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# Being Positive and Staying Positive

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*Easy Step by Step Guide*

# Being Positive and Staying Positive

Pauline Rowson

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Havant  
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## About the author

Pauline Rowson is a freelance writer and author. She is also a qualified marketing professional and has run her own marketing, PR and training company for many years. She also undertakes many public speaking engagements to audiences of all sizes.



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# Introduction

Many of us do not know what we want from life. We are influenced and swayed by others; friends, colleagues, bosses, the media, family. This often leaves us confused and rudderless. Then there are those of us who thought we knew what we wanted and are surprised to find that having got it, it no longer holds any appeal.

Changing work patterns, pressures of this fast paced life, or family upheavals, often leave us feeling bewildered, confused and negative. What seemed so important to us once no longer has such great meaning. When this happens where do we go? How do we start again? How do we resist the pressures to be all things to all men? How do we cope with the guilt when we feel we are failing and inadequate? How do we learn to be more focused? And importantly, how do we learn to get pleasure out of life when everything around us seems grim or we have no time 'to stand and stare' (W.H. Davies).

This book is a practical, self-help guide for anyone who wants to become more positive and stay positive even when the going gets tough.

## What you will learn

- how you can find contentment with yourself
- how you can increase your self-confidence
- how you can release your full potential
- how you can stop being frustrated with life
- how you can benefit from being positive and staying positive even when things get difficult
- how to handle difficult people and situations and keep calm

## How to use this guide

This guide is written in as clear a style as possible to aid you. I recommend that you read it through from beginning to end and then dip into it to refresh your memory. The boxes in each chapter contain tips to help you and at the end of each chapter is a useful at a glance summary of points covered.

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# 1

## Why should we be positive?

Given the pressures in life and the pace of change today it is not always easy to maintain a positive attitude. When you are working too hard, when things don't seem to be going right in your personal life, or when you are under emotional stress it is very easy to be negative. Your life is out of balance and it is difficult to make rational decisions and see the 'options' that are available. If this continues, and you do not know the techniques to help you through these difficult times, or you do not have the confidence to speak out or seek help, then you will feel out of control and a sense of hopelessness can swamp you. This can lead to more dangerous feelings like depression. It is important, therefore, to understand what makes you feel negative and to recognize it when it is happening; to take back control and do something about it no matter how small. Small steps lead to bigger ones, which in turn can lead to giant steps in your life.

But how do we do this? We do it through retraining our mental capability, in other words retraining our brain.

The brain is the most powerful organ in our bodies and yet how many of us use it to its full effect? How many of us abuse it? The first step on the road to becoming positive is to want to. The second step is to train yourself to think positively even when the going gets tough.

## **But what if I am a natural pessimist?**

Indeed some people, whether through upbringing or personality (or both), may have a somewhat pessimistic outlook on life. Do you know a person who is never happy unless they are moaning? Instead of getting irritated, feel sympathy for them for the wasted time and energy that they will never release, for the life of disappointments and frustrations that will surely be in store for them for their unrealized potential. If you are one of those people who see the glass as half empty then take heart from the fact that you are reading this book and want to change that outlook – if you are quite happy to be miserable then you might as well stop now and either give this book to someone else or throw it away.

You've decided to read on to see how you can find contentment with yourself, how you can increase your self-confidence, how you can release your full potential, how you can stop being frustrated with life, how you can in effect benefit from being positive and staying positive.

**Having a positive outlook can seriously benefit your health.**

## The benefits of being positive

- an increased chance of needs being met
- greater confidence in yourself
- greater confidence in others
- taking more initiatives
- greater self-control and worth
- a saving in energy
- no see-sawing of emotions
- more options

This all leads to:

reduction in stress

better personal health and increased efficiency

There are many benefits to being positive not least of which is improved health. In addition, positive people attract positive people and indeed as a result are more successful in their professional and personal lives.

And if you're still not convinced, positive people will suffer less stress and gain the cooperation of others; work colleagues, friends and family members, and lead more contented lives. What further reasons could you want?

## What makes you feel negative?

So to make a start on this journey to becoming a more positive and self-confident person let's first try and begin to understand what makes us feel negative.

Negative emotions are:

- anger
- frustration
- being upset

### Exercise

Without looking at the list on page 7 try this exercise. Write down all the things that make you feel negative i.e. angry, upset and frustrated. This can include things that happen in the workplace, at home or any other aspect of your life.

When you have got your list you might like to ask a friend to do the same exercise and then compare lists.

You will find similarities but you may also find that what makes your friend feel negative doesn't necessarily have the same effect on you. We are all different. We all react to stressful occurrences in different ways; indeed what stresses one person may not stress another.

Knowing what makes you feel negative is the first step to being positive.



Here are some things that make people feel negative – you may have them on your list:

- the weather
- being stuck in a traffic jam
- not being appreciated either at home or at work
- too much work and not enough time to do it
- being bored
- being constantly criticized
- bereavement
- family or relationship breakdown
- being ill
- a difficult or awkward person
- seemingly endless pointless rules and regulations
- never enough time
- too much to do
- being let down
- having too high expectations of others and myself
- lack of information and poor communication

In the following chapters we are going to look at how to handle negativity in others and ourselves, how to

boost our self-confidence and our self-esteem and how to take control of our lives.

## **What to aim for**

A mature personality is what we are aiming for. This can be defined as being the following:

- the ability to identify with other people's concerns as well as with our own; to offer sympathy and empathy
- a warm unselfish relationship with others
- the absence of suspicion and resentment
- emotional security
- living in the present and the future – not the past, learning to let go
- a realistic knowledge of yourself
- a realistic view of the world
- the ability to exercise sound judgement and take necessary decisions
- not wasting time and energy fighting conditions you cannot change
- cooperation with life instead of trying to destroy it or run away from it
- the ability to take the initiative and responsibility for your own actions

- refusing to pity yourself
  - not expecting too much of yourself
  - some consistent view of the meaning of life, whether it be religious or humanistic, that helps you set values and determine life goals
- 

## **In summary**

- having a positive outlook can seriously benefit your health
  - knowing what makes you feel negative is the first step to being positive
  - a mature personality is what you are aiming for
-



---

## 2

# How to cope with negative feelings

## Understanding what is controllable and uncontrollable

I would like you to look at the list that you made earlier on the things that cause you to feel negative. Now identify all the things on your list that you feel are beyond your control – i.e. what is uncontrollable?

You may on first glance believe that all the things on your list are uncontrollable. The weather, for example, is beyond our control, being caught in a traffic jam is beyond our control, falling ill could be beyond our control, a bereavement is beyond our control, being unappreciated at work is beyond our control and so on. Even if we say everything on our list is uncontrollable there is one factor in all of this that is not and that is **our reaction to the event, circumstance or the person – that is within our control.**

## Our inner voice

The way we react to an event, person or circumstance is determined by what we are thinking, by the dialogue that is being conducted inside our heads. I like to call this our **inner voice**. This inner voice can be saying negative things to us and therefore will lead us to react to events and people in a negative way: we can be angry, or upset or withdraw from the event or person and let that anger and emotion turn inwards.

We need to hear that negative inner voice, recognize it for what it is and change it to a positive inner voice. This will mean that we will then react to people and events in a much more positive way and so ensure better emotions and health for us as individuals.

Life-changing events such as the loss of a loved one, a relationship breakdown, and life-threatening events like illness take tremendous courage to overcome or to see through and for a time you will experience negative stress. This is completely natural and you will need greater help through these experiences than this book can give you. Recognizing that you need practical or spiritual help is a positive step.

Now, looking at the other things on your list in comparison to the three I have mentioned above, don't they seem more trivial? Getting things into their proper perspective is one technique to help you to become more positive and stay positive. I look at this in more detail in Chapter 4 which examines values and goal setting.

So to get back to our list of negative things, let's see how we can change the way we react to these negative elements.

## Take the weather.

In Britain the weather is always a topic of conversation. It is not unknown to have four seasons in one day and certainly in one week. Continuous rain and grey skies, high winds and the cold can make us all feel low. We wake up in the morning, pull up the blinds and groan at yet another grey miserable day. It can get us down. The conversation inside our heads can go something like this:

'It's raining again. I'm fed up with this weather – it really gets me down. I know it's going to be a horrible day today. I wish I were in the sunshine somewhere and not stuck here doing this.'

Can you hear the negativity in this dialogue? If this is what is going on inside your head you are telling your brain, and therefore your body, that you are fed up. You feel depressed so your body language goes into a downward spiral, which in turn sends negative messages back to your brain because, believe it or not, the brain and body are connected! So the brain goes into an even more downward spiral. As a result you snap at the kids, you grumble at your partner, you drive to work too fast and get cross with someone who cuts you up, the traffic seems worse than usual and the radio has nothing but bad news on it, or the train arrives late and is too crowded. By the time you get to work (if you have a job) you are feeling thoroughly disgruntled. What kind of day are you going to have? You've guessed - a very bad day.

So let's rewind (like 'Groundhog Day' for those of you who have seen the film).

You pull up the blinds and you look at the weather and say, *'It's raining again. Oh well, never mind. If we didn't have the rain we wouldn't appreciate the*

*sunshine. I can still have a good day today and I am going to have a good day.'*

I can't guarantee that the trains will then arrive on time, or that the motorways will be traffic and accident free or that your children won't be fighting, but it will start the day for you in a positive frame of mind rather than a negative one and that positivity, if maintained, will rub off on other people and create yet more positivity.

You need to train your brain to think in this way, and you can by recognizing the negative inner dialogues and converting them to positive ones. Positive dialogues inside your head will send positive messages to your body, your shoulders will go back and your body language will be positive which in turn sends positive signals back to the brain. A win-win situation. I will cover more on the inner voice in Chapters 4 and 10.

## **Reframing**

There is a wonderful expression in marketing and indeed political circles - it is called reframing. For example the General is not retreating he is simply advancing in a different direction!

There is always another way of looking at things and if you train your brain properly you will see this. As with our weather example we are looking at it in a different way. I can't recall who said 'There is no such thing as bad weather only bad clothing', but whoever did was looking at things in a different way – that's reframing.



## The window of opportunity

So you've started your day well with the right inner voice. Then you get stuck in a traffic jam. Now you have what I call a small window of opportunity in which you can choose how to react. You can choose to get stressed out and go into negative mode or you can choose to go into positive mode.

Our positive dialogue will be something like this:

*'I'm stuck in this traffic jam; there's nothing I can do about it. Getting angry won't make the traffic move any faster. I can call the office/home/my friend to let them know I am going to be late. I can put some music on the radio/tape/CD that I like and be patient.'*

Let others around you get stressed and have high blood pressure – it won't make the traffic move any quicker. One way I look at it is that often when I'm sitting in a traffic hold-up, ahead of me there could be people fighting for their life. Isn't it selfish that all we can think about is how it has inconvenienced us? You're alive and breathing - better late than never as the old saying goes.

In some instances you have a split second in which to choose how to react. You need to train yourself to see that split second and trigger your split second response: *'I can keep calm'*, will work for many people or *'I can handle this'*. Saying this mentally, or aloud, will send a positive message to your brain, your brain will in turn prime your body to respond in this way. Once this split second dialogue has kicked in you can then take a bit more time to examine your feelings and change the negative dialogue going through your brain to a positive one.

## Comfort zone

This is fine for the occasional traffic hold-up (did I say occasional – I should say frequent given the state of the roads these days?) However your lifestyle, or job, might be such that you are continually getting stressed because of the travelling you do. If this is so then perhaps you should reexamine your lifestyle. If you are not getting stressed but enjoy the travelling and take the delays in your stride then there will be no need for you to reexamine your lifestyle or job.

