract.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "I probably shouldn't, but..."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Why would I tell you that?"

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I can discuss our general approach, but I can't disclose another client's confidential terms."

WHY IT WORKS *You maintain a professional boundary without being unnecessarily confrontational.*

EXAMPLE 59

When you need to ask for a raise

SITUATION *You have taken on greater responsibility and want your compensation reviewed.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "I was wondering whether there might be a chance of a small increase."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "I need more money, or I'm leaving."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "My responsibilities and results have grown over the past year. I'd like to discuss adjusting my compensation to reflect that."

WHY IT WORKS *You base your request on responsibilities and results rather than apology or threat.*

EXAMPLE 60

When you need to persuade without overstating the evidence

SITUATION *You believe a proposal is promising, but the available data is limited.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "I'm not sure, but maybe we should try it."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "This will definitely work."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "The early evidence is promising, although limited. I recommend testing it on a small scale before making a larger investment."

WHY IT WORKS *You make a clear recommendation while being honest about the strength of the evidence.*

Chapter 7: Leadership, Delegation, and Accountability

EXAMPLES 61–70

EXAMPLE 61

When a team member misses a deadline

SITUATION *An employee misses a deadline that affects the rest of the team.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You quietly finish the work yourself.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "You've let everyone down."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "The deadline was missed, and that affects the next stage. What caused the delay, and what's your plan to complete the work?"

WHY IT WORKS *You address the impact and establish accountability without assuming the cause.*

EXAMPLE 62

When you delegate a task

SITUATION *You need a team member to take responsibility for a project component.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "Could you possibly help with this?"

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "This is your job. Just do it."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I'd like you to lead this part of the project. The expected result is this, and we'll review progress on Thursday."

WHY IT WORKS *You clarify ownership, expectations, and follow-up.*

EXAMPLE 63

When an employee becomes defensive

SITUATION *An employee reacts badly to feedback about a missed requirement.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "Forget it. It's not a big deal."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "You never accept criticism."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I'm not questioning your intentions. I'm addressing this specific requirement because it wasn't met. Let's work out how to prevent it from happening again."

WHY IT WORKS *You separate the person's intentions from the performance issue and return to the work.*

EXAMPLE 64

When a high performer treats colleagues disrespectfully

SITUATION *A technically excellent employee regularly dismisses teammates.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You tolerate the behaviour because the employee produces good results.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Your attitude is terrible."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "Your technical work is strong, but dismissing colleagues in meetings is undermining collaboration. I expect disagreement to be expressed respectfully."

WHY IT WORKS *You recognize the employee's strengths while setting a clear behavioural expectation.*

EXAMPLE 65

When responsibilities are unclear

SITUATION *Two departments each assume the other is handling a critical task.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You hope someone takes ownership.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Nobody here takes responsibility."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "We seem to have a gap in ownership. Let's assign one person to lead this task and clarify who needs to contribute."

WHY IT WORKS *You address the structural problem rather than assigning vague blame.*

EXAMPLE 66

When performance is consistently below expectations

SITUATION *An employee has repeatedly missed agreed quality standards.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You keep correcting the work without addressing the pattern.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Your work is unacceptable."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "The last three reports have had the same accuracy problems. We need to agree on a plan to improve quality and a date to review progress."

WHY IT WORKS *You identify a pattern and establish measurable next steps.*

EXAMPLE 67

When you need accountability without micromanaging

SITUATION *A team member owns a task, but you need visibility into progress.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You avoid checking in because you do not want to seem controlling.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Send me updates on everything you do."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "You own the task. Let's agree on two checkpoints so I can track progress without interrupting your work."

WHY IT WORKS *You balance autonomy with appropriate oversight.*

EXAMPLE 68

When the team succeeds

SITUATION *Your team completes a difficult project successfully.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You say little about the achievement.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "I made this project happen."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "The team delivered a strong result. I especially want to recognize the work on planning and quality control."

WHY IT WORKS *You recognize specific contributions instead of taking the credit yourself.*

EXAMPLE 69

When a team member needs development

SITUATION *A capable employee is struggling with a new responsibility.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "I suppose they'll figure it out eventually."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "They're not ready for this role."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "Let's identify the skills this responsibility requires and agree on a development plan with a review date."

WHY IT WORKS *You turn a general concern into specific support and measurable progress.*

EXAMPLE 70

When you need to address a team conflict

SITUATION *Two colleagues disagree repeatedly and their work is becoming difficult to coordinate.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "I'm sure they'll sort it out."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "You two need to stop acting like children."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "The disagreement is affecting coordination. Let's clarify the decision we need, the evidence each of you is using, and how we'll move forward."

WHY IT WORKS *You address the impact and create a process for resolving the issue.*

Chapter 8: Professional Judgment and Difficult Conversations

EXAMPLES 71–80

EXAMPLE 71

When evidence contradicts a preferred conclusion

SITUATION *New data challenges a conclusion your team has already presented.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "We can probably leave that detail out."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "The whole analysis is wrong."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "The new data changes part of our conclusion. We should update the analysis and explain what remains supported."

WHY IT WORKS *You protect credibility by separating the evidence from attachment to the original position.*

EXAMPLE 72

When you need to deliver difficult feedback

SITUATION *A colleague's presentation was unclear and the audience missed key points.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "It was fine, don't worry about it."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Your presentation was confusing."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "The main recommendation wasn't clear until the end. I'd move it to the opening and use the supporting details to build the case."

WHY IT WORKS *You identify observable behaviour and offer a practical improvement.*

EXAMPLE 73

When a colleague takes credit for your work

SITUATION *A colleague presents a shared project as if they led it alone.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "It doesn't matter who gets the credit."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "You're taking credit for my work."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I'd like to clarify our contributions. I led the analysis, and you coordinated the rollout. Let's make sure the summary reflects both."

WHY IT WORKS *You correct the record with specific facts rather than a personal accusation.*

EXAMPLE 74

When a conversation becomes personal

SITUATION *A discussion about a work decision turns into criticism of your character.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "Maybe I'm just bad at this."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "You're the one with the problem."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I'm willing to discuss the decision and its impact. I'd like us to keep the conversation focused on the work."

WHY IT WORKS *You set a boundary and return attention to the issue that can be resolved.*

EXAMPLE 75

When you must report an uncomfortable fact

SITUATION *A project is behind schedule and senior stakeholders expect good news.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "We're making progress; it should be fine."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "The deadline was unrealistic from the start."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "We're currently two weeks behind. The main cause is the delayed approval, and I recommend revising the delivery date to reflect the remaining work."

