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Your current situation: Do you want to move on?

This part of the book contains:

- A few bits of theory and an explanation of the various ways of behaving with other people; not just about assertiveness, but also about communication in general.
- Assignments relating to theory and explanation: answers can be found in the appendix at the back of this book.
- Questions that encourage self-observation and improve your ability to judge. It is important to find a good way of “saving” the information and findings. Once saved, you can pass the book on to other people. Do not leave this book on the shelf!
- Exercises and assignments that you can do alone or together with others.

This part is structured in such a way that the easy part comes first, followed by the difficult work. Nevertheless, some of the subjects in the beginning may also be a bit tough. We recommend that you follow our structure and that you perform the exercises one step at a time. The exercises that appear later in the book cannot be done right unless you have studied the preceding chapters.

To keep things simple in the beginning, attention in the initial chapters is primarily focused on “I”, and that means you. It is important to be able to control your own reactions when you find yourself in difficult situations. Only when you are able to ‘guide’ yourself will you be able to take others along, enthuse them and thus create the situation that is to your liking. The initial goal is therefore increasing your own steadfastness. And what about the other person? Right, there is another person. We will gradually look more at how we can become aware of other people’s needs and still maintain our own steadfastness. We must not let ourselves get flustered by the other person who may have also read this book. By all means, take account of other people’s needs, but don’t let them drive you crazy. Be sure to keep an eye on your own boundaries.

In this book you will come across statements, assertions that you may or may not agree with. Their purpose is to stimulate you to form your own opinion. This will teach you

how to clearly express your own opinions and wishes. These assertions are always marked. Let's get started straight away:

Action!

Spend (at least) 2 minutes considering the following statement:

- If I stand up for myself and reveal who I am, I will gain more self-respect and receive more respect from others.

What do you think about this assertion?

You will get the most out of this book if you use it regularly. It is not a book to be read in an evening; it is more a book for six months. It is your personal guide. Use it, *write down your opinions*, and take inspiration from it. And make sure you allow sufficient time for it: one hour each week, for example. If you invest some time on your subassertive, assertive or aggressive behaviour in this way – a bit at a time over a longer period of time – you will gradually gain more insight into the way you react in certain situations.

The usefulness of this book will also be enhanced in the following ways:

- You can go through parts of this book with your partner or a good friend.
- You could also get a few people together and focus on assertiveness. At the back of the book you will find exercises that you can do together.
- You could take assertiveness training. This book is excellent as a personal homework book.

Thus there are a number of different ways you can use the book, but the centre of focus is always your own ability to work on yourself.

DO YOU RECOGNISE THE FOLLOWING TYPES OF SITUATIONS?

This question will be asked often. Why? In the preface we talked about a habit: ineffective, subassertive behaviour; you are *subconsciously ineffective*. Problematic – how do I change something that is a habit?

The first step is to recognise the habit. When you are aware of your habit, you can start changing it. In terms of the habit, you become *consciously ineffective*.

This is when you can start changing: you will start thinking about and playing with new, more effective options. You will put improvements into practice. At first this will feel strange. You can compare this to a person trying to start walking again after a skiing accident. At first he will walk very carefully. You could say he is *consciously effective*.

After enough practice, the new and more effective behaviour will become a habit. Eventually you will no longer notice how well you are doing it; you are *subconsciously effective*.

This will happen to you, too. After a while the new effective, more assertive behaviour will be so easy that that you will no longer be conscious of it at all.

The road to success starts when you are able to identify a difficult point in a situation. Next you need to identify what your ineffective behaviour is that keeps the situation difficult.

Let's do it.

Action!

Do you recognise the following types of situations?

- You are walking down a busy shopping street. People keep coming towards you and you try to avoid them to prevent a collision.
- You have been looking for a parking spot for quite some time. A woman heads for her parked car and gives you a signal that she will be leaving. Just when you are ready to move in, another car races into the empty parking space.
- Your manager has made a decision that you do not agree with. He comes to you and asks what you think about the decision.
- You are in the supermarket; you are in a hurry and want to check out quickly. The person in front of you has finished paying and starts chatting with the cashier. You have to wait even longer.
- It is busy in the restaurant. You patiently wait until a table is available. Just as you are walking to that table, a person who has just arrived squeezes past and sits down there.
- You are in the train and the person opposite you is playing with his mobile phone. The sounds are really irritating you. Why doesn't he switch the sound off?
- The meeting is running late and you have another appointment. The chairman continues the meeting and expects you to explain the next point on the agenda.
- You have had your hair done and when you go to pay, the amount is higher than originally agreed.
- You come home after a busy day at work and think 'Great, an evening for myself!' Then the doorbell rings and it's the neighbours. "We finally found the time to have a cup of coffee with you," they say. "Is this a good time?"
- You are trying on clothes in a store and you are standing in front of the mirror. Someone moves in between you and the mirror and you can barely see anything any more.