Changing your job or lifestyle is not easy and you may be reading this thinking *'That's impossible for me.'* 'Impossible' like the word 'never' is a **big** word - an exaggerated word. Never is a long time. And impossible? Is it really impossible? I'm not asking you to retrain as a brain surgeon (although that may be your heart's desire) and if you are feeling particularly negative while reading this book you might well have said to yourself *'That's all very well but I've got just about as much chance of becoming a brain surgeon as I have of changing my life. What does she know about my life, my commitments etc. I **CAN'T** change things. I'm trapped.'* If this is going through your head can you hear the negative dialogue? What are you going to do about it?

- hear it
- recognize it
- challenge it
- change it

As I said in my introduction being positive means you can see options. There are always options. Don't allow yourself to get stuck on the obstacles. It is sometimes not always easy to see the solutions immediately particularly if you are stressed, or it may take you time to change your lifestyle, but thinking about it then forming an action plan to change will help you become less stressed and move in a positive direction. Do you need to travel as much as you do? Can you find a different job closer to home? Are you trying to fit too much into your life? Does something have to go? Can you get a better balance?

Moving out of your comfort zone is never easy.  
It takes courage and creativity.

A good way to work through a problem is to try and formulate it. Identify the nature of the problem. For example: *'I am unhappy because I am not getting the recognition I deserve at work. This is because the boss doesn't like me.'* or *'I am unhappy because I don't like the boss.'* or *'I am unhappy at work and not getting promotion because I don't have the right qualifications.'* or *'I am unhappy at work because my problems at home have been distracting me of late.'*

So identify the nature of the problem. Look at it from all angles. Because you stop to think about the problem and to consider the greater range of explanations for it you will have a wider and less predictable range of options open out for you.

Do you need to free yourself from defined work paths to pursue what you really want? Do you know

what you want? (I examine goals in Chapter 4). Could you go part-time or job share? Could you try and fulfill your talents outside work if finances are a difficulty?

Here is what happened to me some years ago. I had a very good job as Head of Marketing and PR for an international firm of chartered accountants. The salary package was generous and each year I had a new company car. To some I had it made and yet increasingly I was becoming unhappy and couldn't define why. One day I was driving along the motorway to work when it suddenly struck me that I'd rather be cleaning toilets than doing the job I was doing. I knew then I had to do something about it. At the time this country was in the middle of a recession and it wasn't easy to change jobs; besides getting a similar job meant commuting and I knew I didn't want to spend my life sitting on a train or on a motorway. I had always had an ambition to run my own business and decided that if I was going to do it now was the time. It took me another year before I could hand in my resignation. During that year I scrimped and saved, the only new clothes I bought were from charity shops, until I had some money behind me which would help me over the first few difficult months until I could get some clients. When I duly handed in my notice I was asked if I would stay on as a consultant for six months, something I hadn't planned for but which suited me very well and what's more I was paid more as a consultant on a one day a week basis than as an employee. I never looked backed.

The fear of failure could have prevented me from taking that first step and I'd still be trapped in a job I didn't find fulfilling.

The fear of failure is what stops many of us from branching out and giving it a go.

Sometimes we are forced out of our comfort zone by circumstances, a redundancy or a marital break-up. Sometimes we need others to give us the push but why wait for that? So what if you fail, or shall we say fail to achieve what you set out in the first place? Think what you have gained along the way. No experience is ever wasted. You will gain something from it. By having a positive outlook you can learn and move onwards, using that experience to assess what you liked and didn't like, what went wrong and what went well.

One final word on this: instead of asking yourself what you want to achieve, ask yourself what you want? Is it to make other people happy? To be more creative? To be happier? Try writing it down, or come back to this after we have looked at values in Chapter 4.

Now let's look at some of the other negative elements on our list from Chapter 1:

- not being appreciated either at home or at work
- too much work and not enough time to do it
- being bored
- being constantly criticized

You may feel that all these are out of your control because how can you change the person who is constantly criticizing you, how can you be more appreciated?

Firstly, I want to stress that you cannot change another person so forget that idea for a start. Many people waste a great deal of time and energy trying to change others and become very disappointed and frustrated because they fail to do so and are constantly let down.

**You are the only person that can change you.  
Take responsibility for yourself. Take charge  
of yourself.**

By changing your own attitude, outlook, behaviour you will change the reaction you get back from others. So instead of complaining that Bill is always on your back moaning at you, or that your boss doesn't appreciate you, or that you've got too much work to do, recognize the negative dialogue in your head: you are moaning or grumbling, you are being pessimistic and you are not in control of your own life and emotions.

- hear the negative voice
- recognize it
- challenge it
- change it

And here I will add three further things:

- know yourself
- appreciate yourself

- speak out for yourself

These last two chapters have essentially looked at understanding what makes you feel negative. In the following chapters I look at the inner voice in more detail and how you can know yourself, appreciate yourself and ultimately speak out for yourself to get the life you want.

---

## **In summary**

- our inner voice is within our control: we can choose how we react to a situation, event or person
- understand that not everything is controllable in life but that your mental reaction and your inner voice is controllable
- recognize the window of opportunity you have and choose how you wish to react
- no experience is ever wasted: you can always learn from things even if they seem a disaster at the time
- you can choose to get stressed out and go into negative mode or you can choose to go into positive mode
- positive people have more options
- take responsibility for yourself; take charge of yourself

- 
- you can only change yourself
  - by changing your own attitude, outlook, behaviour you will change the reaction you get back from others.
  - recognize the negative dialogue in your head:  
hear it  
recognize it  
challenge it  
change it
  - know yourself, appreciate yourself, speak out for yourself
-



---

# 3

## Understanding stress

Life is about getting a balance. You can't do everything. Time is finite: there are only so many minutes in an hour, hours in a day and days in a year. None of us know how much time is allotted to us on this earth. We do not have forever and it is what we do with our time while here that counts. You need to apportion that time and importantly allow time for yourself as well as for others. You cannot do everything yourself and if you try, or believe you can then it could be a short ticket to the cemetery.

**The person who has the most options has the less negative stress.**

The pace of life today is fast – there are many pressures on us to do lots of things and to be all things to all men; good wives, mothers, career women, successful men, high flyers. Many people at some time (or

even many times throughout their lives) feel that they cannot cope with their jobs, their families, their responsibilities, their lives. Recognizing this and the fact that you are not alone helps: doing something about it will help change those feelings and help you take control.

## **Realistic expectations**

Unrealistic expectations may have been something you had on your list of what makes you feel negative. It may not only be your own expectations but also the expectations you have of others. If your expectations are too high and can't be met you will face disappointment and frustration.

Today, our expectations are much higher than our parents and grandparents. We are subjected to all sorts of influences of what we could or should aspire to, from the media, our teachers and others. While this is to be encouraged, in that we expect to be better educated, have better health and housing, it can also produce negative feelings because some of those expectations, especially material and lifestyle ones, are unrealistic; they are beyond our means to achieve and, therefore, make us resentful and discontented. For example if we don't have the new shiny BMW or the holiday in Florida, if we can't take our kids to Disney World then we can be made to feel guilty and inadequate, again negative feelings.

**Taking stock of what you have and examining your values can help you to readjust your expectations to the levels that you are happy with.**

If you are continually comparing what you have with others and find yourself lacking you will become bitter and resentful and cause yourself additional negative stress. For some of us, indeed for some of you reading this book, a return to valuing the simple things in life can prove to be invigorating and liberating.

Finding out what is really important to you can sometimes come after experiencing a shock like a bereavement of someone close to you. Only then do we realize how trivial some of the things we have been worrying about and striving for really are.

Some disasters can also cause us to reevaluate our lives, like a flood or fire. And natural events can also help to put our lives and expectations into perspective. I always remember watching the eclipse in 1999. The traffic in the town where I was at the time went silent and everyone stopped what they were doing to gaze up at the sky. People came out of offices, shops and factories. As I gazed up through special spectacles at the eclipse I wondered what would happen if the sun never came out again. I realized that we are all at the mercy of nature and that if the sun didn't come out having the shiny new BMW wouldn't matter a jot.

## **The right amount of stress**

But we all need some stress. The right amount of stress is good for us as it can lead to increased motivation and satisfaction. Too little stress and you'd be bored or dead! However, what stresses one person will not necessarily stress another so you need to know the things that cause you stress and so avoid them or find ways of dealing with them, and also how much stress you can take before it becomes unhealthy.

Your stress levels can also change with your age. What you found exhilarating at 20 could knock you flat at 40. The lifestyle you find comfortable in your thirties, with its hard work and gruelling timetable balancing home and kids could be very stressful when you hit your forties. Our bodies and minds change as we go through our lifecycle and we need to recognize this and not be surprised by it.

Research has shown that women experiencing the double shift of work and home have greater stressors than men. I have met many women in their early forties and mid to late fifties who are quite literally worn out. They are suffering high degrees of stress from a lifetime of balancing both worlds, trying to resolve the mental and physical conflict this has brought.

Another common high stress age is that of retirement. The busy working man or woman can have status, purpose, responsibility one day and nothing the next. We all need a framework for our lives and for many of us this is provided by work. When that framework goes we are left floundering. We feel useless. We feel that we don't belong anywhere and this can lead to high stress levels and illness. We need to prepare for retirement and create a new framework for ourselves.

This kind of stress is sometimes also experienced by young people leaving school, particularly those 'difficult' children who frequently play truant and often have an unhappy home life. They can't wait to leave the school they hate but when they do teachers often find them coming back, or hanging about outside the gates because the school was the only stable framework they had in their lives. Now it's gone they don't know how to create a new one.

## How do you recognize high levels of stress?

High levels of stress are associated with higher rates of nervousness, feelings of tenseness, restlessness, an inability to relax and a sense of being pressed for time.

If not acted upon the results can be:

- higher blood pressure, which can lead to strokes and heart attack
- more infections
- stomach ulcers
- depression and mental ill health
- increased smoking or drinking of alcohol and caffeine

Do you recognize any of these? Try the questionnaire below.

### Questionnaire

During the last month have you continually felt any of the things listed below?

Keyed up and on edge	Yes/No
Irritable	Yes/No
Mood swings	Yes/No
Tearful	Yes/No
Difficulty in relaxing and sleeping	Yes/No
Headaches	Yes/No

Low energy

Yes/No

A tendency to feel worse in the mornings even after a good night's sleep

Yes/No

If you have answered yes to over four of the questions above then heed the danger signs now: you could be in the early stages of negative stress so do something about it. If you don't you could fall ill.

I mentioned before that different people have different levels of stress. If you are what is known as a Type A personality then your stress threshold may be high. Type A personalities are people who are strivers and high achievers. Although generally speaking they can take higher levels of stress than others they are also more prone to stress. This is because they don't know when to ease the foot off the gas and as a consequence ignore the danger signs. This in turn can learn to burn-out and illness.

Type A's often thrive on stress, probably because their bodies manufacture more than the normal amount of noradrenalin the stress hormone which is associated with confidence and elation. This can become addictive because it gives you a 'high.' You therefore seek out more stressful situations and become 'hooked' on it. But at some stage this will become counterproductive as the body cannot keep this high level going indefinitely. We have all experienced moments of elation and then wondered why we felt flat and sometimes rather depressed afterwards. If a Type A becomes addicted to stress he will be in danger of collapse at some time and we have all heard of the men and women who on giving up powerful demanding jobs have dropped dead within six months! This doesn't have to be so if the right preparation is taken

and a new framework is put in place.

Overachievers are also at risk from stress-related illnesses. These are people who always seem to cope, who refuse to give in to illness and fatigue and take on demands of others often at their own expense. They can deny the possible dangers of stress until their health suffers.

You may be neither of the above but a fairly steady dependable sort of person, normally quite content, you like routine and the status quo. However the world is changing fast and change may be forced upon you at work or in your personal life. This can cause you a considerable amount of stress which if not recognized and acted upon again could lead to poor health.

### **A simple test**

So how do you recognize if you are a striver? Here is a quick and simple test.