WHY IT WORKS *You report the status plainly and pair the problem with a realistic recommendation.*

EXAMPLE 76

When a decision could create an ethical concern

SITUATION *A proposed shortcut may mislead customers about what a product can do.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "If everyone agrees, I'll go along with it."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "That's dishonest and you know it."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I'm concerned that this wording could give customers a misleading impression. Let's verify the claim and use language we can substantiate."

WHY IT WORKS *You raise the ethical risk directly and propose a defensible next step.*

EXAMPLE 77

When someone asks you to bypass a process

SITUATION *A colleague asks you to skip a required approval to save time.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "I'll do it this once."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "I'm not breaking rules for you."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I can help move this forward, but we still need the required approval. I'll contact the approver and explain the timing."

WHY IT WORKS *You uphold the control while taking responsibility for progress.*

EXAMPLE 78

When you need to challenge a weak recommendation

SITUATION *A proposal relies on a small sample and uncertain assumptions.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "It looks good to me."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "This analysis is useless."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "The recommendation may be sound, but the sample is too small to support that level of confidence. I suggest testing it before committing."

WHY IT WORKS *You critique the strength of the evidence rather than dismissing the work.*

EXAMPLE 79

When a colleague is being talked over

SITUATION *A colleague's suggestion is dismissed twice before she can finish, and nobody intervenes.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You say nothing because it isn't your suggestion.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Why do you keep cutting her off? That's disrespectful."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I'd like to hear the rest of her point. I think the scheduling issue she raised is relevant."

WHY IT WORKS *You protect a colleague's contribution and keep the meeting focused on substance.*

EXAMPLE 80

When you need to correct a public misunderstanding

SITUATION *A meeting summary misstates the decision your team made.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "I'll let it pass to avoid making an issue."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Whoever wrote this wasn't listening."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I'd like to correct one point in the summary: we agreed to test the proposal, not approve a full rollout."

WHY IT WORKS *You correct the record precisely without escalating the disagreement.*

Chapter 9: Organizational Change and Strategic Alignment

EXAMPLES 81–90

EXAMPLE 81

When a new strategy changes your priorities

SITUATION *Leadership announces a strategic shift that affects your current projects.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "I'll keep doing everything I was doing before."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "This new direction makes our work pointless."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "To align with the new strategy, which current deliverables should remain priorities and which should be paused?"

WHY IT WORKS *You turn a broad change into an explicit prioritization decision.*

EXAMPLE 82

When a change is announced without enough detail

SITUATION *Your team is told a new system will be introduced, but responsibilities are unclear.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "We'll wait until someone tells us what to do."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "This rollout is badly managed."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "Before we can plan the transition, we need the timeline, decision owner, training arrangements, and criteria for readiness."

WHY IT WORKS *You identify the information needed to make implementation practical.*

EXAMPLE 83

When a new manager changes how things are done

SITUATION *A new manager changes the team's reporting format without discussing it.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You comply in silence and complain to colleagues.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "We did fine before you arrived."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I'm happy to try the new format. Could you explain what problem it solves, and how we should handle the reports already in progress?"

WHY IT WORKS *You show willingness and ask for the reasoning and the transition plan.*

EXAMPLE 84

When colleagues resist a necessary change

SITUATION *Team members continue using an old process after a new one is approved.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "I won't push it; people can decide for themselves."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "You're all refusing to adapt."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "The new process is now the agreed standard. What obstacles are making it difficult to use, and what support would help?"

WHY IT WORKS *You state the expectation while investigating practical barriers.*

EXAMPLE 85

When a project's scope keeps expanding

SITUATION *Stakeholders keep adding requirements without changing the deadline.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "We'll try to fit everything in."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Nothing is ever finished with you people."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "We can add those requirements, but they will affect timing or cost. Which existing items should we defer, or should we revise the deadline?"

WHY IT WORKS *You make trade-offs explicit instead of accepting an impossible combination.*

EXAMPLE 86

When teams disagree about ownership

SITUATION *Two departments dispute who should lead a cross-functional initiative.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "I'll do whatever is needed."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "This belongs to your department."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "We need one accountable lead and clear supporting roles. Let's assign ownership based on decision authority and capacity."

WHY IT WORKS *You shift the discussion from territorial claims to clear governance.*

EXAMPLE 87

When a forecast becomes less reliable

SITUATION *New market information makes the current forecast uncertain.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "The forecast is probably still close enough."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "The forecast is worthless now."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "The assumptions have changed. Let's update the forecast, show a range of outcomes, and identify which indicators would trigger another review."

WHY IT WORKS *You make uncertainty visible and define how the team will respond to it.*

EXAMPLE 88

When you need to stop low-value work

SITUATION *A recurring report consumes time but is rarely used for decisions.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "I'll keep producing it because it's always been requested."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Nobody reads this report."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "Before we continue producing this report, can we confirm who uses it and what decision it supports? If there's no clear use, I recommend retiring it."

WHY IT WORKS *You evaluate work by its purpose and value rather than habit.*

EXAMPLE 89

When a project needs a clear decision owner

SITUATION *Several stakeholders are commenting, but no one is authorized to decide.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "I'll wait until everyone agrees."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Someone needs to take charge."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "We have enough input to decide, but ownership is unclear. Who has final decision authority, and by when do we need the decision?"

WHY IT WORKS *You separate consultation from decision authority and establish a deadline.*

EXAMPLE 90

When a change needs to be evaluated honestly

SITUATION *A pilot produces mixed results, and some stakeholders want to scale it immediately.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "Let's call it a success and move on."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "The pilot failed."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "The pilot improved response time but did not meet the quality target. I recommend addressing that gap before deciding whether to scale."

WHY IT WORKS *You preserve the useful evidence while acknowledging the unmet objective.*

Chapter 10: Personal Development, Resilience, and Long-Term Growth

EXAMPLES 91–100

EXAMPLE 91

When you need to protect time for important work

SITUATION *Frequent requests are preventing you from completing your highest-priority responsibilities.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "I'll squeeze everything in somehow."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Stop sending me more work."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I need two uninterrupted mornings a week to finish the budget review. Could we keep Tuesday and Thursday mornings free of meetings and new requests?"

WHY IT WORKS *You protect the time your most important work needs with a specific request that is easy to approve.*

EXAMPLE 92

When you need long-term professional boundaries

SITUATION *Repeated overtime is affecting your ability to sustain high-quality work.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "I suppose I can stay late again this week, even though I'm exhausted."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "If you expect excessive hours, you're looking at the wrong person."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "To maintain high-quality output long-term, I need to cap my weekly commitments at forty hours."

