

10 steps to absolute assertiveness

by Mark Tyrrell

**Full self hypnosis
program with
practical exercises
and 10 audio
downloads**



10 steps to absolute assertiveness

Where do you start?

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10 Steps to Absolute Assertiveness

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Where do you start?



*If I am not for myself, who will be for me?
If I am not for others, what am I?
And if not now, when?*

Rabbi Hillel - Jewish scholar & theologian
(30 BC - 9 AD)

Go past any health food shop, community center, social club or even the customer noticeboard in your local supermarket, and you're sure to see lots of posters advertising self-improvement courses. 'Self esteem' is the most popular offering, and right behind it comes 'assertiveness'.

Why are there so many courses on how to be more assertive?

In 2012, 60 countries had regular troops involved in conflicts. In addition, some 389 militias, guerrilla groups and separatist groups (not regular soldiers) were involved in these conflicts or in conflicts between themselves. (1)

You'd think, looking at the state of the world and all those ongoing conflicts, that we, as a species, could really do with rather *less* assertiveness, not more. Wouldn't that lead to a more peaceful world for all of us?

However, it simply isn't true that being *less* assertive leads to more peace – between groups or between individuals.

That sounds counter-intuitive. At first.

We're social creatures, we need each other, and we need to have good relations with each other if life is to be tolerable. So it's not surprising that we very often *feel* as if the

way to go is to is 'smooth things over', to avoid 'making waves', and generally stay away from confrontation.

We *feel* that if we 'act nice', and generally do what other people seem to want of us, other people are more likely to 'act nice' to us. But this is true only up to a point.

If we continue *beyond* that point, something different than 'getting along' starts to happen...

A holy man once arrived in a village and the villagers warned him to stay clear of a certain tree, for a highly vicious snake resided there. The wise man told the villagers not to worry, the snake would not bite him.

Then he approached the tree and spoke gently to the snake.

"You know it's wrong to bite people," he said. "You must stop doing that."

The snake replied, "I understand your words, oh holy one. But my temper gets the better of me when they come too close. I get so angry, I feel compelled to bite them!"

So the wise man gave the snake a sacred word to say to himself whenever he got angry, a word that would dissipate his anger instantly and allow him to remain calm and peaceful.

And while the holy man remained in the village, all was calm and the snake remained peacefully in the tree. If anyone walked too close to the tree and the snake felt the old irritation building, he said the sacred word to himself and instantly calmed down again.

So the villagers went about their lives in safety and eventually the wise man went off again on his travels.

Some months later he returned to the village, and was horrified to see some children kicking the snake about and throwing it in the air, over and over, like a toy.

He called out to the children in fury to stop at once and leave the snake alone. The children fled while the snake slithered painfully across the ground towards him, bruised and bleeding.

"I wish I'd never listened to you!" hissed the snake. "Since you've been gone, the villagers have become more and more abusive and disrespectful towards me. Nearly every day I get some new injury, as people take out their aggression on me, or use me as some kind of plaything that doesn't have any feelings!"

The holy man looked at the snake in great concern, and said to him, "I told you it was wrong to bite people. I never told you not to hiss at them..."

This story nicely points up the distinction between *aggression* and *assertiveness*. (And there's a lot more to it than that – re-read this story several times to let its different levels of meaning sink in.)

Unless we can be appropriately *assertive*, we may, and are even likely to, find ourselves on the receiving end of *aggression*. And if aggression comes our way (for whatever reason), we will certainly need assertiveness to deal with it.

So what exactly *is* assertiveness?

Definition of assertiveness

Put simply, assertiveness is a form of communication. In assertive communication, what you say and do clearly lets other people know

- that you **respect yourself**
- that you **respect them**
- exactly **what you need or want**.

Contrast this with

- *passive* communication – where you never spell out your wishes or needs
- *aggressive* communication – where you state your needs or wishes as demands or threats.

If you look round, you'll see a lot more passive communication and aggressive communication going on than assertive communication. Many people seem to find it difficult to say what they want (with respect). And many people who can tell you what they want seem to find it difficult to do so without giving orders or making threats.

When you look at your own communication style, you'll find that you tend to fall into one of these camps too – either being too passive about your own wants and needs, so that you miss out, or perhaps being too aggressive about them, so that you cause excessive distress to others, and perhaps even put your relationships at risk, as you pursue your own goals.

But how do you get the balance right?

Well, firstly, it helps immensely if you remember to take account of basic human needs.

Start with the basics

This is so obvious that it often gets overlooked, yet it is **key** to understanding why people (including you) do what they do. Even – especially – when what they do is negative, destructive, or counterproductive.

