

EQ CONNECTIONS

An Emotional Intelligence Newsletter by E.I. Assessments



“YOU GET IN LIFE WHAT YOU HAVE THE COURAGE TO ASK FOR.”

– Oprah Winfrey

ASSERTIVENESS:

Your External Voice

Written by
John J. Hughes

Have you ever left a business meeting regretting that you didn't speak up? Have you ever seen a peer express an idea that you originated but did not feel confident to present? As a manager, have you ever watched one of your direct reports repeat the same mistakes because you have held back giving him or her feedback? If you have answered, yes, to these questions then this could be an opportunity to learn about increasing your *Assertiveness*.

In an earlier newsletter, I made the connections between a person's *Self-Regard* skill and his or her inner voice and confidence level. Strong *Self-Regard* often reflects an individual's confidence level.

For this skill, I describe *Assertiveness* as an individual's external voice which, at times, may be very different from his or her internal thoughts and voice. Sometimes a person's inner voice

can be filtered to the point of silence. Leadership is about finding ways to express your thoughts and ideas to inspire others to act. I have known successful business leaders and professionals, with a great deal of experience, who were unable or unwilling to use their external voices.

WHAT IS ASSERTIVENESS?

Assertiveness is your ability to effectively communicate an idea opinion or point of view in a clear, constructive manner.

WHAT DOES ASSERTIVENESS LOOK LIKE?

People who score high in *Assertiveness* on the EQ-i 2.0:

- Are able to defend or promote their thoughts, beliefs and principles
- Can be very clear and direct when they are in leadership situations making requests or issuing orders
- Know how to use the power and influence of their voices when speaking with individuals or groups

ASSERTIVENESS & EMPATHY

I believe that the two most important leadership lines on the EQ-i report are *Assertiveness* and *Empathy* and that there are consequences to an individual's style if they are out of balance. As mentioned in the previous newsletter, a leader with too much *Empathy* may have trouble delegating or giving feedback which can lead to overwork and potential burnout. Likewise, a leader who relies too much on *Assertiveness* will also experience limits to his or her leadership style

A review of **1,356** EQ-i 2.0 reports completed by executives, managers and professional staff members, indicated that **36%** of the men and **24%** of the women scored much higher in their *Assertiveness* than in their *Empathy* skills. This tells me there are a good number of professional leaders and managers (yes, more men) who have a stronger tendency to dictate, direct and order others instead of listening to their input or ideas. These authoritarian leaders overuse their *Assertiveness* skills.

Simply put, conflicts occur when two people are using their *Assertiveness* skills and no one is using his or her *Empathy* skills.

ASSERTIVENESS & LEADERSHIP

A few years ago, I had an opportunity to present at a women's leadership forum. Before the program, all of the participants were offered an opportunity to take the EQ-I and have a debrief session with me. As a Fortune 500 company specializing in the distribution of computers and electronic components, it was a culture with high expectations of its executives and senior leadership.



Since this was the first time, I had EQ-i data on 100 women in vice president, director and manager positions, I was curious to see if there was a shift in emotional intelligence strengths as they progressed in their careers at this company.

As a group, these women all scored high in *Independence* which meant they had an ability to gather information, process it and make an individual decision. Then, I looked at the total scores in two groups, ages **30-49** in one and ages **50+** in the other. Below are the groups top five high emotional intelligence skills.

WOMEN AGES 30-49	WOMEN AGES 50 +
INDEPENDENCE	ASSERTIVENESS
SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY	STRESS TOLERANCE
EMPATHY	INDEPENDENCE
ASSERTIVENESS	SELF-ACTUALIZATION
REALITY TESTING	EMOTIONAL SELF-AWARENESS

It would appear from the data that for a woman to continue to build her career in this corporation, she will need to eventually increase her *Assertiveness* skills. One way to develop is by improving both writing and presentation skills. Looking at the other emotional intelligence skills, it is interesting to note the increased importance of *Self-Actualization* and *Emotional Self-Awareness* as women progress in their careers.

“YOU DON’T LEAD BY HITTING PEOPLE OVER THE HEAD - THAT’S ASSULT, NOT LEADERSHIP.”

- Dwight D. Eisenhower

CROSSING THE LINE

Some leaders tend to only focus on their business objectives and results while sometimes sacrificing peer and staff relationships. During my 20 years working in Human Resources at IBM and the New York Times, there were some managers and executives, both male and female, who were known for developing aggressive leadership styles. They can be found in any workplace.

A study by the RAND Corporation states,

“Overall, nearly one in five American workers were subjected to some form of verbal abuse, unwanted sexual attention, threats, or humiliating behavior at work in the past month, or to physical violence, bullying or harassment, or sexual harassment at work in the past year. The most common adverse events were verbal abuse and threats (12.8 percent experiencing in the past month), bullying or harassment including sexual harassment (10.2 percent in the past year), and humiliating behavior (9 percent in the past month).”



More on this can be found in the *Rand.org Blog* article "Many Americans Face Bullying, Harassment, and Abuse at Work, but Bosses Can Help."

If you are currently being managed by an aggressive leader, don't give up. Talk to someone. Intimidating leadership conduct can cross the lines towards hostile and harassing behavior which is illegal.

DEVELOPING YOUR ASSERTIVENESS

I have noticed that people who score low in *Assertiveness* often struggle with getting their own needs met. This can be especially true when a person also has high *Empathy*. Increasing your *Assertiveness* is about acknowledging your own professional needs (budget, resources, time) and then making requests from others to get them fulfilled.

Questions to consider asking yourself are:

- What is something that I need from others (my manager, peers, direct reports) but I have not yet asked for it?
- What is my approach to making a request of others?

Since this involves using your external voice, then you need to commit to practicing your words and approach in order to increase your comfort level. As you create an opportunity to practice with someone you trust, ask for feedback on the alignment between your message and your body language. Remember to always be open to feedback.

For some practical suggestions on using your external voice, *Harvard Business Review* offers the article "5 Ways to Get Over Your Fear of Public Speaking" by Mark Bonchek and Mandy Gonzalez.

NEXT ISSUE:

Issue # 7 Emotional Expression: Being a Poker Player