WHY IT WORKS *You frame a sustainable boundary around performance and capacity.*

EXAMPLE 93

When you need to recover after a setback

SITUATION *A project you led is cancelled after months of work.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "I've wasted all that time; I'm clearly not good at this."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Leadership never gives good projects a chance."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "The project has been cancelled. I'll document what we learned, identify what can be reused, and apply those lessons to the next proposal."

WHY IT WORKS *You acknowledge the setback without turning it into a judgment about your worth or others' motives.*

EXAMPLE 94

When you need to ask for support before burnout

SITUATION *Your workload is becoming unmanageable, and quality is starting to slip.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "I'll manage somehow; I don't want to complain."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "This workload is impossible, and nobody cares."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I want to flag something early. I'm making mistakes I don't usually make because I'm stretched too thin. Could someone else take the monthly report for the next quarter?"

WHY IT WORKS *You raise the problem before it becomes a crisis, describe its effect, and ask for one specific change.*

EXAMPLE 95

When you receive criticism you partly agree with

SITUATION *A manager identifies a real weakness but overstates its impact.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "You're right about everything; I'll fix it."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "That criticism is unfair."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I agree that the handover was incomplete. I don't agree that the entire project was poorly managed. Let's separate the issue from the overall result."

WHY IT WORKS *You accept the valid point without accepting an inaccurate generalization.*

EXAMPLE 96

When you need to learn from a failed decision

SITUATION *A decision you supported produces a poor result.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "Let's not revisit it; we need to move on."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "It would have worked if the team had carried it out properly."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "The result was weaker than expected. Let's review which assumptions failed and what evidence we should require next time."

WHY IT WORKS *You turn the outcome into a structured learning opportunity.*

EXAMPLE 97

When someone asks you to take on an unclear role

SITUATION *You are asked to "help out" on a project without defined responsibilities.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "Sure, I'll help wherever needed."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "I'm not doing extra work without a title."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I can contribute, but I'd like to clarify my responsibilities, decision authority, and how this work fits with my existing priorities."

WHY IT WORKS *You establish the conditions needed to contribute effectively.*

EXAMPLE 98

When you think about your professional direction

SITUATION *Your manager asks where you see yourself in two years, and you want to move into a more strategic role.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "I'll wait and see what opportunities open up."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Management is holding back my career progression."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I want to steer my career toward senior strategy over the next two years. Let's identify the milestones required to get there."

WHY IT WORKS *You take proactive ownership of your professional trajectory rather than leaving it to chance.*

EXAMPLE 99

When you need to acknowledge a limitation

SITUATION *Your manager asks you to lead a project that requires a skill you have not yet developed.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "I probably can't do this well."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "The company should have hired someone else."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I haven't developed that skill yet. I can take responsibility for learning it, provided we agree on the support and timeline."

WHY IT WORKS *You state the limitation honestly and identify the conditions for progress.*

EXAMPLE 100

When you need to define success for yourself

SITUATION *In your yearly review, your manager asks whether this role still fits your goals.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "I'm fine with whatever you think is best."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "If this role doesn't lead to promotion, it's a waste of time."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I'd like to review this role against three things: the skills I'm building, the contribution I'm making, and where I want to go next. Could we set aside time to discuss it?"

WHY IT WORKS *You use explicit criteria to evaluate progress rather than relying on frustration or vague expectations.*

Part Two: In Everyday Life

What do you say when it is personal?

Part One showed assertive communication at work. Part Two follows you home: to your family, your friends, your neighbours, the shops, the doctor's office, your children's school, and the messages on your phone. The stakes are often more personal here, because the people involved are people you will see again tomorrow. The principle does not change. State what is true, ask for what you need, and leave room for the other person to respond.

Chapter 11: Family and Close Relationships

EXAMPLES 101–110

EXAMPLE 101

When a relative gives advice you didn't ask for

SITUATION *At a family gathering, an uncle criticizes how you spend your money.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You smile and say nothing, then complain about it later.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Mind your own business."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I know you mean well, and I've thought about this carefully. I'd like to make this decision myself."

WHY IT WORKS *You acknowledge the intention without handing over the decision.*

EXAMPLE 102

When in-laws expect you at every event

SITUATION *Your partner's family expects you at every holiday and every weekend lunch.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "Of course, we'll be there."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "We're not at your command."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "We'd love to come to the holiday dinner. We can't make every weekend lunch, but let's choose a few dates now."

WHY IT WORKS *You say yes to what you can do and turn the limit into a plan.*

EXAMPLE 103

When a sibling asks to borrow money again

SITUATION *Your brother asks for another loan, and the last one was never repaid.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "Fine, but this is the last time." (You lend it.)

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "You never pay anything back."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I can't lend money right now. The last loan hasn't been repaid, and I don't want money to come between us."

WHY IT WORKS *You give a factual reason without a lecture, and you protect the relationship.*

EXAMPLE 104

When a parent criticizes your parenting in front of your children

SITUATION *Your mother says you are too strict while the children are listening.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "Maybe you're right."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "You weren't a perfect parent either."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I'd like to talk about that later, just the two of us. In front of the children, I need us to support each other."

WHY IT WORKS *The disagreement moves somewhere private, and your role as the parent stays intact.*

EXAMPLE 105

When someone shares your private news

SITUATION *Your sister told the relatives about your job change before you could.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You say nothing, but stop confiding in her.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "You can't keep a secret."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I told you that in confidence. Next time, please wait until I've shared my news myself."

WHY IT WORKS *You name the expectation for the future instead of accusing her of a character flaw.*

EXAMPLE 106

When your spouse corrects your English in front of others

SITUATION *You are speaking at a dinner, and your husband or wife keeps fixing your mistakes.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You go quiet and let your spouse do the talking.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Why don't you just speak for me, then?"

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I want to practise, so please let me finish. If you have corrections, tell me afterwards."

WHY IT WORKS *You protect your right to speak and give your spouse a better moment to help.*

EXAMPLE 107

When your spouse answers for you

SITUATION *At a bank or clinic, the staff ask you a question and your spouse answers first.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You let it happen because it is quicker.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "I can speak for myself!"

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "Thank you, but I'd like to answer this one. I'll ask for help if I need it."