Do you like to win at everything? Yes/No

Are you a team player? Yes/No

Do you like to do several things at the same time? Yes/No

Do you have a tendency to finish people's sentences for them? Yes/No

Are you impatient when thwarted Yes/No

Do you ever use the phrase ' I don't tolerate fools very easily?' Yes/No

Are you always in a rush, talking quickly, eating food quickly? Yes/No

If you have scored all yes's then you are a striver. Even the majority of yes's will pick you out as erring towards a Type A personality type.

If this is you then you need to recognize this and find ways to unwind and develop a less driven approach – difficult I know but essential to your well-being. How? Here are some ideas to help you:

**If you are feeling under pressure and experiencing stress try talking about it to someone.** This can be difficult, particularly for men, who do not naturally confide what they perceive to be their weaknesses to others but talking does help.

**Take time to think about yourself** and how you are feeling. By being more aware of yourself and your feelings you are more likely to pick up on stress. Hopefully this book will help you to do this.

**Take part in a sport or arts activity.** Physical activity is a terrific outlet for stress.

**Eat a healthy well-balanced diet.**

**Be sensible about how much alcohol you drink.**

**Get help to give up smoking.**

**Get enough sleep** and rest to recharge your energy levels.

**Learn to accept what you cannot change.**

**Know when you are tired and do something about it.** Don't push yourself too hard. If you are sick then don't try to carry on as if you are not.

**Manage your time better,** delegate if you can, say 'no'. You can prevent pressure from piling up (see Chapter 9).



**Agree with someone;** life should not be a constant battleground.

And if you are the sort of person who is always in a rush then here are some tips for you:

- try to restrain yourself from being the centre of attention
  - force yourself to listen to others
  - stop trying to finish their sentences for them
  - ask yourself:  
do I really have anything important to say?  
does anyone really want to hear it?  
is this the right time to say it?
  - must you do it right now or do you have enough time to think about the best way to accomplish it?
- 

## **In summary**

- negativity can lead to harmful stress which if not corrected will in turn lead to poor health
- life is about getting a balance – you can't do everything
- learn to trust and respect yourself and others
- the right amount of stress is good for us as it can lead to increased motivation and satisfaction. Too little stress and you'd be bored or dead!

- if suffering from negative stress talk to someone
  - take part in a sport or arts activity
  - take time to think about yourself and how you are feeling
  - be more aware of yourself and your feelings
  - eat a healthy well-balanced diet
  - be sensible about how much alcohol you drink
  - get help to give up smoking.
-

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# 4

## Know yourself

It stands to reason the better you know yourself the more able you are to cope with negative stresses. You can recognize what triggers your negative emotions and you can correct them.

But how many of us take the time to get know ourselves? Very few. Why is this? Sometimes it is because we have been conditioned that to think about ourselves is to be self-indulgent, selfish and arrogant. ***It is not.***

Self-confidence is not the same as over confidence.

Being self-confident recognizes that you know your faults as well as your strengths. Being over confident means that you do not recognize your faults or, certainly if you do, you do not acknowledge them to

yourself or to others. Humility is fine and is to be applauded so long as it is accompanied by self-knowledge and self-awareness, which lead to self-confidence. If humility is accompanied by low self-esteem and feelings of worthlessness then it is not fine.

## **Exercise**

### **Get to know yourself questionnaire**

Try answering some of these questions

- 1** What am I good at?
- 2** What am I bad at?
- 3** What do I most like doing?
- 4** What do I most dislike doing?
- 5** What types and levels of people can I mix freely with?
- 6** What type of role do I tend to take?  
lead  
drive  
arbitrate
- 7** How do other people describe me?
- 8** What words describe me in general terms?
- 9** What attainments am I most proud of?
- 10** Where do I see myself in five years time?
- 11** What would I like to become?

Some of the questions above are difficult to answer and you may have to think about them for some time. If you are feeling particularly low, or have poor self-esteem, you may have struggled to answer the

question: *'What am I good at?'* and may have written reams under the question: *'What am I bad at?'* Everyone is good at something; you need to find it and define it. If you have a close friend or colleague, whose opinions you value and trust, then enlist their help in doing this exercise.

*'What do I want to become?'* Now that is a difficult question – or is it? If you could be anything what would it be? As discussed in Chapter 2 it doesn't necessarily mean you want to be a brain surgeon: you could want to be an artist, a singer, a housewife, a bus driver. Defining what we want in life is not always easy because we don't always know. We have to strip away preconceptions before we can see the options. We can begin to do this by looking at our values and setting goals.

## Your values

Knowing what you value in life and keeping these constantly in mind will help you deal with difficult situations and difficult people. Often when we are under stress and feeling negative things get out of proportion. You need to get a sense of perspective back in your life. You need to know what you value.

### Exercise

Take a piece of paper and list on it all the things that you value in your life, everything that is significant in it, for example: your partner, your children, your health.

Think long and hard about them. Can you prioritize them? It isn't always easy.

I often do this exercise with my students as it helps me to reevaluate where I am going with my life. It was

quite a shock to me a short while ago to realize that my life was out of kilter.

For years I had been working hard, striving to get to the top and eventually running my own business and yet I realized that work had taken over my life. I had nothing outside of work except my relationship with my long-suffering and very patient husband and I was even putting that at risk! My life consisted of getting up, working nearly twelve hours a day, coming home, glass or two of wine, eating, crashing out and sleeping. I found myself constantly thinking of work and waking up with the three o'clock horrors – that's when you lie there worrying about everything and anything, unable to get back to sleep.

I would wake up the next morning feeling tired and the whole cycle would begin again. I was finding that I was getting through the days by going from one appointment to another wishing my life away – crazy.

I am sure many of you reading this book will identify with this in some way. I know from the number of people I meet on my courses there are a very high proportion of people who feel that their life is out of control. One lady said to me that all she wanted to do was to cook a nice meal for her family and serve it up instead of taking food from the freezer to the microwave and plonking it on the table. She didn't have time to do anything else. She wasn't alone. She wanted **time**.

I needed to get the balance back into my life. I did this by looking at my values first.

My values before this experience read something like this:

success  
career  
achievements

respected  
status  
liked  
husband  
health

Now revisiting them they read:

health  
husband  
creativity  
fulfillment  
social

Prioritizing them is difficult as joint top would be health and husband.

## Exercise

Now take another piece of paper and divide it down the middle and then into squares or boxes. The number of squares you need will depend on how many things you listed in your values exercise above. Put a value heading in each box, as shown in the example below.

Partner/Husband	Children
Health	Social life
Hobbies	Religion/Faith

## Goals

Now in order to give you focus you need to think about your goals for each of the above. Example goals might be:

to spend more time with my partner

to help my children more with their schoolwork

Put your goals under the headings in each box.

Once the goals have been added you then need to think about how you are going to achieve those goals. Some goals may take you longer to achieve than others. And some may seem quite daunting when you first look at them. For example under health you might wish to give up smoking and perhaps you are saying to yourself *'I shall never be able to do that. I tried once and failed.'*

Can you hear the negative dialogue? Did you have a negative voice on any of your goals? If you did then remember:

**hear it**

**recognize it**

**challenge it**

**change it**

In the above example I used the word 'never'. Never is a long time. Every time you hear that word challenge it.

There is an old maxim 'Adults fail because they expect to fail'. If you think you will fail then you most invariably will. So let's change that negative voice.



## Rewind:

'I know it's going to be tough giving up smoking (or chocolate/alcohol/changing my job) but I **can** do it. I can take it step by step. I can seek help and I can do it.'

Make sure your goals are positive goals; about things you want to do with your life not things you wish to get rid of, for example to get fit is a positive goal rather than '*I want to stop feeling such a slob!*'

Goals will also need to be:

- measurable
- achievable
- realistic
- timed

You will need to put in a measurement otherwise how will you know when you are fit? By when would you like to achieve this fitness level? What do you define as being fit? Is this achievable? The worst thing you can do is set yourself unrealistic goals. If you don't meet them you will be disappointed. You may be better able to flesh out your goals and the timetable for achieving them when you have put in place the steps required to reach that goal.

## Example goal

To get fit so that I can run two miles easily (or climb a hill without stopping halfway up) by (and put a date).

## Steps

Now you need to look at your goals and underneath

each put in the steps you can take to reach your goal.

For example:

### **Partner**

**Goal:** To spend more time with my partner/husband/wife.

**Step:** Starting from Monday I will come home early from work at least once a week and enjoy a meal with my partner (even if it is beans on toast).

Yes, it needs to be that basic. But if you are working all hours God sends by making that commitment to come home early, or even leaving work at your allotted time, it will be a big step. Set the goal, take the first step and stick to it no matter what. It will be tough but you **can** do it.

### **Fitness/Health**

**Goal:** to get fit so that I can run two miles easily (or climb a hill without stopping half-way up) by (and put a date).

**Steps:** to walk at least twenty minutes three days a week.

Or

To cycle three miles once a week.

And what if your goal is to give up smoking, drinking alcohol or eating chocolate or similar?

Finding out why you drink, smoke or eat too much or why you feel you can't change your lifestyle is important and the reasons may be embedded deep inside you. You may find you need help taking the first step on this road.

Keeping a diary may be one way of doing it. When you reach for the wine bottle or the cigarette when is this? Why do you feel the need for it? What are your feelings? If you can identify them you may be able to identify the cause. What can you do instead of abusing your health? Take a few deep breaths, walk away, take a walk around the office or the garden.

## Positive thinking

When setting your goals, and trying to attain them, it is important to have the right dialogue in your head. If you tell yourself you are fat then you will be thinking fat and you will stay that way. If you tell yourself that only you have control over what you put in your mouth then you are taking control of your mind and not conditioning it to be negative. You will find it much easier to give up sweets, chocolates and cakes etc.

If you need to improve your diet then don't feel you have to change all your eating habits at once. As I have indicated above take **steps** to change it.

You have to take responsibility for your own life. You have to take control of it – no one else. There isn't a magic pill that will change you or your circumstances, if you want to change them you have to make them happen and only you can do it.

## In summary

- the better you know yourself the more able you are to cope with negative stresses
  - self-confidence is not the same as over confidence
  - being self-confident recognizes that you know your faults as well as your strengths and being over confident means that you do not recognize your faults or you do not acknowledge them
  - knowing what you value in life and keeping these constantly in mind will help you deal with difficult situations and people by getting things into perspective
  - make sure your goals are positive goals; about things you want to do with your life, not things you wish to get rid of
  - goals also need to be measurable; achievable; realistic; timed
  - when setting your goals it is important to have the right dialogue in your head
  - you have to take responsibility for your own life: you have to take control of it – no one else.
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# 5

## Being assertive

Assertiveness is a characteristic of behaviour not of a person. We are not born assertive: it is something that we need to learn. Why? Because it leads to better health.

### So what is an assertive person?

An assertive person is someone who is confident enough to stand up for himself while respecting the rights of others.

An assertive person is someone who has a positive mental attitude, self-belief and the confidence to express opinions. Someone who behaves assertively is keen to reach solutions to conflicts that give satisfaction to both sides. They will listen to others and do not impose their views on them. Their body language is confident and open, and their eye contact good.

However assertive behaviour is not a natural form of

behaviour for human beings. Humans are primed to behave in a certain way when faced with danger. Our natural reflexes mean that we will either want to run away from that danger (flight) or attack it first before it gets us (fight). This is known as the **flight or fight response** and can be translated into either behaving submissively (flight) or behaving aggressively (fight).

In today's society however, it is not acceptable that we behave like this: if we do then not only could we end up in trouble with the law but we could also damage our health. Behaving in an aggressive manner results in an increased heart rate which can lead to high blood pressure, and therefore possibly heart attack and strokes. Behaving submissively leads to low self-worth and a lack of confidence which can result in greater exposure to viruses, infections and depression. And swinging between these two forms of behaviour will again result in poor health, as your body is continually preparing to fight or flight.

