The 5 Essential People Skills

How to Assert Yourself, Listen to Others, and Resolve Conflicts

Dale Carnegie Training

From The 5 Essential People Skills by Dale Carnegie.
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INTRODUCTION

Many people feel awkward in certain situations – a handicap that can prevent them from moving ahead personally and professionally. Drawing on almost 100 years of experience by Dale Carnegie Training, The 5 Essential People Skills presents a step-by-step guide to mastering rapport building, curiosity, communication, ambition, and conflict resolution. Through narrative text and “action step” activities at the end of each chapter, this book seeks to help readers feel empowered, respected, and at ease in any situation.

The 5 Essential People Skills first examines assertiveness, the skill at the core of the five essential people skills. Assertive people are able to make their ideas known without inhibiting others from sharing their ideas. The remainder of the book instructs readers how to apply assertiveness to the five essential people skills. Each chapter provides specific, practical advice for applying each set of skills; a series of real-life examples on how to effectively deploy assertiveness in the workplace; and a set of action steps that deepen readers’ understanding of and ability to apply the chapter’s ideas.

ASSERTIVENESS

Assertiveness – the ability to speak and act in ways that naturally cause people to respond attentively and positively – is at the core of the five essential people skills. It consists of being able to:

- Resist the pressure and dominance of aggressive people.
- Stand up for one’s beliefs.
- Maintain control in important situations.
The effective use of assertiveness in the workplace is illustrated by the story of an employee who worked on a large team that achieved its goal. Although everyone on the team contributed, the team’s supervisor singled out just one member of the team for special praise, leaving the rest of the team feeling betrayed and unappreciated.

In this situation, aggressive people might feel and express hostility toward both the supervisor and the person singled out for recognition. Passive people would take no action – and perhaps even deny that anything unfair had taken place. In contrast, assertive people might make an appointment with the supervisor to air their reaction. Saying “I did just as much work as George, and now he’s getting all the credit” sounds whiny and unprofessional. Instead, an assertive person might say, “I understand that you’re pleased with George’s work on the project, and I’m really glad to hear that, because he made some important contributions. There is one thing that concerns me. This was a group effort, and all of us devoted a significant amount of time to the project, including me. When the time comes for my performance review, I want to be sure that I receive the same recognition that George does. While it would be gratifying, of course, if each of us could also receive a personal thank you, my main concern is how this will affect my career opportunities in the organization.” This kind of response avoids the essentially childish responses of both the aggressive person and the passive person.

Individuals can take four steps to master assertiveness in virtually any setting:

1. **Prepare with self-reflection.** The first step toward becoming an assertive person is recognizing and analyzing the way you behave. People who are very outspoken should examine whether their outspokenness may have crossed the line into aggressive behavior. Those who feel taken advantage of may have difficulty saying no. Keeping a diary can help people identify the way they feel and analyze the actions they take. Self-awareness and self-assessment are critical to effective assertiveness.

2. **Conduct an honest self-assessment.** People should begin by listing their positive and negative traits as well as their desired traits, and then sending

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**Key Concepts**

The 5 Essential People Skills presents a step-by-step guide to applying appropriate assertiveness and mastering the five essential skills of building rapport, demonstrating curiosity, communicating, harnessing ambition, and resolving conflict. This Dale Carnegie Training publication shows readers how to:

- Focus on the factors that will move them and their organizations forward.
- Improve their confidence while learning how to convey their messages with greater esteem, power, and clarity.
- Use a five-part template for articulate communications that grow business.
- Create a cutting-edge business environment that delivers innovation and results.
- Live up to their fullest potential while achieving success.
- Resolve conflict or misunderstanding by applying a handful of proven principles.

The combination of general principles, specific tips, examples, and “action steps” at the end of each chapter provides readers with the tools they need to apply the lessons learned.

Information about the author and subject:
[www.dalecarnegie.com](http://www.dalecarnegie.com)

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the list to a friend. Doing so often provides unexpected feedback, as other people often see traits that the individual does not see.

3. **Assess the outer world**, particularly the specific situations that bear on career success. Choose a specific circumstance and create an accurate view of it. Make a detailed plan that describes how to act assertively in the situation. Try to focus on positive feelings rather than on resentment of someone else. In addressing the situation, begin with phrases such as “What we might do is…” “We could do…” and “I agree with some of what you’re saying, and here’s what I would like to see changed.”