WHY IT WORKS *You claim the conversation without making a scene.*

EXAMPLE 108

When a joke at your expense keeps coming back

SITUATION *A cousin teases you about your career choice every time the family meets.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You laugh along while it stings.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "That's not funny. You're rude."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I know you're joking, but that one wears on me. I'd rather you stop."

WHY IT WORKS *You describe the effect on you without claiming to know the intention.*

EXAMPLE 109

When one of you is learning faster than the other

SITUATION *Your English is stronger than your spouse's, and you are tired of translating for both of you.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You keep translating and grow resentful.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Learn English already."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I'm glad to help, but I can't be the interpreter for everything. Let's decide which calls and appointments you'll take on, and I'll back you up."

WHY IT WORKS *You offer help together with a plan to build independence.*

EXAMPLE 110

When guilt is used about distance

SITUATION *Your parents are upset that you live far away and visit rarely.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "I'm sorry. I'll try to come more often."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "I have my own life."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I miss you too, and I'm glad we talk every week. I can visit twice a year, so let's plan those dates now."

WHY IT WORKS *You acknowledge the feeling and offer a commitment you can actually keep.*

Chapter 12: Friends and Social Life

EXAMPLES 111–120

EXAMPLE 111

When you need to decline an invitation

SITUATION *A friend invites you to a party, and you don't want to go.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "Maybe. I'll see how I feel," followed by a last-minute excuse.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "I'm not interested in your parties."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "Thank you for inviting me. I can't make it, but I hope it goes well."

WHY IT WORKS *A clear, warm no is kinder than a vague yes you plan to break.*

EXAMPLE 112

When a friend is always late

SITUATION *A friend arrives 30 minutes late every time you meet, and you wait alone.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "No problem," every time.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "You have no respect for my time."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "When you're 30 minutes late, I end up waiting alone. From now on, I'll wait 15 minutes and then go ahead without you."

WHY IT WORKS *You state the effect and a consequence you control, instead of trying to change the other person.*

EXAMPLE 113

When a friend doesn't return something

SITUATION *A friend borrowed your drill two months ago.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You stop mentioning it and buy a new one.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "You always keep things you borrow."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I think you still have my drill. Could you bring it back this weekend?"

WHY IT WORKS *A specific request with a date is easier to act on than a hint.*

EXAMPLE 114

When a friend keeps cancelling at the last minute

SITUATION *For the third time this month, a friend cancels an hour before you meet.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "It's okay, don't worry about it."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Don't bother making plans with me anymore."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "That's the third cancellation this month. If this isn't a good time for you, tell me, and we'll plan something when it suits you."

WHY IT WORKS *You name the pattern and give the friend an honest way out.*

EXAMPLE 115

When a friend talks only about themselves

SITUATION *Every conversation with a friend becomes a monologue about their life.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You listen, nod, and leave feeling unheard.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "You never ask about me."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I'd like to tell you about something that's going on with me, too. Do you have a few minutes to listen?"

WHY IT WORKS *You ask for space in the conversation instead of criticizing the friend's personality.*

EXAMPLE 116

When the bill is split unfairly

SITUATION *The group wants to split the restaurant bill equally, but you ordered only a salad and water.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You pay your equal share and say nothing.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "I'm not paying for everyone's wine."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I only had a salad and water. I'll pay for mine and a share of the tip."

WHY IT WORKS *You state the facts and offer a fair contribution, so nobody feels accused.*

EXAMPLE 117

When a friend asks for a very large favour

SITUATION *A friend asks you to spend an entire weekend helping them move.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "Sure, I'll be there," despite your other plans.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Hire movers like everyone else."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I can help on Saturday morning for two hours. I can't do the whole weekend."

WHY IT WORKS *You offer a specific amount of help you can actually give.*

EXAMPLE 118

When someone gossips to you

SITUATION *An acquaintance starts criticizing a mutual friend who isn't present.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You listen and add a comment to fit in.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "You're a terrible gossip."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I'd rather not discuss her when she isn't here. If something is bothering you, it's worth telling her directly."

WHY IT WORKS *You decline to join without attacking the speaker.*

EXAMPLE 119

When a friend pushes their opinions

SITUATION *A friend keeps pressing you to agree on a political or religious subject.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You nod to end the conversation.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "That's a ridiculous view."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "We see this differently, and I'd rather not argue about it. Can we talk about something else?"

WHY IT WORKS *You accept the disagreement and protect the friendship by changing the subject.*

EXAMPLE 120

When you want to reconnect

SITUATION *You've lost touch with a good friend and you miss them.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You wait for them to call, then decide they don't care.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "You never call me."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I've missed you. Would you like to have coffee next week?"

WHY IT WORKS *A specific invitation is more likely to succeed than a complaint about the silence.*

Chapter 13: Neighbours, Housing, and Landlords

EXAMPLES 121–130

EXAMPLE 121

When a neighbour is too noisy

SITUATION *Loud music from the apartment next door continues past 11 p.m.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You lie awake and say nothing.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> You pound on the wall and shout.

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "Your music has been pretty loud after 11, and I can't sleep. Could you turn it down on weeknights?"

WHY IT WORKS *You describe the problem, the time, and one reasonable request.*

EXAMPLE 122

When a landlord is slow with repairs

SITUATION *You reported a leak three weeks ago, and nothing has happened.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "I'm sorry to bother you again, but whenever you have time..."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "You're a terrible landlord."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I reported the leak on the 3rd. Could you let me know by Friday when it will be fixed?"

WHY IT WORKS *You give the history and ask for a firm date.*

EXAMPLE 123

When a landlord wants to enter without notice

SITUATION *Your lease requires 24 hours' notice, but the landlord arrives unannounced.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You let him in and say nothing.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "You can't just walk into my home!"

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I'm happy to arrange a visit, but our lease requires 24 hours' notice. Which day this week works for you?"

WHY IT WORKS *You point to the agreement and offer a way to cooperate.*

EXAMPLE 124

When a deposit is withheld

SITUATION *After you move out, your landlord keeps part of your deposit without explanation. (Deposit rules differ by province; check with your provincial tenancy office.)*

> **PASSIVE**
> "Okay, if that's what the cost was."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "You're stealing my money."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "Could you send me an itemized list of the deductions and the receipts? I'd like to review it."

WHY IT WORKS *You ask for evidence before you accept or dispute the amount.*

EXAMPLE 125

When someone parks in your space

SITUATION *A neighbour regularly parks in your assigned spot.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You park on the street and complain to your family.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> You leave an angry note on the windshield.

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "That's my assigned space. Could you park in your own from now on? If you have a problem with yours, let's talk about it."