So we need to adopt assertive behaviour which not only benefits society but also leads to better health for us as individuals.

Having said what assertiveness is let's just clarify the other forms of behaviour; **submissive** (flight) and **aggressive** (fight). As you read the following sections think of situations where you have been forced into a corner, i.e into doing something you don't want to do; how do you behave? Look at the descriptions below and see whether either of these is typical of your response.

## What does submissive behaviour mean?

Submissive behaviour means neglecting to defend your personal rights and beliefs. You put the rights of others before your own rights.

## Are you behaving submissively?

I am always apologizing when I don't need to be Yes/No

I have difficulty in making requests and go about it in a roundabout way Yes/No

I am quietly spoken Yes/No

I find it difficult holding eye contact with another person Yes/No

I try not to be noticed in meetings or gatherings Yes/No

I fidget unnecessarily Yes/No

I have difficulty in speaking my mind Yes/No

I don't like rocking the boat but prefer to keep things as they are, even if I don't like them Yes/No

I have difficulty in expressing my feelings Yes/No

If you have answered mainly yes then your behaviour is submissive.

## What makes us become submissive?

As mentioned before we can become submissive when we are under attack or even when we think we are going to be attacked. We can run away or withdraw into ourselves.

We can become submissive when faced with a bullying boss, partner, parent or someone else in an authoritative position.

Submissive individuals usually have low self-esteem which can sometimes, but not necessarily always, be formed as a child. If you are told that you are useless, too fat, too tall, too thin, too clumsy this is how you will end up seeing yourself and your self-worth will be dented.

I once met a lady who had been adopted and all throughout her childhood she had been told by her adoptive parents that she should be grateful for having been adopted, otherwise she would have ended up in a children's home. This cruelty may have been inadvertent or deliberate but the damage was done. That lady grew up believing she had to be grateful to everyone, she had very little self-worth and subsequently was very submissive. Over the years I have had the pleasure of helping this lady and I have seen her take control of her life, gain promotion and become much more assertive.

## What does aggressive behaviour mean?

Aggressive behaviour means that you consider your rights and beliefs are more important than other people and you say so.



## Are you behaving aggressively?

I tend to deliver instructions and commands without consulting others	Yes/No
I like to be in control	Yes/No
I use a fair bit of sarcasm	Yes/No
When I am upset I can hold a grudge for a long time afterwards	Yes/No
When I am upset I fly off the handle too quickly	Yes/No

If you have answered mainly yes, then you are behaving aggressively.

## What makes us become aggressive?

Apart from being threatened, or in danger of attack and adopting the fight response, people become aggressive, or use aggression, for all sorts of other reasons. They may see that aggressive behaviour gets results and unfortunately it does in the short term. However, if an aggressive boss uses this behaviour regularly then he will very soon end up losing staff and especially those self-confident and assertive staff. The company will lose out in the long run by not being able to attract and retain bright confident individuals who contribute to its growth and future success.

The child screaming its head off in the supermarket is rewarded by its mother or father with a bag of sweets to keep it quiet – what is this saying to that child? Behave badly and you will be rewarded. The child will carry on behaving badly because that way people give it things, or allow it to do what it wants. It doesn't

know any different and if this is not corrected, in school or at home, as the child grows up it will continue to behave badly and use aggression to get what it wants.

People also behave aggressively because it gives them a sense of power and sometimes it covers up for their own insecurity.

You may come across as too aggressive to others because you are trying too hard to assert yourself. Or perhaps you have difficulty in dealing with difficult people and don't have the words to describe how you are feeling and so in the end come over as being argumentative. The techniques described in Chapters 10 and 11 should help you to give a more assertive response.

## **Responding assertively**

Let's now look at an example and see how we can respond assertively.

You agree to pick up a colleague on your way to work, knowing this means you getting up an ungodly hour, taking the children to their grandparents earlier than usual and having to go slightly out of your way which means you will get stuck in the traffic jam by the industrial estate. But you say yes and then make yourself ill and get cross with everyone else around you, busting a gut to do it.

You have given into a request when you would have preferred not to. In this example you have behaved submissively. So how should you have dealt with this request in an assertive way?

Your assertive response to the request should have been:

*'Sorry Jane, I can't give you a lift as it is out of my way.'*

*I could pick you up en route though, by the cinema.'*

You have suggested a much more convenient place to pick up Jane which does not mean you have to go to the ends of the earth to accommodate her. In all likelihood she'll probably say *'Oh don't bother, I'll ask my boyfriend if he'll bring me. I just thought I'd try you first.'*

The assertive response sees you standing up for yourself. I could go further and say that you don't really have to apologize or give a reason (though some people will find this difficult). You could simply say. *'I can't Jane, but I could pick you up en route by the cinema.'* I deal with refusing requests in more detail in Chapter 9.

It would be great if we could all be assertive and confident all the time but this is hardly realistic. You may normally be a very confident person but then something in your life knocks that confidence back and leads to feelings of inadequacies and doubts about yourself and your abilities. A divorce, bereavement and other life-changing events like redundancy, or a bullying boss or colleague will affect you and make you feel negative.

Sometimes, when a mother sees her children off to work or university her level of confidence is affected because her role in life has changed and she is no longer needed in the same way as when her children were young. Many women then have to redefine themselves and find a new direction and focus for their life before they can regain their confidence.

Being assertive can help us take control of our lives and give us a positive outlook.

## In summary

- there are three main types of behaviour:  
**assertive**  
**aggressive**  
**submissive**
- submissive means neglecting to defend your personal rights and beliefs
- aggressive means considering your rights and beliefs are more important than other people's
- assertive means standing up for your own rights without violating the rights of others
- being assertive means that you are confident enough to express your opinions, views and ideas and that you expect those opinions, views and ideas to be listened to
- people behave aggressively because it gives them a sense of power and sometimes it covers up for their own insecurity
- people behave aggressively if they are threatened
- people become submissive when they are under attack or when they think they are going to be attacked
- people become submissive when faced with a bullying boss, partner, parent or someone else in an authoritative position
- submissive individuals usually have low self esteem
- being assertive can help us take control of our lives and give us a positive outlook.

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# 6

## Self-esteem

Self-esteem is forged at a very young age. It is the picture we form of ourselves through the eyes (and subsequently through the words and actions) of others: our parents, our relatives, our teachers and friends. It is the value we place upon ourselves.

To enable children to have a high self-esteem it is important that they experience rewards for good behaviour, that they are treated fairly and are heard and respected by their parents, teachers and other adults. The discipline they receive should be fair and not erratic.

Girls generally have naturally lower self-esteem than boys. Some girls are uncomfortable in a superior role; they tend to underestimate their abilities and are prepared to accept second best. Girls also tend to set themselves lower goals in life than boys. They will repress their successes when with boys. This can continue into adulthood and indeed into the workplace where often women will put down their successes with a modest 'It was nothing' even when they have spent a great

deal of energy completing a very difficult and complex task successfully. Men are generally much better at telling others how well they have done or are doing.

Of course there are men, perhaps reading this book, who are suffering from this same low self-esteem and false modesty as their female counterparts and there could be very confident women reading this book who have no difficulties in expressing their views, opinions and telling others of their successes.

For others to appreciate you, you first need to appreciate yourself.

## **What do you like about yourself?**

Take a piece of paper and for one minute write down what you like about yourself, for example: your sense of humour, your smile, your loyalty, your body, etc.

Did you struggle with this exercise? Are you still looking at a blank piece of paper?

In my experience many people find this exercise incredibly difficult. Yet, if I were to ask you what you don't like about yourself you probably wouldn't stop scribbling for ten minutes. Why is it we are comfortable telling people what we don't like about ourselves or what we are 'useless' at, rather than what we are good at? Why is it that when many of us are paid a compliment we shrug it off or throw it back in the person's face?

## Example

Boss: *'You did a good job on that report, Mary.'*

Mary: *'Oh it was nothing.'*

And yet Mary had stayed late working to finish that report and had worked hard – she still shrugs it off.

Friend: *'You look nice today, Joan. I like your suit.'*

Joan: *'Oh I've had this ages. I bought it from the charity shop.'*

Let's rewind and try this again with the correct responses:

Boss: *'You did a good job on that report, Mary.'*

Mary: *'Thank you. I worked hard on that and I am pleased with the results.'*

Friend: *'You look nice today, Joan. I like your suit.'*

Joan: *'Thank you.'*

## What are your strengths?

### Exercise

In Chapter 4 I asked you to complete a questionnaire on getting to know yourself. One of the questions in that questionnaire was 'What am I good at?' Now look again at this question and your answers, with this in mind write down what you consider to be your strengths. Often your strengths are those things that you are good at.

Some of you again may have had difficulty with this

exercise. You really do not know what your strengths are and need someone else to help you to kick-start the process. If this is you then enlist the help of someone whose opinions you value and whom you trust and ask them to list what they consider your strengths to be. Then review them together.

But sometimes it must go further than this. Not only do you need to take stock of your strengths but you may also need to tell others and draw their attention to your qualities. You may need to say *'I am good at that. It is a particular strength of mine.'*

But you cringe – why? Because it sounds too much like blowing your own trumpet. For years, centuries even, we have been told, or been conditioned, to be modest. I am not talking about bragging or boasting but about being confident about who you are and what your strengths are.

Why do we find this exercise difficult? Because your negative voice is saying *'What if someone shoots me down and says I'm not good at this?'* They often don't and won't. If they do what are their motives for doing so? Is it envy, fear, insecurity? If you are realistic about your strengths then hold fast to them, do not allow others to hijack them. Remember that positive voice, *'Yes, I am good at this. Yes, I do like my voice, smile'* etc.

So what if someone is unfairly criticizing you or constantly criticizing you (remember our list of negatives in Chapter 1?) If you haven't taken stock of your assets or strengths you will not be able to correct this either mentally or verbally.

I do a great deal of work in the education sector and teachers have to put up with a lot of criticism, especially public criticism. They are constantly being told



that whatever they do, it is not good enough. Good and bad teachers are lumped together. More and more work is being heaped onto them; they are under pressure to teach more in a shorter day. If they read in the newspapers, or hear on the radio, that they are not teaching well even the good confident teachers can begin to develop a negative inner voice. Whatever they do just does not seem to be enough.

So how do good teachers cope with this constant pressure and constant criticizing? By getting the right inner voice. They can only do this by knowing their strengths, by knowing that they are good at their jobs and to keep telling themselves so. They can't change the criticism from on high because it is out of their control but the good teachers can be assured that what they are doing is good and tell themselves so.

### Exercise

- 1** List your strengths/positive assets/what you like about yourself.
- 2** Put this up on a board near your desk, or in the bathroom at home, or anywhere where you can see it.
- 3** Look at it every morning.
- 4** Say your positive traits out loud to yourself in the car, in the bathroom, in the garden.
- 5** When you are feeling negative, or someone has said something negative to you, revisit this list and remind yourself of your good points and take that negative voice out of your head.

## In summary

- self-esteem is forged at a very young age
  - self-esteem is the picture we form of ourselves through the eyes, words and actions of others
  - girls generally have naturally lower self-esteem than boys
  - for others to appreciate you, you need to appreciate yourself
  - you need to take stock of your strengths and weaknesses
  - if you are realistic about your strengths then hold fast to them – do not allow others to hijack them
  - say your positive traits out loud to yourself in the car, in the bathroom, in the garden
  - when you are feeling negative, or someone has said something negative to you, then revisit your strengths and remind yourself of your good points
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# 7

## How to project a confident image

Image is important because (unfortunately) we do judge by appearances. The wrong image can blow your credibility before you even open your mouth. Projecting the right image can make you feel and act more positively and therefore make others act more positively towards you.

### Appearance

How you look, your clothes and your personal grooming are important.