4. **Take the road test.** Pick a manageable set of circumstances that demand assertiveness on which to test the skills learned. Over a period of a week or two, make a list of settings in which greater assertiveness would be beneficial. Analyze the situations; determine how best to communicate ideas, wants, and needs; and take action.

A three-part assertiveness message requires individuals to summarize the facts of a situation, express their thoughts and feelings, and clearly state their wants and needs, including benefits to the other party. This message serves as the foundation for tactics such as interviewing assertively, starting meetings on a positive note, taking an indirect approach to discussions of errors or disagreements, asking questions rather than giving direct orders, ending on a positive note, observing reactions, and dealing with denial.

**Rapport Building**

Building rapport involves connecting with someone else. Doing so depends on establishing a relationship of mutual liking and trust. Establishing rapport increases the chances of mutually beneficial interactions. It also makes doing business more fun.

Individuals can develop self-confidence and engage in more assertive behavior by doing the following:

- **Smiling and being positive.** Smiling not only elicits a positive reaction from others, it also increases the production of neurotransmitters in the brain. This means that smiling and acting happy can actually make a person feel happier. Greeting colleagues with praise can go a long way toward improving the work environment.

  *Real leadership is inclusive and proactive. It does not dominate nonassertive people. It includes them and it involves them. Dominance as a management style is ineffective in almost all circumstances.*

- **Speaking up.** For a variety of reasons, many people speak too softly. Assertive people know to vary their voice quality to build rapport in different types of situations. They know how to modulate volume, pace, and inflection.

- **Being specific when asserting ideas.** When building rapport, assertive people might say, “I was really impressed with the way you handled that customer, by listening to her argument instead of interrupting.” This provides better feedback than a more general comment like “You’re quite good with difficult people.” Before giving any kind of constructive criticism or feedback, assertive people should make sure their motives are pure. Comments should never be used to manipulate others.

- **Speaking effectively about one’s own accomplishments.** When speaking about achievements, it is important not to embellish or dramatize the facts. Emphasizing the role of teammates will win trust, credibility, and respect.

- **Cultivating assertive silence.** In a business setting, silence does not necessarily reflect anger or clamming up. Assertive silence is choosing to be quiet,

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**About the Author**

**Dale Carnegie** wrote the best-selling book *How to Win Friends and Influence People* in 1936. Dale Carnegie Training, the company he founded in 1912, continues to offer training and publish books on improving employee performance. For more information on the company, visit www.dalecarnegie.com.
listening with full attention, and making the decision not to speak before having something important to say.

- **Preventing leaks.** Psychologists refer to behaviors that reveal something a person was trying to conceal as “leaks.” When then-President George H. W. Bush glanced at his watch during his debate with Bill Clinton, he inadvertently gave the impression that he was bored. Rather than leaking impatience, a manager would be better served by stating openly, “I hate to cut our meeting short, but I have another meeting in just a few minutes.”

**Curiosity can be of tremendous benefit to any manager who knows how to ignite the inborn curiosity of his or her team.**

### CURIOSITY

A 10-point list helps maximize the role of curiosity in a person’s people-skills repertoire:

1. **Make assertive curiosity an emotional experience.** People who make assertive curiosity an emotional experience demonstrate passion. They feel real excitement about what they are doing, and they convey that excitement to others.

2. **See yourself as a student and purveyor of knowledge.** Assertively curious people want to understand things deeply, and they recognize that they lack all the facts. They are simultaneously very knowledgeable about their field and full of questions.

3. **Engage in interactive listening.** This involves listening, questioning, responding, and remembering that all human beings are different. It also involves avoiding criticizing, condemning, or complaining, and instead developing feelings of appreciation, gratitude, and genuine interest in other people.

4. **Be interactive without an agenda.** Asking team members where they live, what they enjoy doing with their families, what they like or dislike about the company, what sports they enjoy, and what they do in their spare time is a way of exercising curiosity.

5. **Share personal stories with flair.** Managers who express a desire to learn are much more inspiring than those who claim to know it all. Only by presenting personal stories in an interesting manner can a manager ignite other people’s curiosity.

6. **Use humor.** Assertively curious people are often very honest about how much they do not know. They often have a self-deprecating sense of humor, which creates a relaxed atmosphere that makes everyone want to listen and learn.

