

4.4 Management skills Assertiveness

Your **assertive** rights in the workplace

- The right to hold your own opinions.
- The right to a fair hearing for those opinions.
- The right to need and want things that may differ from other peoples' needs and wants.
- The right to ask (not demand) that others respond to your needs and wants.
- The right to refuse a request without feeling guilty or selfish.
- The right to have feelings and to express them assertively if you want to.
- The right to be wrong sometimes.
- The right to have others respect your rights.

from Assertiveness at Work, by Ken and Kate Back

Discussion

1 Work with a partner. Discuss which of your assertive rights are contravened by these comments.

- 1 'When I want your opinion, I'll ask for it!'
- 2 'What do you mean, you can't work late tonight? Don't you have any sense of loyalty?'
- 3 'I don't care how you feel about it, just get on with the job!'
- 4 'I will not tolerate mistakes, do you hear me?'


2 Which answers would you choose?

- 1 a) Sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt you.
b) I think exchanging views will help us move forward.
c) You're so opinionated, why don't you ever listen to me?
- 2 a) Oh all right then, I'll do it.
b) Yes, I do but unfortunately I've got family commitments tonight. I'm happy to reschedule the work though.
c) You should've planned ahead, I knew this would happen!
- 3 a) Never mind, it doesn't matter.
b) I realize you're worried that it's urgent, but as I said, I feel there are more important jobs I should be doing.
c) Why don't you do some work for a change?
- 4 a) It won't happen again.
b) That seems a bit unfair to me.
c) Calm down, it's no big deal.

3 Work with a partner. Answer the questions.

- 1 Which of the answers above are aggressive, non-assertive/passive, assertive?
- 2 What kind of body language would you associate with each type of behaviour?
- 3 What kind of outcomes are aggression and non-assertiveness likely to lead to?
- 4 How do perceptions of what constitutes aggressive or passive behaviour vary between countries and cultures?

Listening

4  **1:59–1:62** Linda is a supervisor in an open-space office in a merchant bank. Listen to her handling four difficult situations. For each case, identify the problem and tick (✓) the assertiveness techniques Linda uses to resolve it.

Assertiveness techniques

- 1 Acknowledge the other's person's position, but make sure your views are heard. ☐☐☐☐
- 2 Ask for more time to respond. ☐☐☐☐
- 3 Just say no – don't apologize or justify yourself. ☐☐☐☐
- 4 Offer an acceptable compromise. ☐☐☐☐
- 5 Use 'I' statements to express your feelings: avoid arguments and blaming with 'you' statements. ☐☐☐☐
- 6 Use the 'broken record' technique – repeat your position as many times as necessary. ☐☐☐☐

4

Managing conflict

4.6 Case study Olvea Brasil

Discussion

1 Work with a partner. Imagine your ideal team leader. What would they do in the following situations?

you need help you make a big mistake you do something really well
you do your job with no problems you have personal problems

Reading

2 Read the background to the case and answer the questions.

- 1 What are Eliana's concerns?
- 2 What kind of management style does the company encourage?
- 3 Why does Eliana like to hear both sides of the story?

ELIANA SCHAEFFER, Director of Human Resources at Olvea Brasil, stood at her window and stared out pensively at the mountains rising above the city. On her table were four employee files; each had been put in the 'concerns' category at last Friday's six-monthly staff review. Eliana knew very well that although a 'concern' tag was supposed to be an early warning, all too often it meant that a crisis was just waiting to happen.

Olvea Brasil was the Brazilian subsidiary of an international group which supplied components for the automobile industry. Aware that they relied heavily on the skills and creativity of their engineers

for survival, Olvea's management encouraged a culture that was officially firmly people-oriented. At the same time, Eliana understood that in a field where competition was fierce, and customers more and more demanding, productivity was crucial; results often took precedence over people's feelings.

It was going to be a tough morning; Eliana had made appointments with each of the four 'concerns' in turn. After reading their manager's comments in their files, she liked to hear the employee's side of the story before reaching any conclusions. 'More often than not it's the manager who's the real concern!' she thought as she sat down at the table to review the four files.

Internet research

Search for the keywords *how to manage your boss*. Take a class vote to find your top tips.