- Compared to other areas, not enough is done for children in the area where you live: there is no reasonable playground and there are a few unsafe crossings. The council is organising an evening for residents so that they can voice their opinions.
 - Your son is very untidy and it really bothers you that he is always losing things. He comes to you and says “I have to go to school but I don’t know where my keys are; could you help me find them?”
 - One of your colleagues swears all the time. It doesn’t bother the others, but it does bother you.
 - You are working on an important project at work. Everything has been agreed, but you find yourself having to deal with all kinds of unplanned and unexpected issues. In fact, you are going to have to tell your boss that you will not be able to get the project finished on time.
 - Things have not been going well between you and your girl/boyfriend for some time now. You want to talk about it, but when is a good time?
 - A foreign woman has come to live in your street. You would like to contact her and ask her how she likes it here. She is walking down the other side of the street right now.
 - One of your colleagues is always out to get you. You pale as you notice him coming, but he hasn’t seen you yet..
 - A group of kids are at it again: they keep harassing the same child. You see that the circle is closing in.
-

What do you think: would you describe any of these situations above as *awkward*? Situations in which you would find it difficult to react in a manner that is right for you? Would you find any of these situations *easy* to deal with? It is important to look at those too. Perhaps even more important than the situations that you would handle less well. If you know how you would react in *simple* situations, you can adapt your reactions so that you can use them in *complicated* situations. Always start with your strengths, therefore, and use these to make improvements; see what works and look at how you can improve on this.

Read through the examples again and mark the situations that you could handle easily with an X. Mark the situations that you would find less easy to handle with an O.

Action!

Now it’s your turn. Imagine yourself in a situation where you find it difficult to react in the way you would like to. A situation where feelings of tension, irritation, shyness and hurt make it difficult for you to react appropriately.

A difficult situation for me would be:

This book is not just a collection of lessons; it is also a book about doing. It is not just about theory, but about you, about the way you handle yourself and other people.

THREE WAYS OF REACTING: SUBASSERTIVELY, ASSERTIVELY OR AGGRESSIVELY

In this book, special attention is paid to your assertive or subassertive behaviour. In general, assertive behaviour means: standing up for yourself calmly without needlessly offending anyone.

The following example clarifies exactly what we mean by assertive behaviour.

Paul is in a difficult situation. Together with a colleague he has agreed to go into town for lunch. “What is the soup of the day?” he asks the waiter. It is tomato soup. Paul orders tomato soup. He feels like having something hearty. It is cold outside and he likes eating something warm before going back to work. His order arrives. Paul takes a spoonful of soup. “Yuck, this soup is almost cold”, he says to his colleague. Disappointed by the bland flavour of the lukewarm tomato soup, Paul puts his spoon down.

What happens next? There are many different ways of reacting to this situation, too many to list them all. It is more useful to summarise them. A good way of summarising them all here is using the words subassertive, assertive and aggressive. Paul can react subassertively, assertively or aggressively.

Subassertive: Paul mutters to his colleague about his disappointment: “I’m never coming here again.” He says nothing to the waiter and when asked if it was to his liking, he says: “Yes, thanks”. His convivial lunch has been completely spoiled. His self-respect has been shaken: he is unhappy with himself. Feeling sour, he eats his soup anyway.

Assertive: Paul calls the waiter over to his table. He looks at him and calmly points out that his soup is not hot enough. He asks him in a friendly but determined way to take the soup back and to give him hot soup. The waiter apologises and comes back with hot tomato soup. Paul enjoys it and is satisfied with himself. “Excellent,” he says to the waiter when asked if everything is to his liking.

Aggressive: White with rage, Paul calls over the waiter, points to his soup and states in a harsh tone so that everyone can hear: “Do you eat your soup cold at home, too? What

kind of place is this?" His behaviour puts the waiter in a difficult position. He feels that he does not deserve to be treated like this. Moreover, Paul has embarrassed his colleague. Paul gets the soup that he wanted. He finds that he has the situation in hand, but suddenly notices that this incident has created an unpleasant atmosphere. The convivial meal together has now been spoiled. Looking back, he is sorry about his reaction.

This book naturally devotes much attention to the concepts of subassertive, assertive and aggressive behaviour. For the time being, we will apply the following definitions:

- *Subassertive*: not standing up for yourself or not standing up for yourself enough.
- *Assertive*: standing up for yourself without needlessly offending other people.
- *Aggressive*: standing up excessively for yourself and needlessly offending other people in the process.

