

GRACIOUS ASSERTIVENESS

One of the most common relationship problems is avoidance. A need or right we have is not being met by someone in our lives. If we express our need or right we run the risk of adding to the problem when the person engages in rejection and refusal instead of openness and receptivity. So we avoid confronting the area of discomfort because of the risk of greater discomfort. But we find that this only sets us up for an “explosion” of emotions characterized by anger. When angry, our reason is dismantled and we escalate the situation, often worsening the conflict.

The subject of rights is an interesting one. Many Christians feel that they have no rights. This is true, but only in the context of our standing before God. In the context of our relationships with each other, we do indeed have rights. There are times when these rights will be denied us. In those times we must, in a sense, be our own advocate. We can't depend on others or upon God to do for us what we can do for ourselves. Taking care of our emotional/relational/occupational health is part of good stewardship.

Learning to overcome avoidance and clearly and calmly express our needs and rights while fully respecting the needs and rights of others is called *gracious assertiveness*. It is premised on the spirit of true etiquette, which is based upon unconditional love. To allow others to deprive us of our needs and rights only hurts them, so for all concerned it is better for us to assert ourselves rather than live as “doormats.”

Gracious assertiveness has several benefits: It is usually effective in getting others to change. There is a low risk of hurting the relationship, and often the relationship improves because trust builds. Assertiveness doesn't damage the other person's self-worth, either, and often makes them feel valued. And best of all, it prevents angry outbursts that can ruin a relationship.

GRACIOUS ASSERTIVENESS POINTERS

1. ***Eye contact and facial expression:*** Maintain direct eye contact, appear interested and engaged, but not angry.
2. ***Posture:*** Stand or sit erect, possibly leaning forward slightly.
3. ***Distance and contact:*** Stand or sit at a normal conversational distance from the other.
4. ***Gestures:*** Use relaxed, conversational gestures. Some use of hands can help build confidence.
5. ***Voice:*** Use a factual, not emotional tone of voice. Sound determined and full of conviction, but not overbearing.
6. ***Breath deep:*** Oxygenate your brain. Support your voice. Speak slowly and take time to choose your words. If your lungs are expanded, your voice will deliver in a rounder, fuller tone that will convey confidence.
7. ***Timing:*** Choose a time when both parties are relaxed. A neutral site is best.
8. ***“I” statements:*** “You” comes across as accusatory if overused. Describing your thoughts and needs is safe ground.
9. ***Use the “RAD” Request-Appeal-Demand model:*** First, make a request. This is the most preserving to the individual’s self-image. Most people will not refuse a clearly stated, reasonable request. If this fails, appeal to the individual on the basis of conscience. Ninety-nine percent of the time the situation will be resolved in these two steps. As a last resort, demand that your needs be met and clearly state the consequences if they are not. Beware of demanding, though. Check with others to make sure that your demands are in fact reasonable.

R.A.D. ILLUSTRATIONS

<p>Request</p>	<p>“I was promised Saturdays off when I accepted this position. I would like to cash in on that agreement.”</p> <p>“The children and I are together all day. I’d like you to spend an hour with them each night.”</p> <p>“I was hurt when you said that. I think it would be good for all concerned if you were more sensitive.”</p>
<p>Appeal</p>	<p>“You promised me Saturdays off. Please don’t ignore this promise or my request to have that day free.”</p> <p>“It is essential that you spend more time with the children. You’re their father and you have a responsibility.”</p> <p>“It’s not fair for you to be insensitive to others’ feelings. You don’t like to hear cutting remarks.”</p>
<p>Demand</p>	<p>“If you don’t give me Saturdays off, I will have to quit the job.”</p> <p>“If you don’t spend more time with the children, they will be less inclined to obey you. Our children will suffer, I will suffer and you will suffer for it.”</p> <p>“The cutting remarks are making our relationship difficult for me to enjoy. My natural response will be to pull back and start to avoid you.”</p>

DISTORTED THINKING ON ASSERTIVENESS

Untruth	Truth
If I assert myself, others will get mad at me.	If I assert myself the results may be positive, negative, or neutral. However, since assertion involves legitimate needs and rights, the odds of having positive results are in my favor.
If I do assert myself and others do become angry with me, it will be awful; I will be devastated.	Even if others become angry, it isn't the end of the world. If I assert myself graciously, I don't have to feel responsible for others' feelings.
If I assert myself, others will be hurt.	Actually, the chances of hurt are small. Most people appreciate honesty and take the gracious expression of your needs and rights as a vote of confidence in their desire and willingness to respect them.
If I do assert myself and others do become hurt, it will be terrible! I can't bear to hurt someone.	Hurt is often a catalyst for change in a person's life. They can recover from the hurt by the grace of God and become a better person for it.
I want to be popular and well-liked. Offending someone might ruin my social life!	Chances are you will be more respected and loved if you learn gracious assertion. But if there is a temporary setback, it will be okay. After all, if you hid your real self, it wouldn't be you who was well-liked anyway, but an inaccurate projection of yourself.
If I try to assert myself, I'll get nervous and do something embarrassing.	Some have more natural confidence than others, but this doesn't mean that people who are sometimes awkward have no rights or needs. If you are embarrassed, it will be uncomfortable, but not the end of the world. And you may still have communicated graciously and well.
The person may give lip service to my needs and rights but then ignore them anyway.	Refraining from expressing your needs and rights will not assure a better outcome. If they continue to ignore your needs and rights, you may have to increase the intensity of your request (see RAD chart).