If you look dishevelled then people will think you are disorganized and scatterbrained. If for example you are a teacher and you need to communicate with a parent the serious subject of their child misbehaving

in school then you will need to look authoritative (but not hostile) otherwise you won't be taken seriously. You will also need to speak with a clear and positive voice and communicate through confident body language.

If you have an important business meeting to attend and your little boy has just been sick on your best suit, or you haven't had time to have your hair cut and styled, this is saying that you're disorganized or lazy. People will think that if you don't care about your appearance then you won't really care about the job/project.

When it comes to dress women usually make more mistakes than men because they have more choice in what they wear. Men have had their uniform for a long time, the suit and shirt and tie. In some industries, like the information technology industry, the dress code has become more relaxed but that's still no reason to look untidy and to smell!

Your clothes do say a lot about your personality and rather than clone people to look a certain way I think you need to find that personality and to be comfortable with what you wear but at the same time be conscious of the impression you are giving out.

## Choosing the right colours

Colour can have a major influence on how we feel, from the colours we use in our homes, the colours of nature and the changing seasons, to the colours we wear. Women have a much greater range of choice when it comes to wearing colour although, I am glad to say, men too are being more adventurous today.

Women can also wear coloured jackets and suits which means they have a great tool at their disposal but they can also get it terribly wrong. If, for example, a woman is wearing a pastel coloured jacket, then she is communicating that she is feminine and gentle because these colours are soft, even if she's not. This might be the right impression to give out on some occasions and the wrong one on others. A bright red jacket is a power signal. Red is also the colour for danger: fire engines are red. She could wear her red jacket into a meeting and send out danger signals to the other people around the table, particularly men. Why particularly men? How many men do you know who wear red suit jackets? Only at Butlins – if they still do. So again you need to be wary of the colours you wear.

When deciding on what to wear ask yourself the following:

- what is the message I wish to communicate?
- who am I going to see or meet?
- what should I wear?

If a man wears a dark pinstriped suit to visit a farmer then the farmer is likely to think he's from the Inland Revenue, and not some friendly rep come to sell him something. If this is the image or message you want to portray, then fine, if not then you have blown it even before you open your mouth.

**Use clothes to assert yourself.**

## Choosing the right type of clothes

How do you feel when you put on your jogging pants, or a pair of jeans or shorts? Relaxed, comfortable? How do you feel when you put on a dinner suit or an evening dress?

The clothes you wear make you feel differently, they make you walk differently, they change your body language and therefore the messages you are sending out to others.

For work, getting the right clothes is important for how you feel, act and perform. You may have little choice in the matter because your occupation requires you to put on a uniform, but even if you are not required to wear a formal uniform we still have a uniform of sorts for most jobs i.e. the suit for office wear.

There are now some companies that operate a dress down day on a Friday. However, some people feel uncomfortable about this and research has shown that performance can drop on the days when people come into work in a more casual form of dress. This has therefore led to some companies abolishing this rule and sometimes at the request of its employees. Some men wouldn't feel dressed if they didn't wear a tie to work although others would hate it and often their jobs don't require them to do so.

Those who work from home are often advised to dress as if they are out to work to enhance their professionalism and boost their confidence.

The 'no uniform day' in schools is dreaded by most

teachers who will very quickly tell you that they make the pupils unruly.

So there is something to be said for dressing the part to boost your confidence and to project a more positive image. This doesn't mean the power suit, it just means wearing what makes you feel good and is appropriate for the task: you wouldn't wear an evening dress to do the vacuuming or change a tap and you wouldn't wear your best suit to unblock the lavatory! That may just be common sense but then there is no substitute for that.

At work, as a woman, if you dress in flounces and frills, pastel colours, wear lots of make up and speak in a little girl voice it is unlikely that you will be taken seriously.

If dressed for the disco or nightclub then again I doubt you will be taken seriously in the workplace.

**The more flesh you show the less credible you are.**

Whatever your size or shape, male or female, be aware of body shape and the styles and shapes of clothes that emphasize this. Use clothing signals to assert yourself and show rapport with others.

Learn to play up your strengths and down your weaknesses. What colours enhance you, what colours drain you? Take advice from a colour or style consultant if necessary.

Remember:

You never get a second chance to make a first impression!

## Giving a presentation

You may be asked to give a presentation. If you are to inform your audience then you will need to project authority. Here you need to dress in a smart, classic style. A darker suit will aid authority and you can wear it with a coloured scarf or tie. Check the fit of the suit when buttoned. When you are standing giving a formal presentation your suit should be buttoned up.

For the more informal presentation where you want people to open up, for example a training seminar, staff meeting, or creative thinking session then you can wear less severe colours and styles and can use brighter colours and patterns. But don't bombard your audience with too many colours or too bold a pattern, or you will overwhelm them and distract them from your essential purpose.

## Self-image

Your self-image, how you see yourself, is vital to your well-being.

If you are constantly comparing yourself with others and find yourself lacking then you are putting yourself down.



For example, you see or meet someone and that negative voice inside you says, *'She looks nice, I wish I looked like that'* or *'He's got a good physique, I wish mine was like that'*. Can you see how you come out the poorer in this exchange? You might continue with this inner dialogue adding, *'I will never be as slim or attractive as that, it's not fair, there's nothing I can do about it, no one will like me, I don't know why I bother ...'* If dialogues like this are going through your head can you hear how negative they are? How are you going to feel? Yes, pretty miserable. And what is your body language going to do? Yes, be slumped and negative.

So what do we need to do about it? Let's rewind and correct this negative inner voice:

*'She looks good. I am different to her and I look good too.'*

It may seem strange to you, and you may not believe it at first, but remember the power of the brain. By stating this to yourself you are conditioning your brain into a positive response, this will have an effect on your body language which will be more positive and in turn send positive messages back to your brain.

**Value your individuality.**

Revisit your checklist on the good points you came up with earlier. Say them to yourself. Tell yourself what you have going for yourself.

## Are you presenting yourself as a stereotype?

Do you model yourself on a television personality or pick a ready-made image off the shelf of someone you admire or even envy? This can be just as damaging for you. How can you be like another person? You are you, you are unique – value that uniqueness. Re-visit your list of strengths and tell yourself what you have going for you.

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### In summary

- image is important; the wrong image can blow your credibility before you even open your mouth
- how you are perceived plays a large part in communication
- if you look dishevelled then people will think you are disorganized and scatterbrained
- your clothes say a lot about your personality
- dress to suit your personality but at the same time be aware of the impression you are giving out
- colour can have a major influence on the way you feel
- when deciding what to wear ask:  
What is the message I wish to communicate?

Who am I going to see or meet?

What should I wear?

- if you are constantly comparing yourself with others and find yourself lacking then you are putting yourself down
  - value your individuality
  - use clothes to assert yourself and to change how you feel
  - learn to play up your strengths and down your weaknesses
  - remember you never get a second chance to make a first impression!
  - for a formal presentation you will need to project authority
  - for an informal presentation you can wear less severe colours and styles and can use brighter colours and patterns
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# 8

## Body language

How you project yourself through your body language is vitally important. You may be saying (speaking) the right words but if your body language is communicating another message then it is this message that your recipient/s will hear.

**Non-verbal signals are said to be at least four and a half times as effective as verbal signals and facial expressions eight times as powerful as the words used.**

We look at someone a third of the time we are talking to them and this look can convey anything from boredom and irritation to enthusiasm and liking.

You can also enhance the image you project and your feelings of self-confidence by deliberately using more positive body language. As stated in Chapter 1, positive

body language will send positive messages to your brain, which in turn will send even more positive messages back to your body language. People will pick up on this and will therefore act more positively towards you.

## **Your handshake**

Your handshake can say a great deal about you. A firm dry handshake reveals confidence, professionalism and status. If you have a weak handshake, even if you are not a weak person, it will give out the wrong impression. So what is your handshake like? Try shaking hands with someone you know and ask them for their honest opinion. If you need to firm it up then practice it.

Women need to give what I call the man's handshake. Take the whole hand and not just the fingertips. Grasp the hand and ensure your handshake is firm. Sometimes women are unsure whether or not to shake hands. This is because the handshake is essentially a male form of greeting. However there are now many women in business and therefore women too need to shake hands not only with men but also with other women. If in doubt always offer your hand first and invariably the other person will take it.

## **What the handshake can reveal**

The double clutch handshake is often referred to as the politician's handshake. It is where someone wants to touch more of you to connect with you. It is also a dominant gesture. This person is saying to you that they are in charge of the interchange between you. If you do not wish to accept this then put your other

hand on top of theirs. It may feel a little funny but it is perfectly acceptable and communicates to the other person that you can be equally forceful even if you don't feel it!

The at-arms-length handshake, stiff and fully extended is telling others to keep away. You are saying that you feel threatened, or that you are aloof or superior to them.

The person who holds onto your hand longer than is necessary is giving out a dominant signal. This person is saying, *'I am not going to let go of you until I feel like it because I am in charge here.'* There is very little you can do about this except tighten your pressure and keep your eye contact on the other person, smiling at the same time.

The vice-like grip again is a dominant gesture or indicates a dominant personality. In this case return the pressure and again keep good eye contact with the other person.

When you shake hands take the whole hand with firmness, smile and make direct eye contact.

## The first impression

As the saying goes you never get a second chance to make a first impression so make sure it's the impression you want. If you would like to exude confidence, even if you don't feel that confident, then you can by getting your appearance right and by communicating the correct body language. The first body language signals are:

- **handshake**

- **eye contact**
- **smile**

When you meet someone, walk up to them with your hand outstretched, smile at them and give them good strong eye contact. Take their hand in a firm grasp (but not too firm) with your elbow tucked into your waist, keep your body posture upright and your shoulders back and make a pleasant opening remark – there is nothing wrong with saying, ‘How do you do?’ or ‘Pleased to meet you’ or ‘Hello I’m ... (give your name)’ or all three – ‘How do you do? I’m (name). I’m pleased to meet you.’

## Walking confidently into a room

Making an entrance may not be your style but equally cringing and hugging the escape hatch (the door) should not be either. Most people find it daunting walking into a crowded room, or a room full of strangers, but you **can do it**.

How?

First have you got the right inner voice – a positive one?

Let’s examine what is being said inside your head:

‘I’m dreading this. I wish I didn’t have to do this. Everyone’s going to be looking at me and laughing at me. I won’t know anyone there. It’s going to be awful.’

Do you **hear** that faulty negative inner voice?

Tell it to **stop**



## hear it recognize it

Next we need to **challenge it**. Will everyone be looking at me? Why will people be laughing at me? Of course they won't.

**Change** it to a positive inner voice:

'There will be others who will be equally nervous. I won't be alone. I can handle this. No one's going to eat me, it's not life threatening, I can deal with this.'

Get that positive dialogue going inside your head, tell yourself that you can do it, set your shoulders back, take stock of your positive qualities, and walk in. Keep your body posture upright but not taut; scan the room for a friendly face and head for it. I look for the person standing alone (there is always one) and make a beeline for them. Using the greeting mentioned previously I might follow this up with *'I don't know anyone here, do you?'* And the conversation can start to flow. Alternatively if there is a queue for coffee or lunch I will join it and start talking to either the person in front of me or behind me the common topic being the queue or the event we're both attending.

## Visualization

One technique that I find works well if you are feeling nervous is to recall an occasion in your life when you felt very confident and happy. This could be when you passed your driving test, or an exam; how did you feel then? Elated, confident, happy; what do you think your body language was like? Confident, positive, good? Visualize that moment again in your mind and that will evoke the same feelings and positive body language.

## **Personal space**

Personal space is the space around us that we feel comfortable in. We only allow those close to us to invade that space. If others do uninvited then we feel threatened by it and wish to step back. Make sure you are not invading other's personal space. Different cultures have different distances so be aware of this.

## **Meetings**

### **Where to sit**

If you want recognition at a meeting always sit within good eye contact of the decision maker (who may not always be the chair).