WHY IT WORKS *You claim what is yours and invite a solution to any underlying problem.*

EXAMPLE 126

When a neighbour's dog barks for hours

SITUATION *A dog barks all day while its owner is out.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You put up with it for months.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Get rid of that dog or I'll call the city."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "Your dog barks for hours when you're out, and I work from home. Can we find a solution together?"

WHY IT WORKS *You describe the impact and ask for collaboration, not blame.*

EXAMPLE 127

When a roommate doesn't pay their share

SITUATION *Your roommate is late with their half of the electricity bill again.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You cover it and say nothing.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "You're a freeloader."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "Your share of the electricity is due. Please send it by Friday. I can't keep covering it."

WHY IT WORKS *You set a date and say plainly what you will no longer do.*

EXAMPLE 128

When rent goes up

SITUATION *You receive notice of a large increase.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "I guess I have no choice."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "That's greedy."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "Thank you for the notice. Could we talk about the amount? I'd like to understand how it was calculated, and I'd also like to check it against the provincial rules."

WHY IT WORKS *You ask for the reasoning and open a negotiation.*

EXAMPLE 129

When a neighbour drops by uninvited

SITUATION *A neighbour knocks at your door several times a week without warning.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You open the door every time and lose your evening.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "You're always at my door. Can't you take a hint?"

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I enjoy talking with you, but I'm not available for unplanned visits. Could you text me first? Then we can find a time."

WHY IT WORKS *You affirm the relationship and set a clear process.*

EXAMPLE 130

When a building decision is made without consultation

SITUATION *The condo board proposes higher fees without explaining why.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You vote yes because everyone else seems to agree.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "This board is incompetent."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "Before we vote, could we see the budget and the alternatives that were considered?"

WHY IT WORKS *You ask for information that anyone voting would reasonably need.*

Chapter 14: Shops, Services, and Complaints

EXAMPLES 131–140

EXAMPLE 131

When a product is faulty

SITUATION *A new appliance stops working after a week.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "I guess it's my fault for buying it."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "This is junk, and you sold it to me."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I bought this a week ago and it stopped working. I'd like a replacement or a refund."

WHY IT WORKS *You give the facts and name the outcome you want.*

EXAMPLE 132

When a restaurant brings the wrong order

SITUATION *You ordered fish and received chicken.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You eat it to avoid trouble.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Can't you even get an order right?"

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I ordered the fish, and this is chicken. Could you bring me what I ordered?"

WHY IT WORKS *A calm, specific correction is quickly fixed.*

EXAMPLE 133

When someone pressures you to buy more

SITUATION *A salesperson keeps suggesting extras you don't need.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "Okay, I'll take the warranty too."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Stop trying to sell me things."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "Thank you, but I only want the item I came for."

WHY IT WORKS *You decline once, politely, and repeat it if necessary.*

EXAMPLE 134

When the repair was done badly

SITUATION *A tradesperson repaired your sink, and it leaks again two days later.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You fix it yourself and pay twice.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "You ripped me off."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "The sink is leaking again after your repair. I'd like you to come back and fix it at no extra charge."

WHY IT WORKS *You connect the problem to the work done and state the remedy you expect.*

EXAMPLE 135

When a call centre keeps transferring you

SITUATION *You have been transferred three times without a solution.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You hang up and give up.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Is anyone there actually competent?"

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I've been transferred three times. I'd like to speak to someone who can resolve this, or get a reference number and a callback time."

WHY IT WORKS *You ask for a solution or a record, and either one moves things forward.*

EXAMPLE 136

When there is a hidden fee

SITUATION *Your bill includes a charge that nobody mentioned.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You pay it.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "This is a scam."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I don't see this fee in the original quote. Could you explain it or remove it?"

WHY IT WORKS *You compare the bill with the agreement, and that is hard to argue with.*

EXAMPLE 137

When a delivery is late or damaged

SITUATION *An important package arrives two weeks late with a broken corner.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "Never mind. I'll use it anyway."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Your delivery service is useless."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "My order arrived two weeks late and damaged. I'd like a replacement or a refund, and I can send photos."

WHY IT WORKS *You offer evidence and a clear request.*

EXAMPLE 138

When an online order isn't as described

SITUATION *The item you received looks different from the listing.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You leave a vague review and accept the loss.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> You post an insulting review before contacting the seller.

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "The item doesn't match the description in your listing. I'd like to return it for a full refund."

WHY IT WORKS *You give the seller a chance to fix the problem first.*

EXAMPLE 139

When a haircut or service isn't what you asked for

SITUATION *The stylist cuts your hair much shorter than agreed.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "It's fine, thank you," followed by a bad tip and a bad mood.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "You ruined my hair."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "That's shorter than I asked for. Can you tell me what can be done to improve it?"

WHY IT WORKS *You express disappointment and move the conversation to solutions.*

EXAMPLE 140

When you need to escalate a complaint

SITUATION *You have explained a problem twice, and the staff member cannot resolve it.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You stop trying.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "You're useless. Get me someone competent."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I've explained this twice, and it's still unresolved. I'd like to speak to a supervisor."

WHY IT WORKS *You escalate respectfully and show that you have already tried.*

Chapter 15: Money, Contracts, and Big Purchases

EXAMPLES 141–150

EXAMPLE 141

When you need to understand the fine print

SITUATION *A contract contains a clause you don't fully understand.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You sign because everyone else does.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "This contract is a trick."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "Before I sign, could you explain this clause to me in plain terms?"

WHY IT WORKS *You ask the question before you are committed.*

EXAMPLE 142

When a salesperson uses high pressure

SITUATION *A car dealer says the price is available only today.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "Okay, I'll take it."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "I don't trust you people."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I never decide on the first visit. Could I have the quote in writing? I'll respond by Monday."

WHY IT WORKS *You keep control of the timeline.*

EXAMPLE 143

When you want to cancel a subscription

SITUATION *The company keeps offering discounts when you try to cancel.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "Okay, I'll keep it for another month."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Stop wasting my time."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "Thank you for the offer, but I want to cancel. Please confirm the cancellation in writing."

WHY IT WORKS *You repeat your decision and ask for proof.*

EXAMPLE 144

When you compare contractor quotes

SITUATION *A contractor's quote is a single lump sum with no detail.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You accept it because you don't know what to ask.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "That price is outrageous."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I'm comparing three quotes. Could you itemize the labour and the materials?"

