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## Communication styles – recognising yours, and others

Where do you think your communication style comes from? What influenced it? Or who? Genetic? Role models, necessity?

How much control have you got over what you 'run' on? *Complete control, you choose how you react every day in every single human interaction.*

The good news? Communication starts and ends with you...the bad news...

Most people have a default communication style and 1 they flip into when under stress etc. Knowing what you run on can help you resolve differences, protect your boundaries, and say no when you need to.

For around 50 years psychology has recognised these 4 types:

Passive, assertive, aggressive, passive aggressive, then in 2011 a 5<sup>th</sup> style Compassionate Assertiveness was recognised.

If you were to guess right now, would you know instantly which you were?

Some people are an 80/20%mix.

### **Aggressive?**

They influence through strong opinions and points of view. Point out negative consequences to people. Their communication style is nearly always at the expense of someone else. It's self-indulgent. A quick fix.

It's hard to find a way back from aggressive verbal communication as your subconscious mind (and that of your target/victim) won't easily forget things said in the heat of a discussion, even if your sensible mind wants to.

An aggressive communication style is about instant gratification, there is short term glory in saying your piece, being the loudest voice, or getting your point across at the expense of others. You like the sound of your own voice.

Aggressive communicators often over react. They are the drama kings and queens of life, they have no respect for others rights, they get off on dominating and

overpowering people. And, let's not forget that every single time you choose aggression you have created a victim, and emotions that have to be cleaned up. Some can. Some can't. That's why therapists make a very good living out of people bringing up things from their past.

Your moment of instant gratification and glory at the very least leads to shame and guilt from you. At its worst creates a ripple effect that is hard to forgive – if ever!

If you are ever put in a position of interacting with an aggressive communicator - remember to go 'Low and Slow'© – start talking lower and slower. The minute you adapt your speech level and patterns to theirs, and 'mirror' their aggressive body language, nothing can be achieved. You have brought yourself down to their level, and it's not pretty!

You are role modelling the behaviour you expect in 'Low and Slow'©. Often just this simple act causes a degree of self-analysis from the other person as they begin to hear how unreasonable they sound.

If you can't find common, more reasonable ground, be prepared to go 'Low and Slow'© and say something like, "I'm happy to pick this up when you are ready to communicate in a more reasonable, productive way." And then walk away. Communication terminated until a later date.

Use mantras/questions every time it happens to re-programme anger such as: "What could you have done differently there (add your name)?" This helps you to analyse in real time alternatives to anger.

### **Passive - aggressive (In - direct)?**

Are devious detectives. They waste a lot of time on tittle tattling about others.

If you take a passive aggressive (in-direct) stance it is non- productive. It actually only serves you. The other poor souls that have to listen to you whinge and whine about someone or something when you could have communicated properly in the first place is a different story.

It's painful, awkward, embarrassing, and depressing to listen to. They, (the listener) instead of hearing the good things about your day and having the opportunity to talk to you about theirs – instead have to put up with your failure to communicate in a compassionately assertive way, often hours and days after the event took place.

Often (nearly always) the person who you are directing the passive aggressive communication at has absolutely no comprehension of what you are feeling, because you haven't said it to them in open communication – hence non- productive. No outcome. Waste of words. Waste of your time, and of the people who have to listen to you.

I feel so strongly about this nowadays that I go straight to 'See it, Say it'® if confronted by passive aggressive people, and say something like. "That's unfortunate that you didn't deal with that appropriately at the time. What could you have done differently?"

Passive- Aggressive's are the toxic person at work, the friend who leaves you feeling worse when you leave them than when you arrived. The subtle nuances of passive aggressive behaviour are breath taking in their toxicity.

Passive- Aggressive's are the garden mulch of humanity. In full flight and at their most dangerous they add little to the world, add heartache, drama, and waste time for the people who have to deal with them, and listen to them. They are the people you can't wait to get away from.

### **Passive?**

They trust. They listen and hear, but don't always express. They embrace the mundane and often take on tasks that others would not. They are loyal, sincere and make great friends. They are predictable in their decision making – or lack of it.

If you take a passive stance in communication, I would argue that it is non-productive – unless you choose it. And here is the distinction – if you choose a passive communication style, it is assertive! Because you have chosen it. This can take the form of dis-engagement, or even dismissive behaviour, where you have no interest in 'buying in' to an issue, or alternatively hearing what the other person has to say.

Taking a passive stance as a communication style allows others to take advantage of you and decide how you spend your time. Is that what you want? For other people to decide for you? Passive communication is more about avoiding conflict than anything else. It is certainly not the case that passive communicators don't have a point of view, often they have a very strong point of view – they just don't have the confidence to voice it, so they don't get what they want out of life.

People flip into passive or passive aggressive behaviour for all sorts of reasons: A work colleague asks you to do some of her work for the third time this month. Another friend always stands you up at the last minute when you've put your plans on hold. You want to ask your boss something but you fear she won't admire you anymore. You let people push in front of you in petrol queues, traffic, and say yes way too often when you should say NO.

### **Assertive?**

They have passion, they are pro-active, have ideas. They are innovative and catalysts for change. They will tell you things that others would shy away from, or would find uncomfortable. And, will tell you to your face.

Their expressive style often keeps people engaged and focused. They provide an independent voice, and back themselves when they have an idea. They strive continually to achieve their goals and set new standards for themselves and others.

Assertive communicators are the most likely of all communicators to be leading a life that they actually want to. Assertive communicators are honest, they have no problem in expressing their feelings or voicing their opinions.

How and why are they assertive? Because they are confident either in what they know, in themselves or both. Assertive communicators have a greater sense of control over their own life, and got the memo about responsibility for your own stuff affording you a more authentic life.

An assertive communication style saves time, energy, misunderstandings, and in general forges closer working relationships. To an assertive person it is just logical, however a more passive person can perceive 'assertives' to be blunt.

How to get your head around the idea of assertive communication being the most productive and constructive style of communicating if you've spent your life believing that 'assertives' are forthright, bossy, and demanding (which is a common perception)?

- Assertive people usually (but, not always) have a 'knowledge bank' that makes them confident in what they are saying. They either know the truth or facts of a matter or topic, through study, or life experiences.
- Assertiveness usually (but not always) comes from a place of honesty
- Assertiveness saves time and energy
- Assertiveness helps prevent mis-communication difficulties
- Assertiveness gives you more chance of getting what you want

What if you could be just ONE person? That's what Compassionate Assertive people are. They don't need to go between one style and another, they just use one.

Compassionate Assertive people choose kindness. They give people the benefit of the doubt or ask direct questions to check and find out the reality of situations.

They choose to read body language. Use their intuition, and are adept at deflecting passive aggressive behaviour. They add a human touch to interactions, avoid distractions, and value people's time and input. But they will be honest if they disagree.

And of course within each of these styles you will find hidden layers of: innovators, creatives, experimenters, mavericks, laid back, stubbornly set in their ways, at the mercy of their pre-conditioning, prefer to work alone, prefer to work in a team, like routine, don't like routine, people who like calm, people who thrive on high energy and stress. There are also people who follow through and remember details, 'honeymooners' who don't, people who quietly get the job done, saviours who need to let everyone know they got the job done.

Everyone has something in their innate personality and communication style that they can use to their advantage, and something that slows them down or makes them feel uncomfortable.

If you want to know more about communication styles and begin to learn about compassionate assertiveness and the difference in approach it takes, then wander over to [www.elementalpotential.com](http://www.elementalpotential.com) on the Learning Opportunity page.