7. **Recognize what others need to learn.** Good leaders know how to encourage rather than require their employees to increase their knowledge on a particular topic. Rather than tell an employee to read an article, an assertively curious person might say, “If you ever have a moment, I think you might find this article useful. I know I did.”

8. **Reinforce curiosity with institutional support.** No single manager can sustain assertive curiosity in a vacuum. A corporate culture that values curiosity is critical.

9. **Mentor by senior management.** Senior managers can make curiosity a factor in employee evaluation and promotion. They can give employees time to explore new ideas. For decades, Lockheed Martin had an unofficial division known as the Skunk Works, whose purpose was to explore new ideas and innovative approaches to problem solving. Working in an unstructured, no-pressure environment, the engineers in this division produced some of the most innovative concepts in the history of aviation, including the technology for the stealth aircraft.

10. **Create a fun environment.** At Google, employees are encouraged to explore ideas and have fun doing so. The seemingly relaxed atmosphere has created an extraordinarily successful and loyal workface

Assertive curiosity has four main elements:

1. **Maintaining frequent and continuous contact with team members.** Good managers are in touch with all team members every day, if possible. Remaining in daily contact reveals their commitment and encourages employees to produce. Having all team members get together informally once a week – 20 to 30 minutes before work, for example – to catch up with one another personally and professionally can enhance the assertive curiosity of the team as a whole.
2. **Managing time effectively.** Every discussion of workplace issues should address the amount of time needed to complete a task. The single most effective time management tool is the maintenance of daily logs in which all team members document how they spend their time.

3. **Seeking help from management.** Managers creating assertively curious teams need support from management. They need resources to give team members time to reflect.

4. **Setting goals.** All employees need to identify goals in at least six areas: work, family, finances, health, education, and spirituality. These goals should be specific, not general, and they should be aligned with each individual’s values. For example, “I want to be given more responsibility within the company” is a general goal. “I want to become the director of human resources within the next five years, so that I can increase the diversity of our workforce” is a more meaningful, more specific version of the same goal. Identifying such goals makes it easier to create a vision of how to achieve them.

**Communication**

Knowing how to deal with people is critical for people in positions of leadership. In fact, it is no less important than technical or administrative knowledge. Mastering communication skills is difficult because, as Dale Carnegie wrote decades ago, “when dealing with people, you are not dealing with creatures of logic but with creatures of emotion, creatures bristling with projection and motivated by pride and vanity.”

Eleven simple tips can improve communication in the workplace:

1. **Call people by name.** Using a person’s name personalizes the message. Just consider the difference between a perfunctory “Good morning” and a sincere-sounding “Good morning, Steve!”

2. **Admit making a mistake.** So few people in the workplace recognize their errors that doing so gains respect. Simply saying, “I made a mistake and I realize it” is appropriate. An overdone “I blew it” message sent to everyone in the office is not.

3. **Hold people to high standards.** Avoid becoming a control freak. Instead, trust in other people’s ability to do the best job possible.

4. **Show sincere interest in colleagues.** Ask them about themselves and express sincere curiosity about them.

5. **Offer specific rather than general praise,** and be spare with criticism. When criticism is necessary, give it in a diplomatic way.

6. **Avoid making promises that cannot be fulfilled.**

7. **Show gratitude.** Thank anyone who performs a favor, and offer to do something in return.

8. **Be considerate.** Try to understand other people’s points of view. Think before speaking in order to avoid misunderstandings.

9. **Help others.** Occasionally stepping out of one’s job description and asking, “Need a hand there?” creates a pleasant work environment and encourages other people to give of themselves.

10. **Be humble.** Avoid obvious efforts to impress colleagues and superiors. Play down successes in order to develop a reputation for humility.

11. **Help others save face.** A friendly “It happens to the best of us” can go a long way toward making other people feel better after a blunder.

Etiquette skills cover conversational, money, phone, and restaurant situations, including specific etiquette rules, such as tipping the coat check person and valet when one first meets them, tipping the bartender, and avoiding haggling over the check. Tips are provided on being courteous and thoughtful; choosing safe topics and making sure the other party participates fully in the conversation; and avoiding taboos, gossip, profanity, and unnecessary cell phone conversations.