Pretty well without exception, *everything we do is an attempt to satisfy one or more of our essential human needs*. I'm talking about our need for

Health	health in mind and body , based on eating nutritious food, getting sufficient exercise, and resting and relaxing properly at regular intervals
Security	a sense of safety and security ; a safe territory where you are free from high levels of anxiety or fear (this can also include the need for 'time out' and privacy)
Attention/ interaction	to give and receive regular healthy attention from other people to avoid loneliness and the distorted thinking which can come from too much isolation
Intimacy	to experience friendship, fun and perhaps intimacy with others who are close to you and accept you as you are
Control	to have a sense of independence, control and autonomy
Belonging/ contribution	to feel part of a wider community and emotionally connected to others through friendship, work relationships and social connections
Challenge/ creativity	to have a sense of competence and achievement through being stimulated and interested, learning physical and mental skills and exploring and developing your potential
Status	to have a sense of status ; to feel respected in the role you inhabit (this also connects with your sense of competence)
Meaning	to feel you have meaning and purpose in your life.

When these needs are reasonably (not necessarily perfectly) well met over time, we flourish and thrive. And we have spare capacity to cope with life's challenges (and be assertive when we need to).

When one or more of them are poorly met over a long period, we get overwhelmed. Our 'fuse' gets short. Our brains don't work so well. We become less resilient. It's much harder to cope with life (and we are less likely to feel assertive). We can get depressed and anxious, and start to see everything in very black-and-white, hopeless terms.

So before you rush to pin your difficulties dealing with other people on your own lack of assertiveness, check how well your own needs are being met. Are *you* living a reasonably healthy life? Are *you* getting enough attention and stimulation and recognition? Do *you* have control and autonomy in at least some areas of your life?

Do *you* have some rewarding relationships with others? If these needs are not being adequately well met in your life, it is bound to be more of a struggle to cope with the demands and stresses of dealing with others.

The message here is: “Look after yourself first.”

If things are okay at your end, you can look at interactions between you and others more clearly and objectively. And then, as you look to get the right balance between passive and aggressive communication with a particular individual, so that you can use assertive communication effectively, the next thing to do is to consider

- what **specific** need(s) **you** are trying to meet with your current approach
- what **specific** need(s) the **other person** is trying to meet with their behavior.

Applying this ‘filter’ can bring surprising new insights. Many relationships and interactions get so much easier when you focus on how *both parties* can more effectively meet their basic needs without treading so painfully on each other’s toes.

Sometimes the problem really *isn’t you*. It could be that the other person is using counterproductive ways (for whatever reason) to fulfil their needs, and can’t or won’t change. So even if you take a text book ‘assertive’ approach with them – like one of those covered in this course – it might have only a limited or short-term effect. You are not responsible for fixing their behavior.

But being *aware* of what is going on can really help you figure out how best to respond without getting down on yourself.

Your response will undoubtedly include behaving and communicating assertively. But there’s more to being assertive than just saying to yourself “*I’m going to be assertive!*” You have to know

- **who** to assert yourself with
- **when** to assert yourself
- **what** to say
- **how** to say it

and figuring all that out isn’t always straightforward or obvious.

And that’s why we’ve put together the **10 steps to absolute assertiveness** course.

What this course will do for you

We've helped hundreds of people over the years to learn how to express their views and confidently make their own wishes and needs clear in a respectful way when dealing with other people.

We understand that this transformation requires more than head knowledge about skills. It requires an 'emotional update' that changes how you *feel* when you communicate with others.

Each step on this course tackles a different aspect of assertiveness and communication *in detail*, with lots of thought-provoking information and tried and tested exercises to help you

- understand what has held you back from being how you want to be
- discover how to break out of limiting views of what you can and can't do
- realize your true potential.

But this course is not just a mine of interesting theoretical information. It's about helping you make really fundamental changes within yourself.

So each step includes a carefully selected audio hypnosis session designed to help you more easily absorb and integrate powerful new behavior patterns and helpful mental attitudes.

This is how the 'emotional update' you need happens.

This is how it will come to feel *completely natural* to you, in your very bones, to automatically feel, think and act as a person who knows and values their own worth and is not afraid to express that knowledge appropriately in words and deeds.

And far from having to strive obsessively to remember every little thing we'll talk about on this course, you can *relax* and *absorb the material over time*, making it as naturally and deeply yours as your mother tongue that you learned to speak so fluently without even realizing that this was what you were doing.

Ready to commit?