Now you:

You are out shopping. You walk past a large department store and decide to go in and look around. In the department store you see a woman who is talking to everyone who walks by. As you get closer, you see that she has a perfume bottle in her hand. You don't like perfumes. You are very close to her now. She moves towards you, smiles and aims the bottle at you saying: 'Good afternoon, this is our newest product, a fragrance for both men and women. Shall I spray a bit on your wrist?'

Action!

This is a situation in which a person can respond subassertively, assertively or aggressively. Now write down the different reactions literally. In addition to this book, use a notebook and write down your assignments in it.

Describe what you would consider a subassertive reaction to this situation.

Describe what you would consider an assertive reaction to this situation.

Describe what you would consider an aggressive reaction to this situation.

Your current situation

In order to help you assess the degree to which and the situations in which you react subassertively or assertively, two tests will follow: the assertions test and the space test.

The aim of these tests is to get *you* thinking, not to give others the opportunity to judge you. By first assessing your current behaviour in various situations, you will later be (even) better able to identify situations in which you want to change your behaviour and situations in which you want to reinforce your behaviour.

THE ASSERTIONS TEST

Below you will find a number of assertions that you may or may not agree with. Circle the response that you agree with most. Do not skip any of the statements.

- 1 In discussions I am often dumbstruck but afterwards I know what I should have said.
 - a Yes, that often happens to me.
 - b No, that rarely happens to me.
- 2 If things are boring, I am often the first to liven up the atmosphere.
 - a Yes, that is usually the case.
 - b No, that is usually not the case.
- 3 If someone in a group asks me an unexpected question, I often find it difficult to calmly come up with or give an answer.
 - a True.
 - b Not true.
- 4 If I like someone but don't know them very well, I find it difficult to chat with them.
 - a Yes, this is usually the case.
 - b No, this is not true in general.
- 5 I would like to know what my friends think of me, but I don't ask them.
 - a Yes, this is true in general.
 - b No, this is not true in general.
- 6 I do not like being the first person in a group to say something.
 - a Yes, that is usually the case.
 - b No, that is usually not the case.
- 7 I like the thought of having to ask my boss for a raise.
 - a True.
 - b Not true.
- 8 I often find it annoying to ask that difficult words be explained because I fear that other people will think I am stupid.
 - a Yes, that is usually the case.
 - b No, that is usually not the case.

- 9 In a group I often say nothing for fear that I don't know enough about the subject and that I might say something stupid.
- a True.
 - b Not true.
- 10 If I arrive too late at a presentation, I would rather stand at the back than move in full view to a seat at the front.
- a I would rather stand.
 - b I go and sit at the front.
- 11 If someone keeps kicking the back of my chair at the cinema, I would ask them to stop.
- a Yes, I'd have no problem doing that.
 - b Yes, but I wouldn't feel comfortable about it.
 - c No, I wouldn't say anything about it.
- 12 If a friend asks me something unreasonable I would refuse.
- a Yes, without hesitation, I would refuse.
 - b Yes, but I would have difficulty doing so.
 - c No, but I would not be happy about it.
 - d No, I would never do that.
- 13* I have no difficulty starting up a conversation with people I don't know.
- a Usually not.
 - b Sometimes.
 - c Sometimes not.
 - d Always.
- 14* I get scared at the thought of having to make a presentation in front of a group.
- a Always.
 - b Not usually.
 - c Almost never.
 - d Never.

* Select two answers for assertions 13 and 14.

You can calculate your score for this test using the answers in the appendix, p. 161.

My score for this test is: _____

THE SPACE TEST I

What about you? Do you feel that you have to fight for your turn or do the people around you most of the time give you enough space?

- Yes, with everyone.
- With some people.
- No, with nobody.

Action!

Write down the situations in which and the people with whom you do not have enough space. This could be a situation at home, at work, with your family or with friends.

Situations and people that short-change your own wishes, needs and desires. Situations in which, against your will, other people call the shots. In short: where you are pinched because you are not given and do not make enough space for yourself.

The people and the situations that do not give me enough space are:

Did you complete the above assignment and write down the situations and people? You may think it is unnecessary or childish to write down the actual names of people, colleagues, neighbours, friends and members of your family. But it will help. By writing down your experiences with others, you force yourself to be clear and honest and to stand up for yourself at least *in thought*. The more you read and reflect on it, the more you become aware of your behaviour and will recognise it. You will get an increasingly clearer picture of how you behave and how you have behaved in certain situations. By thinking about it, you will then have a reaction on the tip of your tongue in these situations. You merely have to decide whether or not you will say it. If you haven't written anything down yet, do it now!

THE SPACE TEST 2

There is another aspect to the space test. Perhaps there are people in your environment who could easily take a bit more of your space but don't.