To mitigate a confrontation sit next to the challenger. It is far more difficult to attack from the side. Avoid sitting directly opposite the person.

If you are a junior, or new participant, wait to be told where to sit.

To avoid attention sit in a blind spot for the chair, that is where it is physically difficult for them to see you and wear your most neutral outfit with no special accessories.

## **Positive body language signals**

- try linking your hands together as though to form a steeple – this prevents you making nervous mannerisms
- if you have a table in front of you, with your hands linked, you stake out territory for yourself – this

suggests confidence and self-possession

- stillness suggests ease and comfort in a situation, especially the ability to keep hands and feet still and relaxed
- gestures showing open palms of hands demonstrate openness and confidence
- sitting asymmetrically demonstrates confidence in taking space
- leaning forward indicates interest, but it can also indicate that you are putting in quite a lot of effort and seeking involvement at the expense of your self-possession therefore it can lower your status
- stand comfortably with your hands and arms relaxed at your side

### **Further impressive body language signals**

- sit upright and alert
- keep your eyes on the speaker
- take notes in a meeting, not constantly, but key points
- turn your body to the speaker/chair
- when listening keep your body open, arms leaning forward on the table, hands gently folded, stay relaxed.
- use open gestures

- smile, use humour to alleviate tension

## **Negative body language signals to avoid**

- nervous mannerisms, nail biting, finger and foot tapping, playing with hair, or adjusting clothing, smoothing eyebrows
- playing with objects and personal effects; wedding rings, pencils etc. which often indicates tension
- pointing at people, waving your fist, thumping the table, shows aggression and tension
- touching the face is associated with negative emotions – guilt, self-doubt, irritation
- touching the chin and mouth: doubt, reluctance to speak or accept what is being said
- touching the nose: said to be an indication of lying
- touching the eye: not liking what you are seeing or not wanting to see any further
- touching the ears: not liking what you are hearing

### **Don't**

- slouch
- look down at notes, out of window, at the ceiling

- doodle
  - physically turn away
  - fold your arms tightly across your body which says you're not listening
  - growl, frown, or use cynical expressions.
- 

## **In summary**

- how you project yourself through your body language is vitally important
  - you can also enhance your self-confidence by deliberately using more positive body language
  - a firm dry handshake reveals confidence, professionalism and status
  - if you have a weak handshake, even if you are not a weak person, it will give out the wrong impression
  - take the whole hand with firmness, smile and make direct eye contact
  - make sure you are not invading other's personal space
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# 9

## It's what you say and how you say it

You can project a positive image and increase your feelings of being positive by using the power of language and expressing yourself with clarity: speaking in a strong, steady voice neither shouting nor mumbling.

### Exercise

Record a conversation with a friend or colleague then play it back. How does your voice sound?

Do you need to change the way you speak? I am not talking about accents here; accents are fine as long as others can understand you, but about the clarity of your voice. To sound enthusiastic as well as interesting vary the pace of your voice. Keep your head up and your voice box open. Practice giving good direct eye contact as you talk to the other person.

If your voice is too loud or too fast then practice speaking more softly and slowly. To build rapport you need to match the pace and pitch of the other person. Be aware of how others speak and adapt your style accordingly.

## Watch your language

### Example

John wanted to convince his boss that he needed two more people on his team. He had the facts and figures to back this up but when he met the boss he kept adding in little phrases like:

*'Do you know what I mean?'*

*'You know?'*

*'Can you understand what I'm saying?'*

*'Actually'*

*'In fact'*

*'Basically'*

At the end of his case the boss was far from convinced. John was weakening the power of his words by using statements that were unnecessary and in some cases he put question marks at the end of them. This makes John sound as if he is constantly seeking permission for his arguments. If you keep qualifying what you are saying and checking that others approve you will not sound definite or confident. I have used a male in the above example but unfortunately women do this far more than men.

### Exercise

Do you pepper your conversation with unnecessary phrases and words? Return to your tape-recording – what unnecessary phrases do you use?

Are you guilty of using phrases that put you down? For example:

*'I'm hopeless at this.'*



*'You know me, I seem to be useless at ...'*

*'I can't seem to ...'*

Another thing we sometimes do is apologize when we don't need to for example:

*'I'm sorry but I thought you said ...'* (he did – why should you apologize?)

*'I'm terribly sorry, I didn't really mean to ...'*

*'I'm very sorry to bother you ...'*

*'I hope you don't really mind but would it be all right if ...'*

*'Excuse me please but can we ...'*

To project a more assertive image practice assertive words using 'I' rather than 'You'

For example:

*'I believe'*

*'My idea is'*

*'I would like'*

*'I prefer'*

*'I feel'*

*'I think'*

*'As I see it ...'*

*'My view is ...'*

*'I'd like to change the date of the meeting'* instead of

*'It would be a good idea to change the date of the meeting.'*

Use cooperative words like *'Let's'* and *'We could.'*

For example:

*'Let's look for a way to overcome this.'*

*'How can we get round this ...'*

*'Shall we ...?'*

Make your statements brief and to the point. For example:

*'I'd like to get started this week.'*

From this it is clear what you want. By contrast long rambling statements confuse the other person leaving them unclear about what you want: *'I thought you might like to er ... um ... well ...'*

Use questions to find out thoughts, opinions and wants of others.

*'How does that fit in with your plans?'*

*'What will this involve ...?'*

*'What are your thoughts on ...?'*

You don't have to justify yourself so avoid statements like:

*'I wouldn't normally mention this only ...'*

*'I was just going past your door so I thought I'd see whether ...'*

## **Making requests**

You don't have to justify yourself when making requests, for example: *'I wouldn't normally ask but the*

*car's broken down and my husband is in bed with the flu, I know it's out of your way but just this once, would you mind awfully giving me a lift?' Phew!*

When making requests of others be direct and short but not curt. For example, *'I'm without the car tomorrow. Could you give me a lift into work, John?' or 'I would like that report by the end of the week, Anne' or 'I would like you in by eight o'clock, Jamie.'*

You can give a reason for your request if you think it will help but be sure it's genuine and keep it brief. And if John in our example above says he can't give you a lift into work then respect his right to say 'no'. Don't take it personally and don't flatter or argue him into changing his mind; that is aggressive behaviour.

With a work request give more information and seek clarification. Find out why the other person is refusing. If the answer is still no then put your energy into joint problem-solving rather than persuading the other person to meet your request as originally outlined. Don't sell your request with flattery or tempting benefits. For example:

*'Linda you're just the person' or 'Bob this is right up your street. I'm sure you'll be interested.'*

Don't play on people's friendships or good nature either. For example:

*'Be a pal and get this done by lunchtime.'*

## **Refusing requests – how to say 'no'**

It is only a little word, two letters – that's all. And yet it is one of the hardest words to use. Saying 'no' to requests is something many of us find difficult and

even when we do say 'no' we can often feel guilty. Remember you have the right to say 'no.' Listed below are some techniques to help you cope with this little word and how to use it.

### **Keep your reply short**

When refusing a request keep your reply short but not abrupt. You can simply say, *'I'd prefer not to'* or *'I'd rather not'* or *'No, I'm not happy to ...'* Avoid using *'I can't'* phrases as these start sounding like excuses.

With short replies you need to slow down, speak steadily and with warmth otherwise replies can sound abrupt.

### **Buy yourself some time**

If you are not used to saying 'no' and find refusing requests difficult then buy yourself some time. Don't commit yourself straight away. And don't agree to anything you are even faintly concerned about.

You can buy time by asking for clarification or more information. For example:

*'What detail does this report have to go into?'*

*'I need to think/look into this. I'll get back to you in ten minutes/half an hour.'*

*'I need to check with my diary/husband/ partner/colleague and I'll get back to you later today/in half an hour.'*

*'Bob, I need to check on my schedule before agreeing to help with this project. I will ring you tomorrow.'*

Then you can get back to the person making the request using some of the advice below.

### **Get all the facts**

Don't allow yourself to be caught doing something if your reason for being involved is still vague. Ask for specifics: time, location, how long will you be needed, what is the exact cost, when is the information due?

### **Use the person's name**

An assertive response would also be to acknowledge the person who is making the request by name for example *'Thank you Anne, but I'm not ready to take my lunch break yet.'*

### **Don't blame others**

Don't put the blame for refusing the request onto others; identify yourself with the decision. For example: *'I'm not prepared to bend the rules on this'* rather than, *'Senior management wouldn't want to change it'* or *'I'd prefer not to go to the party'* rather than *'My husband wouldn't like it'*.

### **Give a reason**

If you can, give the real reason for refusing however sometimes, if you are not used to refusing, the little white lie is acceptable.

If the requester becomes persistent then repeat your refusal adding the reason if you didn't give it first time. Leave it out if you gave it first time. Don't search for better reasons.

### **Know your limits**

When refusing work requests it is best if you know

beforehand your own limits (workload, time restraints) and your priorities, so that way you can put the refusal into context. You can say, *'I'm unable to do that now, Mary, but I'll make it a priority first thing in the morning'* or *'I will tackle that task as soon as I have this proposal finished'*.

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## **In summary**

- you can project a positive image and increase your feelings of being positive by using the power of language and changing the way you express yourself
- practice speaking with clarity
- talk in a strong, steady voice, neither shouting nor mumbling
- practice giving good direct eye contact as you talk to the other person
- if your voice is too loud or fast then practice speaking more softly and slowly
- to build rapport you need to match the pace and pitch of the other person
- be aware of how others speak and adapt your style accordingly
- don't apologize when you don't need to
- practice assertive words: 'I' not 'You'

- practice cooperative words:  
'Let's'  
'We could'
  - make your statements brief and to the point
  - use questions to find out thoughts, opinions and wants of others
  - avoid apologetic phrases
  - when making requests of others be direct and short but not curt
  - don't take a 'no' personally. With a work request give more information and clarification
  - don't sell your request with flattery or tempting benefits
  - don't play on people's friendships or good nature
  - when refusing a request keep your reply short but not abrupt
  - don't commit yourself straight away – buy yourself some time before answering
  - ask for clarification or more information if you need it
  - if the requester becomes persistent then repeat your refusal adding the reason if you didn't give it first time
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# 10

## Handling unproductive feelings

### A positive inner voice

I have already mentioned the importance of having a positive inner voice (see Chapter 2). I now want to look at this in more detail. Getting the right inner voice can help you to become more assertive and therefore handle those difficult situations and people more confidently. Let's look at a couple of examples to illustrate this.

#### Example 1

You are on your way to speak to a client who has complained about your services. He has previously taken up a lot of your time with similar complaints. He is very difficult and you find handling him tough.

This might be the dialogue that is going on inside your head:

*'It's typical of people like him. He's a nuisance. He's always complaining. He's no right to take up my time*

*like this.'*

Your feelings are of frustration, anger, and impatience. Therefore if you don't correct this negative inner voice your behaviour will reflect those feelings and you will behave aggressively towards the client. He in turn will pick up on this behaviour and you have a clash and a no win situation.

## **Example 2**

You are about to go to a job interview.

This might be the dialogue that is going on inside your head:

*'This is going to be really tough. I'm so nervous. I hate job interviews. What if they ask me questions I can't answer? I know I'll blush/stammer and make a fool of myself. I'll try and get it over with as quickly as possible. Besides I won't get the job anyway, there'll be far more qualified people attending than me.'*

Your feelings are worry, strong anxiety, panic, and helplessness. You will stumble over your words, gabble, and change your mind too easily when questioned. You will generally look incompetent even though you may not be so. Will you get that job? No, of course you won't.

If you think you are going to fail then you will because your body language will reflect that and you will be giving out negative signals which others will pick up. Just as positive people attract other positive people so the opposite applies.

So taking the last example we need to hear that faulty inner voice, recognize it, challenge it and change it to a positive inner voice.

