

The Smart Social Skills Course

→ **Week 7: How to Become More
Assertive**

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How to Become More Assertive

This is the seventh week of the course and this week is a sort of follow-up to last week's topic.

We looked at social self-confidence last week and this week we'll explore one part of being more confident and being perceived as more confident.

This week is all about becoming more assertive in your social life and relationships. This can be a very important part if you want for example to:

- Move up in your career.
- Go on successful dates and develop a healthy relationship with someone.
- Be respected and treated as well as you deserve by the people close to you or at work and in school.

Many have emailed me about how they are not very assertive in their lives in some way and that it is having a negative effect.

Assertiveness is also one of those factors that many do not understand the full importance of. Especially if you are not very assertive.

I have experience with this myself.

You see, I was “the nice guy”.

My unassertiveness led to me sometimes becoming a pushover that did just what other people wanted even if I didn’t want to do that deep down. It led to first dates that never became second dates. And it led to feeling passive aggressive towards others and angry at myself.

So it is not a good thing for your own well-being or your social life. Or for living your life fully on your own terms.

So what can you do if you feel that you are perhaps not as assertive in all situations as you’d like?

In this guide I’ll share what helped me.

You have the right to ask for what you want and need in life.

This is the first and a very important point: you have the right to ask for legitimate needs in your life. Those needs could be physical, emotional, social or of other kinds.

You also have the right to ask for what you want in life.

If you feel you have low self-esteem and that you would like to be more assertive then there is also the risk that you underestimate what your legitimate needs are. You might

see such a need as simply a want, as a something that would be nice or good to have but not really something that is necessary. And so you might not ask at all.

When you ask for something then the person you ask has the right to respond or act as he or she wants. But remember, no matter what the response may be you always have right to ask.

You may have trouble with saying no or asking for something in some situations or with some people in your life. After you have read through this guide you can use the worksheet for this week to pinpoint your tough spots that you may want to work on first or spend extra time on.

How to say no.

Saying no and asking for what you truly want to are two of the most common issues you may have if you are unassertive.

So let's take a look at how you can improve those two things in a practical way.

We'll start with saying no, a difficult thing for many. How can you make it easier?

Well, first remember the first thing in this week's guide. You have the right to ask for what you want and need in life. You have the right to set limits, the right to say no. This is your life and it is yours to make choices about.

Now, saying no is not always fun, but you have to be the boss of your life. You have to make the decisions and say no both to yourself and to others if necessary.

In a few weeks – during week 11 – we will explore a few very effective strategies for raising your self-esteem and in my experience this makes it easier and more natural to say no if you like. When your self-esteem goes up and you treat yourself better then it becomes very natural to expect other people to do the same to you.

In the meantime and this week, focus on these two practical techniques...

Disarm and then state your need.

It becomes easier for people to accept your no if you disarm them first.

You could for example do that by honestly saying that you are flattered or that you appreciate the kind offer. Then you, for instance, add that you do not have the time for accepting and doing what they want.

Since some pushy people want to overcome your objections and sell you something or convince you to do something even if you first say no with a valid reason you can try this: state how you feel as a reason for saying no.

For example say that you do not feel that this offer is a good fit for your life right now. Or that you feel overwhelmed and superbusy and so you cannot do whatever they want.

The point of telling someone how you feel is not only to make them understand your side of the issue better but also that it is a lot harder to argue with how you feel rather than

how you think. How you feel is your thing and no one can really come up with good counterarguments to that.

Look back and realize that a negative response isn't that common and it is not the end of the world.

We may often fear that people will be angry or very negative towards the choices we make.

But you may also have noticed in your life that people do not react that way to a no as often as you may fear. So adjust your expectations to your past rather than letting your imagination run wild.

And if someone has a negative reaction then that is not the end of the world. It is uncomfortable for a while. But if you have priorities in life then you will in many cases be able to refocus on what is important for you and shake that negative experience off pretty quickly. That has been my experience.

Plus, keep these two things in mind if they react negatively:

- **They will manage somehow without you** in that situation and life will go on for all of you.
- **You'll get more respect from them in the long run**, even if they react negatively at just after you said no. And that can help the both of you to build a better and healthier relationship.

How to ask for what you want (and make it more likely that you'll get it)

Now let's move on to how to ask for what you want in your life. And how to make it more likely that you will get what you want.

Let's start with what you can do before you step into a room or call someone up to ask for something.

Step 1: Keep the request small, specific and if possible make it win/win.

Keep the request small enough to not get too much arguments and resistance. Then you can ask for another small thing later on or in some small way expand on what you asked for first. Take small steps towards what you want to reduce pressure on yourself and to make it more likely for people to say yes.

Make the request as specific as you can, it makes it easier for the other person to understand exactly what you want, to negotiate and get what you want with less arguments. So you'll save time and energy too.

If you can, try to make it a win/win request. Make sure to mention to the one you are asking **what is in it for him or her** to grant your request. This will of course make it easier to get what you want. You can also make it into a win/win request by making an exchange and suggesting that you will do one thing for him or her if he or she does what you want.

Step 2: Prepare. Write down your request. Practice.

If you like then you can prepare your request and write it down. Keep it concise because people are busy and rarely have a lot of patience for roundabout talking. Just write down what you want, from who, when etc. as simply as you can.

If you like you can practice your request in a mirror to make sure you know what you want to say, how you want to say it and to reduce nervousness. This preparation can help you to feel more confident and relaxed as you ask.

Or it can make the request feel bigger and scarier than it is - it can make a meeting into a mountain - so you decide if it is more helpful for you to skip this step.

Step 3: See how well it will go in your mind before you make the request.

Do this with closed or open eyes (try both options and see what works best for you):

Visualize how well things will go – see and hear it in your mind – and also how calm and confident you will feel as you make the request. See yourself smiling, being positive, open and having a great time. See the excellent outcome in your mind.

Then visualize that it has already happened, that the meeting is over with the desired result.

This is surprisingly effective and will get you into a great and relaxed mood before you even step into that meeting.

Step 4: Use the breathing + assuming rapport combination.

Take one more step to get yourself into the right headspace to make the request. Use our old friend, the breathing + assuming rapport combination just before the meeting.

The Action-Steps for This Week

Here's a quick summary of the action-steps to take this week:

1. Day 1: Use the worksheet. Find one thing you want to say no to or set a limit with. Find one thing that you would like to ask someone for and get.
2. Day 2: Set one limit or say no to one thing from your worksheet.
3. Day 3: Ask for one thing from your worksheet.
4. The rest of the week: Feel free to do more limit-setting and asking for what you want.