You think that's a shame. This could be caused by anything: the weather, the distance, work, children, public transport, etc. It may also be that they are less interested in spending time with you. Why? Because you didn't come to their party? Was there a time when you were not very inviting to others? Did you fail to let people know how much you like them? Have you not yet been able to subtly ask why?

Action!

Write down:

Which people are not sufficiently close to me, keep their distance from me:

What do you want to achieve?

Do you now 'have' to act differently in situations in which you would normally behave subassertively? No, we have already discussed this. What it boils down to is: do you want to behave differently?

It is certainly not easy to start standing up for yourself in situations in which you would normally keep a low profile. Moreover, there can also be advantages to behaving subassertively.

The question is whether these advantages outweigh the advantages of behaving more assertively. Only you can answer this question. It is not an easy question because behaving assertively can also have disadvantages.

Action!

Take sufficient time, now, to think about the following assertion:

- I, and nobody else, can make my life more enjoyable by acting differently in some situations.

What is your opinion? Do you agree or disagree with this statement?

What do you want to achieve? That is the most important question here! And there is only one person who can answer it. You! Before you do, we hope you have a lot of patience. If you are used to a certain way of behaving, this is often an old and deeply ingrained habit. It takes time to break that habit and replace it with something new. Take the time. Don't make impossible demands on yourself! Be realistic. Improvement is certainly possible, but it will be achieved gradually.

Action!

In terms of assertive behaviour I want to learn the following:

CONCLUDING TEST QUESTIONS

Action!

- 1 At the beginning of this chapter, we described a few difficult situations. What do these situations have in common? They are all different, yet they are alike.
What do you think they have in common?

- 2 Which statement do you disagree with?
 - There are subassertive people.
 - There are no subassertive people.

The answers are discussed in the appendix, p. 161.

2

I or You

Playing hide and seek

Action!

Take a moment to think about the following assertion:

- 'I' is a great word. If 'I' did not exist, other people would not exist either.

What is your opinion?

A lot of people say 'you' when they are actually talking about themselves. Even when they give their own opinion, they present it as the opinion of the whole world.

When you use the word 'you' when you are actually talking about yourself, it will eventually be confusing for other people. You also end up confusing yourself. Saying 'you' turns into a game of hide and seek and you end up not knowing which opinions are yours and which are those of others. Standing up for yourself starts by using the word 'I'.

Read the paragraphs below out loud and feel the difference:

- 1 If you stand up for yourself, you almost always feel better. Perhaps you don't always achieve what you want, but you always achieve more than you would if you said nothing. You also realise that you can influence your environment, making your life more enjoyable.
- 2 If I stand up for myself I almost always feel better. Perhaps I don't always achieve what I want, but I always achieve more than I would if I said nothing. I also realise that I can influence my environment, making my life more enjoyable.

Action!

What do you do?

When I talk about myself and state my own opinion:

- I usually use the word 'I'
 - I usually use the word 'you'
 - Other, namely ...
-

The word 'I' is your personal calling card in every type of contact. This is certainly the case when you introduce yourself to someone.

There are people who do this assertively. They have a strong handshake, they look the other person in the eye and say: "I am ...", or state their name loudly and clearly.

Others do it subassertively.

- They do not look the other person in the eye and lower their eyes.
- They never use the words: "I am ..."
- When they give their name, their voice is so soft that it's impossible to understand.

How do you introduce yourself? If you can't readily answer this yourself, ask someone else who knows you well. Is there room for improvement? How?

How do you usually introduce yourself?

- Subassertively.
- Assertively.
- Aggressively.

Could you improve on the way you introduce yourself?

- Yes.
- No.

INVITATION

We invite you to note in the days ahead how often you use the word 'I' when talking about yourself. Please note: we are not asking you to use the word 'I' all the time. That's absolutely not necessary. But if you don't use it often enough, it is worth the effort of dropping it into your conversations occasionally.

QUESTION

People will often start using 'you' when they have something difficult or personal to say. Do you do that?

'I' OR 'WE'

Spend a moment letting the following questions sink in.

- Can we talk about it *sometime*?
- Can we talk about it *now*?

The first sentence is a bit more vague than the second, but both have one thing in common. Both are inviting, even *connecting*, appealing to your desire to belong, to do something together. This builds a bridge to the other person, and if this is enough there is no objection to using the word 'we' even if the person speaking means 'I'.

There are times, however, for example when this inviting approach proves ineffective, when a more direct approach is more useful. Then it's time to use the word 'I'.

- I would like to talk about it.
- I would like to talk with you about it sometime.

If your tone remains friendly and the other person also perceives it as such, you could call this behaving assertively.