So the positive inner dialogue could be:

*'This may be a tough interview but I can handle it. I am good at my job and I have a great deal of experience to offer. These are my strengths, which I can convey to the interview panel. I have prepared well and am looking forward to the challenge. If I am asked questions I can't answer then I will say so with confidence and demonstrate what I do know.'*

Think positive. Say these positive things aloud to yourself in the car, in your house, in the garden. They will reflect in your body language. Walk into that room confidently with a smile on your face and give all the members of the panel sweeping eye contact.

It may take practice but remember the old proverb 'Practice makes perfect'.

### **Exercise**

Now look at Example 1 on page 87 and have a go at correcting that inner voice and changing it from a negative one to a positive one.

## **How others influence you**

Of course other people may influence you and cause negative thoughts to flood into your mind. You can be influenced by what they say and how they say it, that is the content of what they are saying and their behaviour.

### **Example**

You need to introduce a new procedure to your team at the staff meeting. Jane is the most difficult member

of your team and always puts up some objections. You just know she will this time.

Before you go into this meeting you need to get the right inner voice.

*'OK, so Jane is usually difficult but I can deal with her. I have good reasons for introducing these changes and I can make my point assertively.'*

In the meeting Jane challenges your statement about increased efficiency coming from these changes. She says, *'Oh come on, that's rubbish! If you do that there will be enormous problems we'll never get the system back on line. Remember the last changes you introduced weren't particularly brilliant!'*

Jane has acted aggressively. Her attack seems to have been personal and like many who use aggressive statements there are exaggerations in her dialogue: *'that's rubbish', 'enormous problems', 'never'*.

Your response to being attacked like this might be to get angry back; *'I'm in charge Jane, so just do as you're told'* or to run away *'Well maybe I should look at it again'*.

You have responded either aggressively or submissively. Instead you should make sure your inner dialogue is positive, don't take it personally: remember you have good reasons for introducing these changes and tell yourself this. Your assertive response to Jane should be something along the lines of:

*'Jane, I believe the changes will improve the overall efficiency; we will start implementing them in a week's time. In the meantime if you, or anyone else, has any constructive suggestions to make on the changes, then I am willing to look at them. Could you get these to*

*me in writing, backed up with evidence, by Thursday morning?'*

Let's examine this statement in detail for evidence that it is assertive:

**Use of the person's name:** *Jane*

**Use of the assertive statement;** *'I believe'*

**Willingness to look at other suggestions** and listen to people but assertion that my decision will stand if this is not backed up.

Let's look another response to Jane's announcement. Instead of Jane being aggressive, another colleague, Simon, behaves submissively. He says something like, *'Well we do have a lot on at the moment and ... er... these changes are bound to take up some of our time. But I suppose we'll try and manage somehow.'*

If you don't maintain your assertiveness you could feel guilty about putting more work on Simon's shoulders and therefore behave submissively yourself, *'Well just do the best you can, Simon'* which means that nothing is going to happen.

Or you could feel cross that Simon is always whining and therefore behave aggressively towards him, *'For goodness sake Simon, just do it if you want to keep your job in this company!'*

So what should your assertive response be?

*'Simon, you obviously have concerns about implementing these changes, perhaps you could let me know what they are and we can look at them in more detail.'*

## Influencing through past behaviour

Sometimes you are influenced through past behaviour. For example there is one person who always gets your back up. You only have to hear their voice on the telephone, or see them walking towards you, and that negative voice pops up. *'Oh no, it's Margaret again – she's such a pain in the neck. I can't stand that woman; she makes my blood boil ...'*

If this is the inner dialogue how are you going to behave towards Margaret? Either aggressively, getting your attack in first, or submissively, running away from her or backing down.

So what should your inner voice be saying? A positive inner voice should go something like this:

*'Margaret is a difficult lady to deal with but I can handle her. I can keep calm.'* And if you do feel yourself losing it with Margaret then don't beat yourself over the head about it; say to yourself, *'Next time I'll do better with Margaret. I'll keep calm longer.'*

It is a fact of life that you can't get on with everyone. You can't like everyone you work with, or come into contact with, but you may have to get along with them the best you can. If you can avoid them then do so; if not then don't waste your time, energy and emotions on becoming bitter and resentful. Life's too short for that.

## **In summary**

- people can be successful in modifying and changing their feelings without stifling them or giving vent to them
  - positive people attract other positive people
  - think positive: convert negative dialogues into positive ones
  - other people may influence you and cause negative thoughts – make sure your inner voice is positive
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# 11

## Tackling the difficult situation or person

Dealing with angry people and handling conflict is never easy. We need to learn how to handle these people and situations and to express ourselves without losing our temper or bursting into tears.

Having the positive inner voice as mentioned in the previous chapter is a good starting point. But you may need more than this. Very often we lose our temper or behave submissively because we don't know how to express our emotions. We need a framework for this and the four part statement (discussed on page 96) gives us this. This is an excellent technique when you are faced with someone who is behaving in a way that you find unacceptable.

Recognize this scenario?

At work David has upset you, or made you angry, because he keeps shouting at you and throwing work at you just as you are about to leave for home. You find this very upsetting and you feel pressurized into staying late to do the work. Then when you have

finished you often find that David has already gone home. You get home and complain bitterly to your long-suffering partner who tells you that you should stand up for yourself and tell David to stick his job. You then shout at your partner accusing him of not understanding and World War Three breaks out! Or you go to bed thinking it over and over in your head, rehearsing imaginary conversations. You wake up at three o'clock in the morning worrying about it, then you go in the next day tired and it starts all over again. While you are worrying yourself sick David has had a lovely night's sleep and carries on as normal.

You tell everyone what the problem is but you don't tell David – why? Because you're worried you might lose your temper or burst into tears or you might lose your job. The only way to stop this happening and to change David's behaviour is to tell him about it and this is where the four part statement comes in.

## The four part statement

When you do/say that

I feel

Because

I'd rather/prefer

This excellent technique allows you to reason things out in your own mind and can also give you a framework for tackling these difficult or delicate situations.

Let's look at our previous example and see how it can

apply.

**When you do/say that** – What is it that David is doing? He is shouting at you and giving you work too late in the day for you to complete on time.

**I feel** – How do you feel? Angry, frustrated, upset.

**Because** – Why? Because you can't complete the work on time, because you have other commitments outside of work that are important to you, because you don't like being shouted at – who does?

**I'd rather/prefer** – what do you want to change? What would you rather happen? That David stops shouting at you and gives you work on time.

In this case I would also go a step further and ask myself why David is not giving me the work on time? Is it because he's a poor time manager? Is he disorganized or inefficient, perhaps he can't cope with his job or could he be under pressure and that is why he's shouting at you? That doesn't excuse him but it helps me to understand that it's not personal and if he doesn't change his behaviour then his health could suffer.

My first tip to you is to reason this out. Go to the toilet at work, or take a walk, and think the scenario through in the order above. Be specific about what is making you angry. Think the situation through to the conclusion you want. Write it down if it helps you. Then practice the four part statement

Choose the right time and place – out of the public gaze would be best. Then, take a deep breath and ask to see David. When you do, stick to the point and the present, don't drag other facts into the conversation, or what happened last week, last month or last year.

Pause, breathe, don't rush in. Say:

*'David, when you give me this work late in the afternoon and insist that it is done before I leave work, I feel very frustrated and uncomfortable because I like to do a professional job but can't because of the lack of time. I am unable to stay late because of my other commitments. In future could you give me the work earlier in the day so that I may complete it for you?'*

You could suggest a time that you and David could meet up to discuss what is urgent and non-urgent and help him prioritize. Or you could go on to suggest that you both sit down and see if you can plan the workload better.

But what happens if David isn't reasonable?

David: *'Don't be ridiculous, Mary. How do I know what I'm going to be able to give you and when. You'll just have to stay late. Where is your commitment to this company? There are plenty of others that would like your job.'*

Ouch!!! What a bully. Do you really want to continue working for someone who behaves like this and doesn't appreciate you? Anyway, the right way to deal with this kind of response is to hold your ground. Keep your body language upright but not too stiff, keep your eye contact on him, look and sound assertive even if your knees are knocking and your heart is pounding and repeat the final part of your four part statement:

You: *'I'd prefer it if you gave me the work earlier.'*

David: *'You know I can't do that I've just told you.'*

You: *'I'd prefer to have the work earlier.'*

David may go off in a huff, still moaning at you but he will think again before giving you the work too late. If he does continue you need to once again assert yourself and say:

*'I am unable to do this now. I will make it my priority in the morning.'* And do so. David should get the message unless he is a real bully then you will need to examine your job description, log the incidents and get a witness to them and talk to the manager above David or the human resources manager depending on your organisation's grievance policy and procedure.

Let's look at another scenario. This is one that happened to me many years ago.

My boss took great delight in making personal remarks about me, my figure, my clothes, appearance etc. I didn't mind these at first but as time went on they began to get more personal and he started making these remarks in front of colleagues and clients. I had to put a stop to them. So I went to see him and said:

*'When you make those personal remarks about me, Jim, I feel very uncomfortable because I find it humiliating. In future I'd rather you didn't make these remarks.'*

My boss was extremely apologetic. He didn't realize they upset me. He thought he was treating me as 'one of the boys' (men have a much more ribbing style than women and I was working in a male-dominated environment). From that moment onwards he stopped and things were fine between us.

But what if he hadn't been reasonable? His response could have been: *'What's wrong, can't you take a joke? I'm only teasing you. You women are so sensitive – if you can't hack it you shouldn't be here.'*

**Don't justify your reasons** – if you do you'll start to dig a big hole for yourself and probably end up apologizing when you shouldn't (submissive behaviour). Simply repeat the outcome you want:

*'In future I'd rather you didn't make these remarks.'*

### **Exercise**

Try the response to the following scenario before looking at the answer.

A colleague from another department is constantly criticizing your decisions and your work by making snide remarks behind your back. You need to tackle the issue. You meet her and say ...

### **Answer:**

'Mary, I am aware that you are making remarks about me to others. When you do this, I feel annoyed/disappointed because you are undermining my authority (or questioning my ability, views and judgments). In future, if you have anything to say, I'd rather/prefer that you say it to me direct and then we can look at the issue or deal with it together. '

Again you may get pressure from Mary: *'Who told you I was talking about you?'* Mary becomes defensive and aggressive. Don't get drawn into arguing about the rights and wrongs of who told you. Simply repeat the outcome you want: *'If you have anything to say I'd rather you say it to me direct.'*

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## **In summary**

- be specific about what is making you angry
- if you can, deal with it there and then, if not, then shortly afterwards
- stick to the point and the present and don't drag

other facts into it or what happened last month or last year

- choose the right time and place – out of the public gaze would be best
  - think the situation through to the conclusion you want
  - map out what you want beforehand. Write it down if it helps you
  - practice the four part statement:  
**When you say/do**  
**I feel**  
**Because**  
**I'd rather/prefer**
  - know your own advantages but don't underestimate theirs
  - work out what is your last best option – the bottom line
  - be mentally prepared for ultimatums
  - be prepared to be put under pressure
  - deal with the problem and not the person
  - concentrate on the main issues, don't allow yourself to get sidetracked
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# 12

## Handling put downs and criticism

Put downs or sarcasm can be extremely difficult to deal with. They are a form of aggressive behaviour. They are used to make you question your decisions and to belittle you.

So how do you deal with them?

There are two ways. One is to take them seriously and question the put down. The other is to state your views or your position.

Depending on who is giving the put down, why and the circumstances in which it is intended there is another way of dealing with them and that is to laugh at them or treat them with humour, but beware you don't become sarcastic back.

Let's take a couple of examples:

**Put down:** *'It's all right for you part-timers, you don't have the same responsibilities.'*

**Answer:** *'I am part-time but I also take the responsibilities of my job seriously.'*

You have accepted the first part of the put down statement because it is a fact but not the second part. You have asserted that you take your responsibilities seriously. You have stated your position/view.