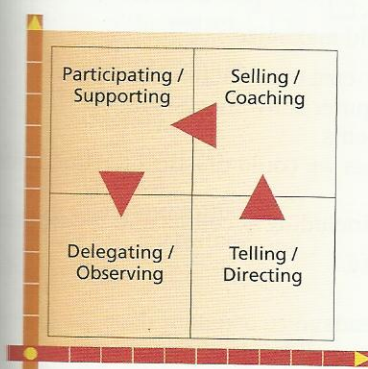
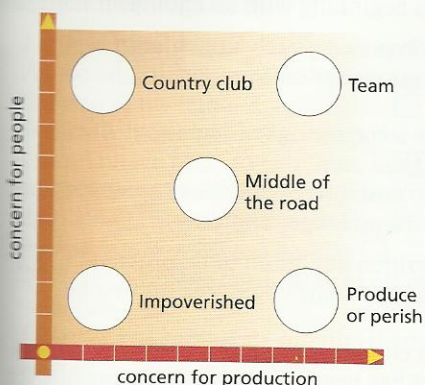
3 Work in small groups. Read the employee files opposite and answer the questions below. What do they suggest about the relationship between each employee and their manager?

Which members of staff:

- 1 have changed their attitude?
- 2 do not communicate well?
- 3 are disappointing or disappointed?
- 4 are being unreasonable?
- 5 have a limited future with the company?

Listening

4 1:63–1:66 Listen to Eliana's interviews with the four members of staff, and take notes.



Discussion

5 In small groups, discuss the questions.

- 1 How are the employees' stories different from their manager's versions? Who should you believe?
- 2 What are Carla Hartmann, Vitor Martins, Isabel Correia and Antony Middleton's management styles?
- 3 What strategies do you feel would be most effective in managing Wilson Holden, Susan Shipley, Luigi Tarantini and Natasha Gomes in future?
- 4 How should Eliana manage the managers?

Presentation

6 In your groups, draw up an action plan covering all the issues. Present your plan to the class and take questions.

NAME: Wilson Holden

AGE: 26

POSITION: Moulding engineer

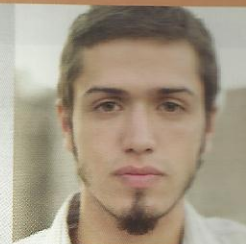
MANAGER: Carla Hartmann

MANAGER'S COMMENTS: Young graduate engineer.

No problems in first year, but uncommunicative.

Three months ago he started suggesting changes to procedures. I explained it was not his job to make changes; if changes are needed I will make them. Since

then he has consistently disregarded procedures and encouraged other colleagues to do the same. He refuses to follow instructions; last week he refused to work on Saturday, even though all the engineers agreed to do one Saturday per month. He is insolent, arrogant, frequently uses foul language and cannot accept criticism.



NAME: Susan Shipley

AGE: 38

POSITION: Project manager

MANAGER: Vitor Martins

MANAGER'S COMMENTS: Susan is very experienced and autonomous (13 years with Olvea) but she seems unhappy. No obvious problems – her work is satisfactory, but people in the department say she's miserable and demotivated. Isabel Correia, my boss, said she asked to speak to her, so I thought I'd better bring it to your attention.



NAME: Luigi Tarantini

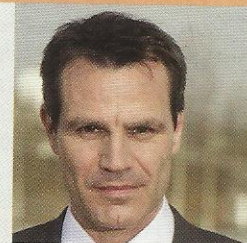
AGE: 48

POSITION: Head of R&D

MANAGER: Isabel Correia

MANAGER'S COMMENTS: Luigi does a great job for us, we've always worked well together. But just recently he's become colder, not his normal friendly self. With my engineering background, I enjoy working with Luigi in the lab, but he has become almost secretive about his work – when I offer to look at the latest test results with him he keeps suggesting I have more important things to do.

No complaints about the quality of his work, everything is fine – he just doesn't seem to want to share with me the way we used to.



NAME: Natasha Gomes

AGE: 23

POSITION: Administrative assistant

MANAGER: Antony Middleton

MANAGER'S COMMENTS: Natasha is pleasant and compliant. However she lacks initiative and seems frightened of making mistakes. She seems unable to make decisions herself; she phones me several times a day to ask for instructions when a little common sense is all that is necessary. Her work is acceptable but never excellent. Although she is much more willing than the rest of my department, I am not sure that she possesses the qualities we expect in an administrative assistant.