You may know someone who liberally uses the word 'we'.

- We all think this is logical, right?
- People like us don't agree. We think something else is more important.

When it happens all the time, you realise that this kind of person always wants and always will want something from you. What does that person want from me? Keep asking yourself this question so that you can independently decide what you want and how you see things yourself.

Introducing yourself in a *connecting* manner is also an important skill. If you would like to read more about this, we recommend the book by Hannah Nathans. See the list of recommended reading.

3

Reacting

Reacting directly ...

'Yes' and 'No': two small words with a large meaning.

There are three types of situations in which these words can be important:

- Someone asks you for information. For example: Can you tell me how to get to the library?
- Someone asks your opinion about something. For example: Do you like your job?
- Someone asks, requests, orders you to do something. For example: Would you get some coffee?

REACTING TO DIRECT REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

In order to assess your reaction in this type of situation, a number of requests for information are given below. Answer these questions with a 'yes' or a 'no'.

Do you know which town Witling Street is in?

Do you know how many political prisoners there are in Cuba?

If the person asking the question is not a difficult person, it will naturally be easy to reply *assertively*. One thing is already clear, however: if someone asks you for information, an assertive way to react is to say:

- Yes, I know that – when you think you do know it.
- No, I'm sorry, I don't know the answer – when you don't know it.

In principle, this reaction is effective and often assertive, unless it is said so strongly that the other person is frightened and backs away. That would be described as aggressive behaviour. The tone sets the scene. We will discuss this more in depth in Chapter 12.

Subassertive behaviour is also often seen in this type of situation. The following questions illustrate this.

Action!

Which of the subassertive reactions to requests for information quoted below do you identify with?

- Saying *yes* and pretending that you know the answer when actually you don't.
- Saying *no* and pretending that you don't know the answer when you actually do. (Because you're afraid that you will not be able to explain it if the other person asks more questions or because you're afraid the other person will ask more questions and you don't have the time to answer them.)
- Saying neither yes or no*, but skirting endlessly around the question instead of saying a simple 'yes' or 'no'. You skirt around the subject by using hesitant language. A few examples of hesitant language are:
 - ... actually, well, yes ...
 - ... actually, well, no ...
 - ... preferably not ...
 - ... actually, preferably not ...
 - ... well, yes ...

Using hesitant language is not forbidden, of course, if you are actually hesitant.

Action!

Think about real-life situations in which and people with whom you behave subassertively on occasion when asked for information. You skirt around the subject because you do not want to give the information.

REACTING DIRECTLY TO A QUESTION ABOUT YOUR OPINION

The words 'yes' and 'no' can also be important in this type of situation.

Here, too, you can react subassertively, assertively or aggressively.

Action!

Below are a number of questions about your opinion. Answer these with 'yes' or 'no'.

- Do you like cauliflower?
 - Do you like this book so far?
 - Do you trust your doctor?
 - Did you enjoy your work in the past week?
-

Subassertive

The answer to a question of this type is *sub-assertive* when you express an opinion that is not your own or when your answer is hesitant.

- You say: 'Yes, I like cauliflower' when actually you do not.
- You say: 'No, I don't like cauliflower' when actually you do.
- You don't say 'yes' or 'no'. You beat about the bush. You hesitate. You do not enjoy doing that and would rather briefly state your opinion.

Assertive

You say 'yes' if you do like cauliflower. You say 'no', if you don't like it.

Assertive behaviour is often associated with being able to say 'no'. We believe this is too limited and often oversimplified. Saying 'yes' in certain situations can be at least as difficult.

Aggressive

Instead of saying 'yes' or 'no', you upset the other person. You laugh mockingly and say: 'You won't find many people who think cauliflower is a vegetable worthy of their dinner guests.' The other person must decide whether your statement is intended to alienate. They probably will. Certainly the tone of your answer will define whether your reaction is perceived as being aggressive.

Action!

Think about real-life situations in which and people with whom you have difficulty being assertive when they ask your opinion directly. Write down at least one situation that you can identify with:

IS IT OKAY TO SAY NOTHING AT ALL?

Until now we have assumed that you want to reply to questions about your opinion or requests for information. There's nothing to stop people asking questions, but you don't have to feel obligated to provide an answer.

Now let's look at actual practice in your life.

Action!

Has the following ever happened to you? Someone asks you a question. You answer, but afterwards you realise that you didn't want to answer the question at all. Because it was too personal, for example, or because you didn't think the subject was appropriate at the time, because you didn't really have the time or because the person asking the question expressed themselves aggressively or subassertively.

- No, that never happens to me.
 - Yes, sometimes I answer a question that I actually didn't want to answer at the time.
 - Others, namely: _____
-
-

Action!