**Put down:** *'You working mothers are all the same – no commitment.'*

**Answer:** *'I am a working mother but I take my job and its commitments very seriously.'*

Again you can't dispute the fact that you are a working mother but you assert that you take your commitments very seriously.

In some cases you may not have to acknowledge the fact, i.e. the first part of the put down but simply state your position or view. For example:

**Put down:** *'Of course you don't have the same pressures as me.'*

**Answer:** *'We all have different pressures.'*

**Put down:** *'You don't really believe that, do you?'*

**Answer:** *'Yes I do.'*

**Put down:** *'That was a stupid decision.'*

**Answer:** *'I accept the decision was wrong but I don't accept it was stupid. (Only if the decision proved wrong). What you do not accept is the exaggerate emotive word 'stupid'.*

The other option is to question the put down. For example:

**Put down:** *'I expect you've got plenty of spare time.'*

**Answer:** *'Really, what makes you say that?'*

Answering the put down with a question.

You may know someone who always seems to come up with just the right answer to a put down, a witty quip that makes you wish you could find the right thing to say at the right moment. But we are not all blessed with a quick wit and those words never come when you most need them. You don't have to think of a fancy answer to a put down simply try the techniques detailed above.

## Receiving criticism

Nobody likes being criticized, particularly if it is unfair or constant. This may have been on your list of things that make you feel negative.

**If someone is criticizing you it is imperative that first you get your inner voice right.**

Consider that the other person has a right to criticize you. If you do not do this then you will go on the defensive and behave aggressively. If you accept they have the right, then you will want them also to accept that you have the right not to be put down, or be made to look small, or to be subjected to personal attacks. Also you have a right for that criticism to be made in private rather than in front of colleagues: *'Jane, can we discuss this in private please?'*

If your inner voice is wrong for example: *'He's at it again, always nitpicking. He's always got to find something wrong with what I do'* this will make you behave aggressively.

So listen to the voice inside your head, then challenge it and change into a healthier inner voice.

*'I have made a mistake but not necessarily a complete disaster.'*

*'The criticism may be a personal attack but I can get behind that and I can learn from criticism.'*

If the criticism is unclear ask the other person for clarification. Use the 'I' statement assertively not aggressively: *'I'd find it helpful, Joe, if you could give me some examples of what you mean.'* Again we are using his name to help build rapport and make us sound more assertive.

If it becomes a personal attack: *'I accept that your criticism is valid, Laura, but I'd prefer it if you made it less of a personal attack.'*

If you disagree with the criticism then say so. Use the I statement, *'As I see it ...'*

Maintain steady eye contact. Keep your voice clear and controlled. Don't get high pitched and indignant: *'You never told me that.'*

If you are being subjected to constant criticism then ask yourself why? If you feel it is unjustified, or you are uncomfortable with it, then use the four part statement to tackle that person.

For example:

***'When you*** constantly criticize me, Joe, ***I feel*** very annoyed ***because*** I feel it is unjustified/becomes too much of a personal attack/***is not specific enough. I would appreciate*** it if you made your criticism more specific by giving me examples of what you mean.'

## Giving criticism

Before giving criticism yourself check that your inner voice is sound and healthy. Also check that your criticism is specific and not a personal attack. Introduce the topic and if appropriate say why you want to raise it. Make your *specific* criticism and get a response to your criticism. Then ask for suggestions to bring about desired change. At the end of the interview summarize the suggestions to be actioned.

For example:

*'James, I've noticed your reports have not been coming in on time. Can you tell me why this is?'*

There is no excessive blaming here or jumping to conclusions.

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## In summary

- put downs can be extremely difficult to deal with
- put downs are designed to make you question your decisions and to belittle you
- put downs are a form of aggressive behaviour
- when receiving criticism make sure your inner voice is right
- consider that the other person has a right to criticize you
- you also have the right not to be put down or made

- to look small or be subjected to personal attacks
  - you have the right for the criticism to be made in private
  - if the criticism is unclear ask the other person for clarification
  - if you disagree with the criticism then say so using the 'I' statement
  - maintain steady eye contact and keep your voice clear and controlled
  - before giving criticism yourself check that your inner voice is sound and healthy
  - check that your criticism is specific and not a personal attack
  - introduce the topic and if appropriate say why you want to raise it
  - get a response to your criticism then ask for suggestions to bring about desired change
  - at the end of the interview summarize the suggestions to be actioned
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# 13

## Managing aggression and conflict

Conflict in your personal life and at work can arise for all sorts of reasons. It should be managed constructively to the benefit of everyone concerned.

Typical areas of conflict include:

- mediating between two colleagues or two family members
- a colleague who wants the same resources as you but thinks his need is greater
- handling crises and unforeseen events

### Handling conflict

So how do you handle conflict? Do you become aggressive back, do you give in at the expense of your own feelings, or do you handle them assertively? Or, as is likely, do you resort to all three types of behaviour depending on what the conflict is and who is causing it?

First you need to understand your typical reactions to conflict. What do you usually do? Avoid them, confront them head on or deal with them? Which things really wind you up and why? How do you feel at the time?

### Exercise

Consider typical conflict situations, which you have encountered at work, at home, or in your social life. Write down what causes you conflict then write against it your typical reactions.

Now think whether or not this was the most appropriate response. What could have been the alternatives?

Does anything you've learned so far in this book help you? Could you have used the four part statement to deal with it, for example? Could you have changed your inner voice to a more positive one and got a different result?

If someone is arguing with you do you immediately go on the defensive and argue back with your negative inner voice saying *'How dare he talk to me like that?'* or *'How dare she think that her need is greater than mine?'* How could you have changed this to a more positive inner voice?

When I feel like this I change my negative inner voice to one that says, *'That's interesting why is this person behaving like this I must find out'* or *'I must get behind the words and find out why. There must be a reason why Jane is behaving like this.'* This immediately distances me from the emotion.

Sometimes there is no logical reason and Jane is always difficult and negative and continually winds me



up. If this is so I can feel sad for her going through life in this way, or I can say to myself '*I have difficulty in getting on with Jane but I can keep calm*' or I can simply refuse to deal with her if I have the choice.

Remember the conflict situations where you generally avoid the issue. Keep a note of these in your diary. Is avoidance the best action in these situations for long-term benefit? It may be. Or does avoidance leave you feeling dejected or frustrated? If so, what other alternatives are available?

I recall running a training course where one young lady was becoming particularly difficult, arguing with everything I was saying, not listening and trying to shout me and everyone else down. I heard my inner voice wishing she'd just shut up. I was getting angry inside and then I was feeling resentful for even being there – in effect I was losing it.

Fortunately we were just on the lunch break so I called a halt to it. I took the time out to get a positive inner dialogue going and then decided to confront the young lady.

I called her into a room to talk to her privately. I opened by saying that clearly she felt the course to be of no benefit to her and that if this was so she would be better off leaving. No one was forcing her to stay. Anyway the upshot of the discussion was that she did want to stay on the course and was indeed the model of good behaviour and cooperation for the rest of the day. This was only the second time in my career that this had happened to me. The critical element here was for me to tackle the situation and the person. I had to deal with the conflict and not avoid it.

Conflict results from differences or perceived differences – try and understand the other person's viewpoint or

at least see where they are coming from and make sure you have a sound and healthy inner voice.

Blending with the other person can maximize similarities and minimize conflict. Use body language to enhance this; mirror physical stance, match voice in volume and speed of conversation.

### **Exercise**

Reflect on typical reactions to conflict situations and ask yourself:

- When do I avoid conflict?
- When do I accommodate others?
- How often do I secure a compromise?
- When do I compete strongly with others?
- Which situations cause me to be bitter and resentful afterwards?
- What alternatives are there for handling situations better?

If you get upset, try to remove yourself from the environment. Excuse yourself to go to the toilet or to return an urgent telephone call. Rehearse your four part statement if appropriate and/or get a healthy inner voice, refresh yourself on your positive points and tell yourself you can deal with it. Calm yourself down before going back or resolving conflict.

And reward yourself every time you deal with a potentially awkward situation in a positive manner even if it is just a pat on the back.

## Handling aggression

Aggressive people can come at us out of the blue when we are least prepared for them. The attack can cause us to go into fight or flight mode i.e. to become aggressive or submissive. Ideally, however, we are seeking an assertive response to this attack that leaves us feeling neither cross or upset. The following way of dealing with aggression may help you. It is sometimes called the consequence method and it takes you through responses for handling escalating aggression.

### Guidelines for handling aggression from others

#### **Step 1**

Take a breath and get a sound inner voice before you reply.

You will have time to do this as the angry person will be letting off a head of steam. Do not try to interrupt them when they are doing this, or try to reason with them, or you will only fuel their anger. You can never reason with people until they have worked their anger through. So while they are letting rip at you, take your breath and get your positive inner dialogue going. For example: *'I can handle this', 'I can deal with this', 'I can keep calm'*. Tell yourself that this attack is not personal and that something has happened to cause this person to behave like this and you happen to be the one they are taking it out on.

#### **Step 2**

Once they have calmed down you can then ask for clarification/information. Keep your tone of voice assertive and your eye contact going. Keep your body

posture upright. Ask open questions to get to the route cause of the problem: *why, what, when, how, where, who.*

### **Step 3**

Hopefully by now the person will have calmed down but what if they haven't? If the aggression is maintained then state where you stand but show you are interested in their opinion.

*'I don't believe we have ignored your requests, Mr Jones, but I'd like to hear why you think we have.'*

### **Step 4**

If the aggression is still maintained then step up your assertiveness. Increase the emphasis on your position.

*'I believe we behaved appropriately.'*

### **Step 5**

If the aggression continues you can use the consequence. *'If you continue to shout in this way Mr Jones, I will put the phone down and ring you back later.'*

### **Step 6**

If all your efforts have failed either cut off the interaction – you have warned them above – or put aside the issue you are discussing or arguing about. *'Look – over the past three months we've spent lot of time arguing about this. Can we forget the procedure for the moment and talk about why we have these long arguments?'*

I have only had to resort to this once in my career to date and that was when I was working in a busy job centre in the middle of a city. A man started shouting at me and being abusive. I warned him of the consequences of continuing to behave in that way and told him I would refuse to deal with him if he continued shouting and swearing. He continued ranting and

raving so I walked away from him. I had a great boss who backed me up and he told the man that until he could behave no one would deal with him.

You can't get on with everyone in life so if you have difficult people then avoid them if you possibly can. Why make your life more miserable? There are plenty of nice positive people out there. Give your difficult person a break and give yourself a break.

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## **In summary**

- conflict at home, in your personal life and at work can arise for all sorts of reasons
- to handle conflict first understand what causes it
- if a certain person causes you conflict then avoid him or her if you can
- if you get upset, try to remove yourself from the environment
- rehearse your four part statement if appropriate and/or get a healthy inner voice, refresh yourself on your positive points and tell yourself you can deal with it
- calm yourself down before going back or resolving conflict
- reward yourself every time you deal with a potentially awkward situation in a positive manner even if it is a pat on the back

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*Being Positive and Staying Positive*

- aggressive situations hit us out of the blue when we are least prepared for them
  - the attack can cause us to go into fight or flight mode
  - seek first to understand then to be understood
  - think win–win versus win–lose
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# And finally

## Think positive to be a success

Take 30 seconds each morning in front of a mirror.

Just think what you want to happen during the day.

Now verbalise this. Say it with conviction and with as much reassurance as you can muster. You may feel funny, you may laugh at this idea or yourself, but goad yourself on – go on, be positive and see what happens.

Go back to your personal objectives and goals. Believe you can do it.

Visualize yourself achieving your personal goals.

Affirm – say you can do it.

Check that what you're going for is on target.

**Take action.**

**Go for it.**

**Be positive and stay positive.**