WHY IT WORKS *A comparable breakdown lets you judge the price fairly.*

EXAMPLE 145

When you are asked to co-sign a loan

SITUATION *A relative asks you to co-sign a loan.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "I guess so, if you really need it."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Absolutely not. What kind of question is that?"

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I don't co-sign loans, as a rule. I'd like to help in another way, so let's talk about what's possible."

WHY IT WORKS *A consistent rule is easier to accept than a personal rejection.*

EXAMPLE 146

When a bank offers a product you don't want

SITUATION *A bank employee keeps recommending an investment plan.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "I'll think about it," even though you won't.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "You just want your commission."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I'm not interested in that product. I only need help with the account I came in about."

WHY IT WORKS *You decline firmly and bring the conversation back to your purpose.*

EXAMPLE 147

When there's a charge you don't recognize

SITUATION *Your card statement shows a payment you did not make.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You hope it will disappear.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "You people stole my money."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I see a charge I don't recognize on this date. Could you review it and tell me how to dispute it?"

WHY IT WORKS *You identify the item and ask for the process.*

EXAMPLE 148

When a promise isn't in writing

SITUATION *A seller promises a free repair, but the contract doesn't mention it.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "I trust you."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "I knew you'd lie."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "That sounds good. Could we add it to the contract so we're both clear?"

WHY IT WORKS *You get the promise in writing, so you both have a clear record, without accusing anyone.*

EXAMPLE 149

When a friend invites you to invest

SITUATION *A friend asks you to put money into their new business.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "Maybe, I'll see what I can do."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "That sounds like a scam."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I don't invest in friends' businesses, because I want to keep money separate from friendship. I hope it goes very well."

WHY IT WORKS *You decline for a stated principle and support the friend.*

EXAMPLE 150

When you and your partner need to talk about money

SITUATION *One of you manages the household money, and the other rarely sees the numbers.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You avoid the subject.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "You're hiding something from me."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "Let's review our budget together once a month, so we both know where the money goes."

WHY IT WORKS *You propose a routine that builds shared understanding.*

Chapter 16: Health, Doctors, and Caring for Others

EXAMPLES 151–160

EXAMPLE 151

When the doctor is rushing

SITUATION *The appointment is ending, and you still have questions.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You leave without asking.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "You never give me enough time."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I have two more questions. Could we go through them before I leave?"

WHY IT WORKS *You say how many questions remain, which makes the request easy to accommodate.*

EXAMPLE 152

When you don't understand the explanation

SITUATION *The doctor uses medical terms you can't follow.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You nod and pretend you understand.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Speak English, not jargon."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I didn't follow that. Could you explain it in simpler words, or write it down for me?"

WHY IT WORKS *Asking for plain language or writing is a normal request, and it protects your health.*

EXAMPLE 153

When you want a second opinion

SITUATION *You are unsure about a recommended treatment.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You agree because you don't want to offend the doctor.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "You just want to push your treatment on me."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "Thank you for explaining. I'd like a second opinion before I decide. Could you refer me to another specialist?"

WHY IT WORKS *You frame it as a careful decision, not a verdict on the doctor.*

EXAMPLE 154

When you are waiting for test results

SITUATION *The clinic promised results last week, and you've heard nothing.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You keep waiting and worrying.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Why is nobody doing their job?"

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I was told my results would be ready last week. When should I expect them, and who will contact me?"

WHY IT WORKS *You ask for a time and a name, and both make follow-up possible.*

EXAMPLE 155

When you have questions for the pharmacist

SITUATION *You've been given a new medication with few instructions.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You take it and hope for the best.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Why didn't anyone tell me anything?"

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "Could you explain how to take this, and what side effects I should watch for?"

WHY IT WORKS *Two specific questions get specific answers.*

EXAMPLE 156

When relatives push remedies or health advice

SITUATION *A relative insists that you try an unproven treatment.*

PASSIVE

You say yes to end the conversation, then ignore the advice.

AGGRESSIVE

"You don't know anything about medicine."

ASSERTIVE

"Thank you for caring. I'm going to follow my doctor's advice."

WHY IT WORKS *You thank them, state your decision, and close the topic.*

EXAMPLE 157

When you're expected to be the only caregiver

SITUATION *The family assumes you will care for an ill parent alone.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "I'll manage somehow."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "None of you ever help."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I can take Mondays and Wednesdays. We need to decide together who covers the rest of the week."

WHY IT WORKS *You state your share and ask the others to define theirs.*

EXAMPLE 158

When staff speak to your relative instead of you

SITUATION *At the hospital, the nurse addresses your spouse about your condition.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You stay silent and let your spouse answer.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "I'm right here! Talk to me."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I'm the patient, so please explain it to me. My partner can listen too."

WHY IT WORKS *You reclaim your role and include the person who came with you.*

EXAMPLE 159

When you've waited far past your appointment

SITUATION *Your appointment was at 10:00, and it is now 11:15.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You wait silently.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "This place is a joke."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "My appointment was at 10:00, and it's 11:15. Could you tell me how much longer it will be?"

WHY IT WORKS *You state the facts and ask for information you can plan around.*

EXAMPLE 160

When you aren't ready to discuss your health

SITUATION *A relative keeps asking about your medical situation.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You share details you would rather keep private.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Stop interrogating me."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "Thank you for asking. I'm not ready to talk about the details, but I'll tell you when I am."

WHY IT WORKS *You respect the concern and keep control of your own information.*

Chapter 17: Children, Schools, and Parenting

EXAMPLES 161–170

EXAMPLE 161

When you're worried about your child's progress

SITUATION *Your daughter is struggling, and you want to understand why.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You wait for the report card.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "You're not teaching her properly."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I'm concerned about her progress in reading. Could we meet to discuss what support she needs?"

WHY IT WORKS *You name the concern and propose a meeting, with the teacher as a partner.*

EXAMPLE 162

When another child hurts yours

SITUATION *A classmate keeps pushing your son at recess.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You tell him to ignore it.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> You confront the other child's parent angrily at pickup.

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "My son has been pushed several times at recess. I'd like to know what the school will do to stop it."

WHY IT WORKS *You go to the people who can act and ask for a concrete response.*

EXAMPLE 163

When a coach plays your child very little

SITUATION *Your child sits on the bench for most of every game.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You complain in the car on the way home.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "You obviously have favourites."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "My daughter would like more playing time. What would help her earn it?"

WHY IT WORKS *You ask for criteria, and a vague grievance becomes a plan.*

EXAMPLE 164

When your child is asked to interpret for you

SITUATION *At a school meeting, staff ask your ten-year-old to translate for you.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You allow it because it is quick.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "He's a child. Find a real interpreter."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I'd prefer not to use my son as an interpreter. Could we have an interpreter, or a written summary I can read first?"