Making major changes and adjustments to how you see yourself and how you relate to the world requires a serious investment of your time and energy. To get the maximum benefit, you need to make a strong commitment to yourself to

- read your material – over and over
- listen to your audio downloads regularly

- do the exercises
- practice everything you learn
- be patient with yourself and give yourself time
- notice, monitor and celebrate your progress

and most important of all

- NEVER EVER GIVE UP!

How to see how you're doing – the Progress Checker

We've put the material in this course together very carefully to make it as easy as possible for you to use, and to review as often as you need. Each step provides you with vital information, tips, exercises and information about related material.

The related material includes

- links to other associated downloads you might like to purchase (these are suggestions only – they are *not* required for the course)
- links to *free* informative articles to enhance your progress and understanding.

Each step includes a Progress Checker sheet containing two identical charts. We recommend that you print out several copies of the Progress Checker for each step you undertake and keep them sorted in a folder. (For your convenience, we have also put all the Progress Checker sheets together at the end of this document, to make them easy to find and print out.)

The Progress Checker makes a number of statements on the topic covered in that step, and asks you to indicate how true these statements are when applied to you. Nobody is going to see this information but you. Be honest and *fair* with yourself.

We recommend that you fill in the first chart on the day you start that step, *before* you read the material or listen to the download. This will give you a baseline against which to monitor your progress.

It's only natural that, when you start, most answers will tend to fall to the left hand side of the chart.

At the end of the 7-day assignment period, complete the second chart.

Each week after that, continue filling in a Progress Checker for that step, even when you have moved on to a subsequent step.

And so on.

Why it's important to monitor progress

Keeping tabs on yourself like this makes you *more aware* of even small improvements and helps you to stay committed.

Even *one* move to the right on the chart is progress, and you should be ready to appreciate and congratulate yourself on the smallest positive change that you notice. Always remember that you have a long term goal here, and it's little steps that will get you there. From time to time you may see a big jump, but gradual, steady, sustainable progress is what you are really after.

When do you stop filling in your Progress Checkers? You'll know...

It's time to start.

Good luck.

Mark

Notes

(1) Figures collected by [Wars in the World](#).

10 steps to absolute assertiveness

Mark Tyrrell



Setting boundaries

Step 1

Setting boundaries

Hello and welcome to the first step of your **10 steps to absolute assertiveness**.

ACTION POINT! Remember to fill in your [Progress Checker](#) before you start!



*Be who you are and say what you feel,
because those who mind don't matter
and those who matter don't mind.*

Dr. Seuss

This course won't just give you plenty of food for thought in what you read, it will also give you *experiences* in the form of hypnotic audio sessions.

Change doesn't just happen on the level of your thinking. It also happens, and even more so, on the level of your *feeling*. And this is why we use hypnosis.

But first: Why it is so important to be able to act and communicate assertively?

The burglar's choice

Imagine you are a professional burglar. Yes, yes, I know, you're not, and probably never would be, but just suppose. Suppose you are a hardened criminal – but you want an easy life.

Now imagine you are considering making a raid on one of two houses. Both look as if they will give you rich pickings. Nothing to choose between them when it comes to what's inside.

The windows and doors of House A are standing wide open; there is clearly no one home. There might just as well be a note pinned to the door saying: *“Why don’t you come in and take everything I’ve got – I don’t deserve my jewels anyway!”*

House B, on the other hand, is protected not only by a sophisticated burglar alarm system but also by a vicious-looking guard dog who clearly knows the difference between friend and foe. And you know for a fact that the owner is a karate expert *and* has a gun he is not afraid to use.

Now which house seems the better bet?



There will always be some who will take if it's
easy for them

If they can bully, they will

Some people are bullies. And even people who are not really full-on bullies can still show bullying tendencies some of the time.

Now why do people bully, take advantage and 'overstep the mark'? Answer: Because there doesn't seem to actually *be* any 'mark' for them to overstep.

If you are a pushover, people (*some* people, not everyone) will push you over.

You'll seem like House A to these people. No threat to them. Just ready for them to abuse. Burgling a house (not that I'm an expert, you understand) presents a potential threat *to the burglar* as well as the house owner. Burglars look for opportunities to take advantage, like a house with no alarm system. An alarm system is a clear 'mark'.

Becoming assertive doesn't mean that you have to be constantly on the lookout for advantage takers, or give up being a decent, kind or caring person. It's more to do with making things clear (showing where the mark is) and knowing how to deal with 'burglars' if the occasion arises.

Most people coming into a house are *not* burglars (and if they are you need a new neighborhood!), so we don't have to tackle them to the floor as they come through the porch.