Which of the people below sometimes ask you a question that you don't want to answer at that particular moment in time? This list is solely intended to give you a few ideas. It may not apply to some of the people in your particular situation. The point here is to decide which people you have difficulty being assertive with because they ask you questions that you don't actually want to answer.

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> my parents | <input type="checkbox"/> my boss |
| <input type="checkbox"/> my siblings | <input type="checkbox"/> my colleagues |
| <input type="checkbox"/> my partner | <input type="checkbox"/> my neighbours |
| <input type="checkbox"/> my children | <input type="checkbox"/> acquaintances |
| <input type="checkbox"/> my friends | <input type="checkbox"/> passers by |
| <input type="checkbox"/> my doctor | <input type="checkbox"/> shopkeepers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> my teacher | <input type="checkbox"/> others: |
-
-

Action!

If someone asks you a question that you don't want to answer, once again you can respond in three different ways: subassertively, assertively or aggressively.

Which of the answers below is subassertive, assertive or aggressive in your opinion?

a No, yes, well, ... preferably not ... ?!

b No, that is topic that troubles me. I don't want to talk about it right now.

c I would rather you had not asked that. I don't want to talk about it with you.

d Go ask your stupid questions somewhere else.

e No, I don't know (although you do know, but you don't want to answer the question).

f Shove off!

g No, this is not a good time from me. You should ask someone else.

You find the answer in the appendix, p. 161.

REACTING TO A REQUEST, WISH OR COMMAND

The following two questions are important:

- 1 When is it the most difficult for you to react assertively?
 - When someone orders me to do something in an aggressive and authoritarian manner. 'Leave that!', 'Get going, slowpoke.', 'Jones, come here!'
 - When someone tells me in a clear and assertive manner what they want of me. 'Peter, I would like you to help me do the washing-up from now on.', 'Bianca, I want you to spend more time with me.', 'Dad, I want you to stop snapping at me.' (This is assertive if the tone used does not alienate people.)
 - When someone invites me to help in manner that is assertive and connecting. 'Robert, we will be in trouble today if you don't help us.', 'Susan, you can do this much better than I can; could you do it?', 'I need your help!'
 - When someone subassertively asks me to do something. 'It's not that it's important, but tomorrow is my birthday. If you could find some time it would be nice if you could come.'

2 With which people is it complicated and difficult for you to react assertively? This is an important question: it is a good way of clearly focusing on your situation and will help you to understand situations as you experience them.

Action!

Write down the names of people, friends or people that you don't know very well, with whom it is sometimes difficult for you to stand up for yourself:

Write down the names of people with whom that is not difficult:

Stop!

If someone asks you to do something, 'no' means 'I don't want to.'

If someone wants to do something to you or does something that you don't want them to do, 'no' means 'Stop, I don't want you to do that, I want you to stop it.'

For example, if someone keeps insisting in an annoying manner, 'no' means 'Stop!' You forbid the other person to do something to you that you don't want.

Action!

Take a moment now to think about the following assertion:

- I have the right to forbid someone to do something to me or to do something that I don't want them to do.

What is your opinion?

Listening and paying attention

Listening is probably even more important than speaking. You will find that some people are better listeners than others. What you will often notice is that these people actually pay attention to what you have to say. They pay attention to you.

By behaving in different ways, you, too, can show the other person that you are paying attention to them:

- Eye contact
- Attentive body language
- Summarising
- Asking for clarification
- Asking open questions
- Saying 'mmm', 'aah', et cetera
- Not interrupting.

EYE CONTACT

If you stare hard at another person for a long time, the other will quickly start to feel uncomfortable. If you avoid looking at them, however, or cast your gaze about, it will appear that you are not paying attention.

ATTENTIVE BODY LANGUAGE

The most obvious example of not paying attention is turning your back on the speaker. The way you speak can also reveal or express the degree or lack of attention.

SUMMARISING

This means summarising in your own words what the person you are talking with has said. It is important to refrain from including your own opinions in the summary; it should be factual:

- Question: 'Do you often travel by train?'
- Reply: 'No, not really any more. My boyfriend and I both have a driving licence. So we travel together by car. But if I have to travel alone I like to take the train. Then I can relax.'
- Summarised: 'So, if you're on your own you prefer to take the train. Then you can relax ...'

ASKING FOR CLARIFICATION

The person you are talking to is not being clear. Asking for clarification shows your interest. The person you are talking to says: 'My mother-in-law is a difficult person.' You ask for clarification and show interest: 'What do you mean by difficult?'