WHY IT WORKS *You protect your child from an adult role and offer practical alternatives.*

EXAMPLE 165

When you set limits with a teenager

SITUATION *Your teenager keeps using a phone at night.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "Fine, just this once," every night.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "I'm taking your phone forever."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "Phones go off at 9:00 so you can sleep. I'm open to discussing exceptions, but not at bedtime."

WHY IT WORKS *The rule is clear, the reason is visible, and discussion happens at a calm time.*

EXAMPLE 166

When grandparents break your rules

SITUATION *The grandparents give your children candy and screens against your wishes.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You say nothing to avoid conflict.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "You're undermining me."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "We're grateful for how much you love them. When it comes to candy and screens, we need you to follow our rules."

WHY IT WORKS *You affirm the love and set the limit clearly.*

EXAMPLE 167

When homework instructions are unclear

SITUATION *Your child's assignment doesn't make sense to you.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You guess and hope.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "These instructions are ridiculous."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "Could you clarify what's expected for this assignment? I want to help my son without doing it for him."

WHY IT WORKS *You resolve the confusion at its source, and you state your own role.*

EXAMPLE 168

When a parents' group chat gets demanding

SITUATION *Other parents expect immediate answers and constant contributions.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You answer every message at once and resent it.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Some of us have jobs, you know."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I can bring snacks for the next game, but I can't respond to messages during the day. Please call if it's urgent."

WHY IT WORKS *You offer something specific and set a practical boundary.*

EXAMPLE 169

When you disagree with a school decision

SITUATION *The school decides to place your child in a different class.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "I suppose the school knows best."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "You can't do that without asking us."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I'd like to understand the reasons for this decision. Could we meet to discuss it before it takes effect?"

WHY IT WORKS *You ask for the reasoning and for a say before the change.*

EXAMPLE 170

When your child asks for something you won't allow

SITUATION *Your child begs for something you have decided against.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You give in after the third request.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Stop asking! The answer is no, and that's final!"

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I know you really want this. The answer is no, and I'm happy to explain why."

WHY IT WORKS *You acknowledge the feeling and hold the decision without a fight.*

Chapter 18: Travel, Public Spaces, and Strangers

EXAMPLES 171–180

EXAMPLE 171

When someone cuts in line

SITUATION *A person steps in front of you in a long line.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You say nothing and wait longer.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Hey! Do you think you're special?"

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "Excuse me, the line starts back there. I was next."

WHY IT WORKS *You state the fact, briefly and without insults.*

EXAMPLE 172

When someone is in your seat

SITUATION *Your reserved seat on a train is occupied.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You stand for the whole trip.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Get out of my seat."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "Excuse me, I think you're in my seat. I have a reservation for this one. Could you check your ticket?"

WHY IT WORKS *You offer a way to confirm the mistake without accusing anyone.*

EXAMPLE 173

When the airline loses your luggage

SITUATION *Your bag doesn't arrive at your destination.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You leave without reporting it.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Your airline is a disgrace."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "My bag didn't arrive. I'd like to file a report now and get a reference number and a delivery address."

WHY IT WORKS *You ask for the record and process first, and everything else depends on them.*

EXAMPLE 174

When a driver overcharges you

SITUATION *A ride-share or taxi fare is much higher than the quote.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You pay without a word and feel cheated all evening.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "You're cheating me."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "We agreed on a fare of $20. I'll pay that amount."

WHY IT WORKS *You state the earlier agreement and the amount you will pay.*

EXAMPLE 175

When someone is loud in a quiet space

SITUATION *A person talks loudly on the phone in the quiet car of a train.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You sit and stew.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Shut up!"

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "Excuse me, could you lower your voice? This is the quiet car."

WHY IT WORKS *A calm, polite request usually works and costs nothing.*

EXAMPLE 176

When someone stands too close

SITUATION *A stranger is standing very close to you in line.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You shift away and say nothing.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Back off!"

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "Could you give me a little more space, please?"

WHY IT WORKS *A short, polite request about your own space is enough.*

EXAMPLE 177

When your hotel room isn't what you booked

SITUATION *The room has twin beds, but you reserved a double.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "It's fine, I suppose."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Is this how you run a hotel?"

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I booked a double room, and this one has twin beds. Could you move me to a double, or tell me what you can offer?"

WHY IT WORKS *You compare the booking with the room and ask for the fix.*

EXAMPLE 178

When a street vendor pressures you

SITUATION *A seller keeps following you and pushing an item you don't want.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You buy it to make them stop.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> You shout and push past.

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "No, thank you." (Repeat calmly, and keep walking.)

WHY IT WORKS *A short, friendly refusal, repeated, needs no explanation.*

EXAMPLE 179

When a stranger asks for money

SITUATION *Someone asks you for money, and you don't want to give it.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You give some out of discomfort.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Get a job."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I can't help today, but I hope things get better for you."

WHY IT WORKS *You say no clearly and kindly, without judgment or a long explanation.*

EXAMPLE 180

When a reclined seat leaves you no room

SITUATION *The passenger in front of you reclines their seat fully on a long flight.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You squeeze in and endure it.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> You kick the seat.

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "Would you mind raising your seat a little? I don't have much room."

WHY IT WORKS *You describe the problem and ask for a small change.*

Chapter 19: Messages, Email, and Online Life

EXAMPLES 181–190

In this chapter, most of the examples are written messages. A message cannot show your tone, so clarity and politeness matter more.

EXAMPLE 181

When you decline a request by email

SITUATION *A colleague's friend emails you asking for a favour you can't give.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "I'll try to see what I can do." (And then you do nothing.)

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "I'm too busy for this."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "Thank you for thinking of me. Unfortunately, I'm not able to help with this right now, but I wish you success."

WHY IT WORKS *A clear, courteous no saves both sides time.*

EXAMPLE 182

When no one replies to your email

SITUATION *You wrote ten days ago and haven't received a response.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You wait and say nothing.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Why are you ignoring me?"

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I'm following up on my message of the 10th. Could you let me know by Thursday whether you can help?"

WHY IT WORKS *You refer to the earlier message and give a clear deadline.*

EXAMPLE 183

When a message is too vague to answer

SITUATION *A friend texts, "We need to talk," without further details.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You worry for hours.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "What now?"

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "Of course. Is it urgent? I can call you tonight at 7, or if you tell me the topic, I can prepare."