Assertiveness matters

When we find it hard to

- voice our own opinions
- set limits on what we will and won't accept
- say '**no**'
- even *know* what is okay or not okay for us

we can feel as if we are no more than a leaf buffeted about by the wind. Chronic lack of assertiveness makes us feel helpless and hopeless and therefore more likely to become depressed. (1)

Not being able to assert yourself effectively leads to all kinds of relationship problems and to a life of missed opportunities, half buried resentments and dissatisfactions.

But maybe it's just the way you are? Perhaps you were just *born* unable to speak up, put your foot down, or stop others pushing you too far?

The myth of genetic destiny

Assertiveness is not a fixed genetic attribute like your eye color.

Of course, some people may be naturally *more likely* to set limits on the behavior of others and know what they want and don't want pretty clearly. Some toddlers clearly have 'strong personalities' and others less so. But just like all the facets of 'emotional intelligence', assertiveness *can be learned*. Just as some people may be naturally better speakers than others, but *everyone* can learn to speak better.

The emerging science of 'epigenetics' shows us that people have different genetic makeups, and we can't change our genetic inheritance (which affects both biology and temperament) but we *can* influence how the DNA is expressed by how we behave, what we think and feel. (2)

So your behavior, what you decide *to do*, can influence how certain genes are expressed, or even *whether* they are expressed or not. **Everyone can learn to be more assertive.**

This means you can set aside any notion that "I'm just not naturally assertive", because our natural inheritance is, and is *meant* to be, extremely flexible.

Looking ahead

By the end of this course you may well have surprised yourself at just how much happier you are feeling, and how far your new found confidence and skills base has expanded when it comes to being assertive.

Effective assertiveness strategies rely in part on

- overcoming anxiety
- overcoming past conditioning (such as guilt)
- improving self esteem (which in turn is improved by increased assertiveness).

In this first step we're looking at boundaries, but first, here's a true tale of what can happen when you *don't* set boundaries.

Sue who didn't know her limits

Sue was and is a delightful person. When she first came to see me, I was struck by her intelligence and pleasant demeanor. But she suffered from a severe lack of self esteem and a painful inability to set boundaries on other people's behavior. I got the distinct impression that if I hadn't been there when she arrived, hadn't bothered to explain

why I wasn't there and yet still charged her for the appointment, she would have somehow found a way to excuse my behavior, blame herself for my absence and *still* pay me.

Anyway, I was there when she arrived, and as she told me about her tendency to get taken advantage of, I asked her to give me a recent example. This is what she told me:

*A few weeks ago I went to a friend's wedding. There was this guy there, whom I'd never met before. I didn't really take to him but I ended up giving him my phone number **because he'd asked me for it.***

*Anyway, a couple of days later he calls me up and tells me he wants to come round to my place. It wasn't convenient, because I was in the middle of decorating, **but he came round anyway.***

*He started talking about my car and said it was no good and I should get another one. Even though I said I was totally happy with it, **he insisted** on taking me down to a car showroom, and getting me to part exchange my car for another car **I didn't really want.***

*When I got it home, he said the car should be checked over properly, and he would do it for me, so **he ended up taking the car,** promising he'd look at it and bring it back. I need a car for work, but now I had no car at all. He kept the new car I hadn't even wanted for over a week and **I didn't get it back until my mother went round** to his house and threatened him with the police. I can't believe how weak I was!*

Incredible as it may seem, this actually happened!

This is a rather dramatic example of how lack of assertiveness can lead to bad outcomes. Sue felt *powerless*, as if she had no say at all and was entirely passive in the face of someone else's demands.

Feeling like you are passive when you are not is like a bird not flying free when the cage door opens – because it doesn't know it can.

Think about this for a few moments. What would *you* have done in this situation?

I hope you would have been more assertive than Sue. Perhaps you would have lied to the man, or given him a fake phone number.

When we are unassertive we may (quite understandably) resort to lying to protect ourselves, because expressing what you really want can seem like a bigger 'sin' than making up excuses.

But even if your boundary setting is a bit better than Sue's was in this instance, you might know that you let things slide too much and your boundaries are at best blurry and sometimes non-existent.

For Sue, it was as if she had no say in the matter at all! As she put it: “*It’s as if, in the moment, I don’t feel like I have a right to express my own boundaries.*”

So where was Sue going wrong?

To be (nice) or not to be (assertive)

Sue, like many people, believed that she had to “be nice at all times”. This wasn’t so much a thought as a *feeling* that she had. She just *reacted* to this man in accordance with this rule, rather than really *responding* to what he was doing.