ASKING OPEN QUESTIONS

Closed questions are questions that can be answered by a 'yes', a 'no' or 'I don't know'. 'Are you going surfing this weekend?' is a typical closed question. The question shows that you only want a 'yes', 'no' or 'I don't know' answer. If that is all the information that

you want, that's fine. If you want to keep the conversation going, however, asking open questions is better. 'What are you doing this weekend?' is a typical open question. The person you are talking to cannot answer this question with a simple 'yes' or 'no' and the conversation will continue.

SAYING MMM, AAH ... ET CETERA

Reacting with 'mmm' or 'yes, yes,' in a conversation gives the other person the impression that you are listening attentively. You can reinforce this even further by nodding or by reacting in another non-verbal way. Not responding could make the other person feel as if you are not listening.

NOT INTERRUPTING

Interrupting the other person and telling your own story is allowed, of course, but by doing so you indicate that you're not interested in the other's story. It can be very irritating to the other person if you keep interrupting with 'Yes, but ...'.

Action!

In the days ahead, try to consciously remove just one element from your conversations.

- Stop saying mmm, aah, yes.
 - Don't look at the person.
 - Try not sitting with the person; remain standing as though you're about to leave at any moment.
-

Expressing your wishes directly

I WANT ...

Just two little words: 'I' and 'want'.

Using those two words is the clearest way to make your wishes known.

Do you ever state your case to someone using the words: 'I want ...'?

- Yes.
- No.

Of course you don't have to necessarily use these words. You don't have to do anything, certainly not if you do not feel comfortable using these words or are not accustomed to using them. Experiment for a while with saying 'I want'. Why? Because if you want

something, using the words 'I want ...' is the clearest and most direct way of making your wishes known.

- I want you to talk louder.
- From now on, I want you to come to the appointment on time.
- I want to leave at four o'clock.
- I want you to stop that.
- I don't want to talk about this with you.
- I want to work this afternoon without being interrupted.
- I want to meet that deadline.
- I don't want to work over the holidays.
- I don't want that.
- Yes, I want that.

I WANT, OR I MUST

Saying 'I want' calmly is an important part of being assertive. If you don't use these words often enough right now, it is important that you start doing so. You will get used to using the words, making it easier for you to use them when you need to.

Or are you the kind of person who says 'I must' instead of 'I want'?

Action!

Which applies to you?

- I use the words 'I must' instead of 'I want' or 'I am going to'.
- If I want to do something, I use the words 'I want'.
- Others, namely _____

If someone frequently says 'I must', it seems as if they really don't want to do it. Almost like there is someone else ordering them to do it.

Do you often use the words 'I must'?

Check out for yourself whether using this phrase feels right. If you don't think it does, try replacing 'I must' with another expression. An expression that makes it clear that you are in charge.

Here are a few examples:

- 'I must do some shopping' or 'I don't really feel like it but I'm going to go shopping now.'
- 'I must go away' or 'I want to go away', 'I'm going away', 'I'm off.'
- 'I must write a report this afternoon' or 'I am going to write a report this afternoon.'

In the coming week, be aware of and use the words 'I want' (or don't want). If you are accustomed to giving yourself orders by using the expression 'I must', you can try what it feels like this week when you stop doing that. Instead, try expressing yourself assertively by using expressions like 'I want to' or 'I am going to'. You are your own boss!

How do you feel about me saying it like this?

Can you simply say: 'I want this ...', 'I want that ...'?

Could that be offensive to the other person? Or insulting? Won't other people find me annoying or difficult? Will other people think that I am egotistic by stating so directly what I want or am going to do?

How can you find out? Precisely by asking the other person how they feel about you saying or asking something so directly: 'How do you feel about me saying it like this?' This kind of question also allows you to discover what the other person thinks about your behaviour. If you are curious about it and would like to know the reaction of the other person, the assertive way to go about it is to ask this question. It will help you to dispel any doubts you might have. 'What will he think of me, what should I expect?' This also gives the other person an opportunity to react.

Action!

Egotism

Take a moment to reflect on the following assertion:

- Not letting others know what I want is just as egotistical as not taking into account what other people want.

What is your opinion?

FINDING THE RIGHT WORDS

- I.
- No.
- Yes.
- I don't want that.
- I want that.
- How do you feel about me saying it like this?
- Yes, I do know.
- No, I don't know.
- Yes, I think so, too.
- No, I don't like the way it looks.
- I simply won't do it!
- I am going.

- Sorry, I can't. I've made other plans.
- No, it's not possible.
- Yes, please!

WHICH OF THESE ANSWERS IS WRONG?

The aim of this exercise is to test whether you have understood what we have covered so far. The answers can be found at the back of the book (appendix).

- Saying 'yes' is always subassertive.
- Saying 'no' is always assertive.
- Saying 'no' is always aggressive because you are doing something that contradicts the other person.