WHY IT WORKS *You offer a time and ask a question that calms uncertainty.*

EXAMPLE 184

When a group chat gets out of control

SITUATION *A group chat for a project is flooded with off-topic messages.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You mute it and miss important updates.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Can everyone stop spamming this chat?"

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "Could we keep this chat for project updates only? We can start a separate one for everything else."

WHY IT WORKS *You solve the problem with a practical alternative.*

EXAMPLE 185

When someone posts your photo without asking

SITUATION *An acquaintance posts a photo of you online.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You leave it up and feel uncomfortable.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "You had no right to do that!"

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "Could you take down the photo of me? I'd prefer that you ask before you post one in the future."

WHY IT WORKS *You make a direct request and set the expectation for next time.*

EXAMPLE 186

When you disagree with a decision in writing

SITUATION *A manager announces a change you believe is a mistake.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You send nothing and complain to colleagues.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "This decision is going to be a disaster."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I understand the reasoning behind the change. I'd like to raise one concern: it may delay the client delivery. Could we discuss this before it is finalized?"

WHY IT WORKS *You acknowledge the logic and put your concern on the record, politely.*

EXAMPLE 187

When a buyer offers far less than your price

SITUATION *On an online marketplace, a buyer offers half your asking price.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "Okay, take it."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Are you joking? Don't waste my time."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "My price is $80, and that's firm. I can hold the item until Saturday if you're interested."

WHY IT WORKS *You state the price and the timing, and leave the decision to the buyer.*

EXAMPLE 188

When your message was misread

SITUATION *A friend is upset by a text that sounded harsher than you intended.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You say nothing and hope it passes.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "You're being too sensitive."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I think my message sounded different from what I meant. What I wanted to say was that I'm busy this week, not that I don't want to see you."

WHY IT WORKS *You clarify your intention without blaming the reader.*

EXAMPLE 189

When someone criticizes you in public

SITUATION *A customer posts an unfair comment about your service online.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You ignore it, and it stays unanswered.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> You reply with a defensive, angry post.

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "Thank you for the feedback. I'd like to understand what happened and put it right. Please send me a private message."

WHY IT WORKS *You respond calmly in public and move the details to a private channel.*

EXAMPLE 190

When a message asks for personal information

SITUATION *A message claims to be from your bank and asks for your account details.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You send the details because the message sounds urgent.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> You reply with an insult.

> **ASSERTIVE**
> You don't reply. You call the bank on the number from its official website and ask, "I received a message asking for my account details. Did it come from you?"

WHY IT WORKS *You don't engage with the sender, and you check through a channel you trust.*

Chapter 20: Apologies, Repair, and Self-Respect

EXAMPLES 191–200

EXAMPLE 191

When you need to apologize properly

SITUATION *You forgot a close friend's birthday.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "I'm the worst friend in the world. I'm so sorry, so sorry."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "It's just a birthday. Don't make it a big deal."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I'm sorry I forgot your birthday. I should have set a reminder. Can I take you to dinner this week to make up for it?"

WHY IT WORKS *You admit the mistake, take responsibility, and offer to repair it, with no drama.*

EXAMPLE 192

When someone apologizes to you

SITUATION *A colleague apologizes for a thoughtless comment.*

> **PASSIVE**
> "It's nothing, don't worry," though it still bothers you.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "It's too late for sorry."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "Thank you for apologizing. I'd appreciate it if it didn't happen again."

WHY IT WORKS *You accept the apology and say what you need next.*

EXAMPLE 193

When you apologize too often

SITUATION *You begin every request with "Sorry to bother you."*

> **PASSIVE**
> "Sorry, sorry, could I possibly ask a very small question?"

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Answer my question already."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "Excuse me, do you have a minute? I have a question about the schedule."

WHY IT WORKS *"Excuse me" asks for attention without treating the request as a fault.*

EXAMPLE 194

When the apology isn't sincere

SITUATION *Someone says, "I'm sorry you feel that way."*

> **PASSIVE**
> "Okay."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "That's not an apology."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I'd like you to acknowledge what happened, not just how I feel about it. Can we talk about that part?"

WHY IT WORKS *You say what is missing from the apology and invite them to complete it.*

EXAMPLE 195

When you were wrong

SITUATION *In an argument, you realize the other person was right.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You change the subject.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Fine, whatever, you win."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "You were right, and I was wrong. Thank you for explaining it again."

WHY IT WORKS *A plain admission earns respect and ends the conflict.*

EXAMPLE 196

When you want to repair after an argument

SITUATION *You had a hard argument with someone you care about, and neither of you has spoken since.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You wait for them to speak first.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "I'm not going to be the one to call."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I don't want to leave this unresolved. Could we talk tonight?"

WHY IT WORKS *You make the first move without conceding everything.*

EXAMPLE 197

When you need to step back from a friendship

SITUATION *A friendship has become draining, and you want distance.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You stop answering messages and disappear.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "I'm done with you."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I've valued our friendship, but I need to step back for a while. I wanted to tell you honestly."

WHY IT WORKS *You are clear and kind, and you don't leave the other person guessing.*

EXAMPLE 198

When someone keeps reopening an old issue

SITUATION *A relative brings up a past mistake of yours every time you meet.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You apologize again.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "Stop living in the past."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I've apologized for that, and I've learned from it. I'd rather not discuss it again unless something new has happened."

WHY IT WORKS *You acknowledge the history and close the subject.*

EXAMPLE 199

When you receive a compliment

SITUATION *A colleague says, "That was an excellent presentation."*

> **PASSIVE**
> "Oh, it was nothing. Anyone could have done it."

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "I know. I worked harder than everyone else."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "Thank you. I put a lot of work into it, so I'm glad it showed."

WHY IT WORKS *You accept praise gracefully, without shrinking or boasting.*

EXAMPLE 200

When you wish you had spoken up earlier

SITUATION *Last week you agreed to something you didn't really want, and you've been uncomfortable since.*

> **PASSIVE**
> You keep quiet and promise yourself you'll do better next time.

> **AGGRESSIVE**
> "You pushed me into this."

> **ASSERTIVE**
> "I'd like to go back to something we discussed last week. I agreed, but I should have told you I had concerns. Could we talk about it?"

WHY IT WORKS *A late voice is still a voice, and returning to the conversation is itself assertive.*

You will not always say the right thing at the right moment. Assertiveness is a skill, and it improves with practice, including the practice of coming back to a conversation after it has ended.

Find Your Situation

Numbers refer to example numbers, not pages.

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About the Author

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