Often what ‘feels right’ only ‘feels right’ because we were *conditioned* that way.

People brought up in poverty often find that it ‘feels right’ to be very careful with money. Those who were brought up with plenty may find it ‘feels right’ to spend thousands on a single outing.

The point is that what *feels* right isn’t always *actually* right.

We’re going to concentrate on the matter of being too nice in more depth in Step 7, but for now it’s fair to say that Sue felt that ‘nice girls’ don’t tell pushy men where to get off.

It was interesting to discover that Sue’s mother was a very assertive woman, but also an angry and temperamental one. Sue had spent much of her childhood placating her mother – ‘being nice’ in order to derail her mother’s rages. This meant that Sue never really learned to put herself first, as she was conditioned to care primarily how *others* were feeling. How she herself felt or what she thought didn’t come into it.

We’ll be looking at what might have been keeping your own assertiveness low throughout this course.

But for now I’d like you to do this exercise.

Exercise • Boundary tracking

Recall **three occasions** where you know you weren't as assertive as you could or should have been.

For each occasion, write down:

1) In what way you let others trample across your boundaries (which of course would have been easier for them if there weren't any).

For example:

I let X persuade me to stay on at the party, even after I told him/her I was feeling very unwell.

2) What the boundaries should have been – and **why**.

For example:

*The boundary should have been: It's **not okay** to ask me to do unnecessary things when I'm not well. This is because pushing myself at these times is likely to make me feel worse.*

3) How you could have clearly set those boundaries. Write down exactly what you would have said or done.

For example:

I could have said: "I'm feeling really sick and I need to get to bed and try to recover. I know you're enjoying the party, but there will be other parties. I have to go home now."

Starting to think clearly about boundaries, and setting them down in writing, will help you **clarify** what you really want, and be able to **defend it** better.

ASSIGNMENT 1

Setting boundaries

Download [Setting boundaries](#) and listen to your download

- every day
- at least once a day
- for 7 days
- or until you notice at least half of the progress indicators shown below

Progress indicators

- you start to get a clearer sense of where your boundaries actually lie; what is and isn't okay with you
- you feel ready to start making these boundaries clear to others
- you no longer feel compelled to agree to everything in order to appease others
- you feel you can remind people when they step across your boundaries
- you feel calmer and stronger around others

Supplementary material

Related downloads available to purchase

[Know yourself](#)

Understanding yourself better is important to help you be able to know what you will and won't put up with.

Recommended FREE articles

[5 Golden Keys to Assertiveness and Setting Boundaries](#)

Remember to complete your second Progress Checker chart when you have listened to your download for seven days.

Okay, we've made a good start here, but there's lots more to master on this course! I promise you, if you stick with it you *will* become expert in truly representing yourself in the world to the best possible degree.

Next time, you'll get a sense of how to say what sometimes seems to be the hardest word in the world: No.

All the best

Mark

Notes

- (1) Feeling we have no control or say over how other treat us is a form of 'learned helplessness' which has been shown to both help cause and, in turn, be caused by depression. See *Human Helplessness. Theory and Applications*. J. Garber and M. E. P. Seligman (Eds), London: Academic Press, 1980, pp. xvii + 402
- (2) For example, epigenetic research focused on rats found that licking and grooming performed by the mother rat has been found to influence or 'switch on' the groomed rat's genome for calm behavior, whereas the young rats who don't experience grooming have the genome switched on for general anxiousness. See: [Environmental programming of stress responses through DNA methylation: life at the interface between a dynamic environment and a fixed genome](#). Meaney MJ, Szyf M. *Dialogues in Clinical Neuroscience* 2005;7(2):103-23.

Setting boundaries – Progress Checker

Date: _____

How true are these statements of you?	Slightly	Partly	Fairly	Mostly	Totally
I am clear about my own boundaries and what I will and won't put up with					
I can let other people know where my limits are					
I don't feel I have to give way to others all the time					
I can tell someone directly if they have overstepped the mark					
I feel more calm and confident around others					

Date: _____

How true are these statements of you?	Slightly	Partly	Fairly	Mostly	Totally
I am clear about my own boundaries and what I will and won't put up with					
I can let other people know where my limits are					
I don't feel I have to give way to others all the time					
I can tell someone directly if they have overstepped the mark					
I feel more calm and confident around others					



I hope you found Step 1 of the 10 Steps to
Absolute Assertiveness course useful

If you would like to try the whole course, you can [read about
it here](#).

All my very best,

Mark Tyrrell
Co-founder of Uncommon Knowledge
Author of [10 Steps to Absolute Assertiveness](#)