A 10-step list helps business people become persuasive:

1. **Build trust.**

2. **Find common ground.**

In any business setting, the person who seems most mature always comes out best. If you pout and whine or throw a tantrum, you’ll be on the losing end of the encounter.
3. Structure the information that forms the basis of the argument.
4. Show both sides.
5. Appeal to self-interest.
6. Appeal to authority.
7. Create consensus.
8. Time requests so that they come at good times for the person or people you are trying to persuade.
9. Be original, interesting, reasonable, diplomatic, and humble.
10. Use persuasion sparingly.

Assertive listening can be achieved by learning to listen empathetically— that is, listening in a way that allows true understanding of both the interlocutors’ messages and their circumstances and feelings. People who engage in empathetic listening listen so intently and identify so closely with the speaker that they gain a sense of the speaker’s situation, thoughts, and emotions. Assertive listening allows managers to understand their team members by cutting through the superficiality of conversation and understanding what is really on their minds.

Both the good thing and the bad thing about business relationships is that they’re basically unsentimental. Business friendships are mainly significant when everything is going well. When problems arise in the workplace, it’s amazing how fast good buddies can become strangers.

**Ambition**

Leaders can maximize the positive energy of ambition of everyone on their teams. To do so, they should arrive early, maintain a high level of energy, greet their teams with enthusiasm and humor, and have clear action plans. To create assertive ambition within their teams, they should:

- Create a culture of learning, so that team members are constantly exposed to the latest industry trends, research, techniques, and tools.
- Attend and send team members to seminars and training programs.
- Put the lessons learned to use. Have attendees share what they learned with the rest of the team.

**Conflict Resolution**

Angry conflict is inherently negative and unproductive in a business setting. The goal of conflict resolution should therefore be to assertively end the conflict as quickly and fairly as possible. Specific tips for dealing with conflict include the following:

- Make an honest assessment of the source of conflict.
- Do not point fingers or call names.
- Exercise restraint during arguments.
- Keep the focus on the present and the future; do not make references to the past.
- Avoid using words or phrases that tend to perpetuate problems, such as “You always do that.”
- Make sure that body language, words, and voice tone match.
- Maintain eye contact without staring or glaring.
- Make an effort to sound positive and enthusiastic. Smile and look confident no matter how tense the discussion becomes.
- Be gracious. Do not flaunt a favorable resolution. Allow the other side an honorable retreat.
- Whatever the outcome of the conflict, write a sincere note to the other side in a positive and conciliatory tone.

Skilled negotiators recognize that satisfying both parties is important. Ideally, both parties should come out of negotiations feeling that the conflict was successfully resolved. Good negotiation creates this sense of a “win-win” situation.

Three strategic principles can help managers master this skill:

1. **Make a commitment to a win-win approach.** Assume responsibility for a positive outcome by adopting a positive mindset and a sense of self-empowerment. Prepare for the negotiations by identifying whether the person sitting across the table has an autocratic or an accommodating personality. Keep the focus on the real issues rather than who wins or loses.
2. **Clarify what is sought and why.** Distinguish between real and superficial wants and needs.

3. **Have a clear Plan B** (the walk-away position). Be prepared to abandon negotiations if a suitable compromise cannot be found. In most business situations, the parties to a conflict are likely to have future dealings with one another. For this reason, always leave the negotiating table with a positive outlook, regardless of the outcome; doing so will increase the chances of a better outcome during future negotiations. Resist the temptation to make personal attacks. Keep the focus on long-term goals. Make it clear that the conflict is not about personalities but about issues, so that the other party will not be angry or defensive.

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**Features of the Book**

**Reading Time:** 4 ½ hours, 240 pages

*The 5 Essential People Skills* identifies and explores five essential people skills: rapport building, curiosity, communication, ambition, and conflict resolution. Through narrative text and “action steps” at the end of each chapter, it helps readers feel empowered, respected, and at ease in any business or personal situation.

The book’s first two chapters examine the skill at the core of the five essential people skills: assertiveness. The next 14 chapters show readers how to apply assertiveness to the five essential people skills. Each chapter provides specific, practical advice for applying skills; a series of real-life examples on how to effectively deploy assertiveness in the workplace; and a set of “action steps” that increase readers’ deep understanding of and ability to apply the chapter’s ideas.

The book’s many lists make it easy to read and allow readers to read chapters individually rather than sequentially. The book provides very specific recommendations on situations, such as how much money a new employee should contribute to an office gift for a department head having a milestone birthday, and whether it is appropriate to supplement the inadequate tip left by a host who picks up the bill for dinner.
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