

TEAMWORK

INSTITUTE QUALITY
WITH SIX SIGMA

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YOUR PERSONAL GUIDE TO WORKING SUCCESSFULLY WITH PEOPLE

QUICK TIPS

Choose assertion over aggression

By LISA A. BEACH

Holly sat in a meeting wanting to voice her concern about the lack of progress on a team project, but she didn't have the nerve to speak up. Jim, on the other hand, dominated the meeting as he talked at length about why the team should do the project *his* way and why everyone else's ideas were inferior.

Would you believe that both Holly and Jim need to learn to be more assertive? While Holly is non-assertive and needs to feel comfortable expressing her thoughts to others, Jim is aggressive and needs to learn how to communicate without denying the rights of others. Neither behavior bodes

well in a team environment, which relies on the equal contribution and participation of all team members.

"Being assertive means communicating your beliefs, knowledge and expectations in a positive way that does not undermine those same things in other people," explains Donna Deepröse, author of *The Team Coach* and a management, training and organization development consultant in New York City. "In contrast, being aggressive means dominating and controlling others, and showing little or no concern for others' feelings and needs."

To boost your effectiveness as an active, respectful team member,
(See **ASSERTION** on page 2)

Drive forward with emotional intelligence

Not long ago, staying in touch with your emotions in a business environment was not the most acceptable mode of behavior. These days, you may notice a different point of view emerging in the workplace and on your team. This social and personal competency known as "emotional intelligence" is the capacity to recognize your feelings and the feelings of others, to motivate yourself from what you discover, and to manage your emotions that support your productivity at work and in other aspects of your life.

Your emotional intelligence plays a positive role for the team by:

- **Generating energy** for optimum work performance;

- **Driving organizational performance** to the next level;
- **Establishing trust** between you and your teammates;
- **Developing your intuition** to guide well-rounded decisions;
- **Understanding who you are** and what inspires you.

Developing your emotional intelligence means concentrating on four areas:

- 1. Self-awareness:** Understanding your emotions, strengths and weaknesses;
- 2. Social awareness:** Empathizing with others;
- 3. Self-management:** Examining, managing and regulating your behavior; and
- 4. Social skills:** Behaving in such a way that you achieve desirable results from others. ■

- **Do you have an emergency plan?** Think ahead: If you should ever experience a personal emergency that will take you off the production line, who can cover for you? Identify department members who can be trained to take on various aspects of your job before an unexpected situation occurs.

- **Turn on to new lighting.** Worker alertness can be stimulated by the amount of light or illusion of light provided in a work area. Check to see if fluorescent lights can be added or if the walls can be painted with a reflective off-white color to simulate a bright, sunny atmosphere.

- **Tips to quench your thirst.** Your daily fluid consumption at the office may read like this: coffee, tea, soda. These drinks may deplete your body of fluids. To prevent fatigue-related injuries, heat illness and dehydration, drink at least eight servings of water per day.

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

My peer sits on the product development team with me. We have a mutual friend who told me that my teammate shared confidential company information about a product in development during a social gathering. How should I address my colleague and how can this be avoided in the future?

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Choose to be challenged

"The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy."

—Martin Luther King Jr.

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

Keep the lid on company secrets

Due to the private nature of your team's mission, your team entrusts you with a large amount of confidential information. Concealing it from other employees or outsiders can take an extra effort. If you find out that your teammate has shared company secrets to an outsider, consider this approach:

Speak with your teammate directly so that he can protect himself from future reprimand. Tell him you are concerned that the information may get into the wrong hands and could result in negative consequences for the team and the company. Assure him that although the temptation to divulge corporate secrets is natural, it's not worth losing your job over it.

If you are placed in a situation where the temptation to "tell all" exists, there are ways you can play it safe:

- **Use negative non-verbals when others pry.** A simple shrug of the shoulders can get you off the hook when speaking can get you into hot water.
- **Go off on a tangent.** When you are pinned down by a friend who asks about sensitive information, go off on a tangent. This will discourage future inquiries.
- **Shift gears and change the subject.** If you dislike the line of questioning and you don't like where it's headed, change the topic politely.
- **Turn the conversation around.** Otherwise known as "pulling in the reins," take direct action and say, "I'm sorry, but this matter is rather private and any information is better left unsaid." ■

Source: Robert L. Genua, author of *Managing Your Mouth*, (Amacom 1992).

ASSERTION (continued from page 1)

Deepröse offers these six assertiveness tips:

1. Affirm your rights. You have the right to have your ideas and needs heard. You have the right to be shown respect and consideration. (Tip: You must be ready and willing to state your thoughts, needs and expectations to others. If you find this difficult to do, prepare in advance.)

2. Practice the "artful interruption." When you hear a brief lull in the conversation, grasp the pause and say loudly enough, "I have something to contribute." If you're normally quiet, people will listen. Develop the self-confidence to break into a conversation with an "I" statement, such as "I want to contribute an idea," or "Here's why I think it's important."

3. Piggyback on what others say. For example, say, "Joe's idea was great. Here's something that I think will make it even better." This connects your own ideas with someone else's ideas, creating a partnership. That's teamwork in action!

4. Provide visual cues. Square your shoulders. Maintain good posture. Talk with your hands. Don't stare, but do make quick eye contact.

5. Provide verbal cues. Speak firmly, but modulate your tone with expression. Don't talk too fast, too slow, too loud or too soft.

6. Listen to other people. Part of being assertive involves gaining respect for yourself and showing respect for others — both signs of a good listener. ■

Source: Donna Deepröse, author of *The Team Coach and co-owner of Teams @ Work*, New York, (212) 787-9604.

Tips that don't cross the line

"Sometimes a fine line exists between assertiveness and aggressiveness," says Donna Deepröse. To ensure you don't cross that line, review this checklist:

- I have self-respect and self-confidence.
- I communicate honestly and directly about my thoughts and feelings without trampling on the rights of others.
- I always show respect.
- I am willing to share control.
- I am willing to take and share responsibility.
- I am firm, clear and tactful when communicating my wants and needs.

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