You find the answer in the appendix, p. 162.

Read the following section about anti-dependent behaviour and consider what is recognisable to you.

Anti-dependent behaviour

Anti-dependent behaviour (recalcitrant, pig-headed) is quite common. It could be described as negatively-focused dependent behaviour.

It is always seen in relationships of authority, usually between subordinates: a child, for instance, a student or an employee, and superiors: a parent, teacher or boss. How do you deal with this type of behaviour?

In your team, for example, you are promoted to supervisor. You have serious problems with the behaviour of one of your staff. He refuses to comply with certain time-consuming safety rules. No matter what you do, he keeps doing things his own way, even after you try to make friendly suggestions. You try to correct his behaviour. In addition, you offer individual solutions, for example by lowering his production target. The employee rejects your solutions. The problem here is that his relationship of dependency on you (you are now his superior) blocks a help relationship with you (you are prepared to find an individual solution for him). He cannot differentiate between the relationship of authority and the help relationship.

This is also seen in other types of situations, with neighbours, family, school and friends, for example. Despite your good intentions, the other person digs his heels in and is "anti". This type of behaviour may seem to be assertive and strong, but it often comes across as aggressive. Moreover, is the person refusing because he really is opposed to it, or because you are the person asking him to do it? In that case, the person is dependent.

Because it is irritating, the temptation to deal with anti-dependent behaviour with a firm hand is very strong. Doing so will always fail, however, because the relationship of authority will then completely block the help relationship. If you want to get closer to the other person, it is best to follow your intuition and to listen. You could say, for example: 'I notice that when I propose something you always oppose it, like just now. I am not very happy about this. Are you really opposed to it, or are you simply opposed because I proposed it?' Then you can start to listen.

Action!

Homework

- The more you start using the words 'I', 'I want' and 'I am going to', the easier it will be for you to use these words in difficult situations.
 - Make a habit of using the words 'I', 'I want' and 'I am going to' as often as possible. Use the words in various situations. When you are in a shop or restaurant, don't ask: 'Could I please have', but say 'I want', or 'I am going to.'
 - 'Yes' and 'no' are two clear words. This week, try to respond to questions and requests from people in this short, concise manner. Say 'yes' or 'no' as often as possible. Try to do so assertively.
 - Practice clearly introducing yourself to others. Do this in every appropriate situation. To discover the style that suits you best, practice in the morning when you are brushing your teeth. Look at yourself in the mirror. Then introduce yourself: 'I am'.
 - State your name loudly and clearly.
-

4

How can you assess yourself?

Different ways of assessing yourself

It is important to work towards a more assertive way of behaving at your own pace. At your own pace and in your own way. Working on issues that are important to you. These may be completely different issues than those that are important to other people.

Meaning that you are the only one who can “correct” your own homework.

Roughly speaking, there are three ways to do this.

- *Too pessimistically:* If you assess yourself too pessimistically, you will only look at the things that you don't do well. This way of assessing yourself is an excellent way of putting yourself in a bad mood.
- *Too optimistically:* This perspective focuses on only the things you have done well, ignoring things that you still want to do and have not yet done. Doing this is not a bad thing in itself, but you may end up disregarding reality and find yourself faced with unpleasant surprises.
- *Realistically:* When you assess yourself realistically, you start by looking at the things that you are satisfied with. Then you identify things that could be improved.

Which of the three ways of assessing yourself do you usually apply?

- Too pessimistic
- Too optimistic
- Realistic

REALISTIC SELF-APPRAISAL

Try to appraise yourself realistically. Here are a few examples of how to do this.

- I am satisfied that I used the word 'I' more frequently this week when talking about myself.
- In order to improve, I need to express my opinion better in a number of situations.
- I am pleased that I told my colleague that he should keep his word more in the future.
- I could have done better if I had clearly held his gaze.

Action!

A number of homework tasks relating to the issues discussed above are listed here. Assess whether you are satisfied about each point and determine where improvements could be made.

Using the word 'I' when speaking about yourself.

- How satisfied are you?
- How could you improve?

Saying 'I (do not) want to' or 'I will (not)' to make your wishes known.

- How satisfied are you?
- How could you improve?

Reacting to a question in a friendly, clear and assertive way by saying 'yes' or 'no'.

- How satisfied are you?
- How could you improve?

Introducing yourself clearly to someone new: 'I am ...'.

- How satisfied are you?
- How could you improve?

Finding someone to discuss situations with.

- How satisfied are you?
- How could you improve?

Your own intentions.

- How satisfied are you?
- How could you improve?

Do you know someone that you would like to be able to look in the eye but have difficulty doing so?

- Yes.
- No.