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4 ways to be more assertive at work

by Maurie Backman for The Motley Fool @CNNMoney

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Confidence and assertiveness don't come naturally to everyone, but if you tend to be timid or reserved in work situations, those qualities could end up hurting you.

Not only might an excess of mildness give others the opportunity to take advantage of you, but by failing to appear self-assured, you could ruin your chances at getting otherwise well-deserved promotions. That's why it pays to work on becoming more assertive -- and here's how.

1. Stop apologizing

Being humble generally isn't a bad thing, but when you apologize in workplace situations where an "I'm sorry" is by no means warranted, you discredit your own ideas and highlight your insecurities. Next time you disagree with someone or want to suggest doing things differently, don't preface your statements with "I'm sorry." Just say what you want to say, let your audience react, and respond as necessary.

Imagine your colleague is suggesting a marketing strategy you firmly disagree with. Rather than saying, "I'm sorry, but I think we should go a different way," try "Actually, here's why this other approach will be more beneficial." Your colleagues and managers are more likely to listen to your ideas if your language exudes confidence.

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2. Choose your words carefully

You never what know seemingly minor nuances of speech can detract from an otherwise compelling argument. Whatever point you're trying to make, you'll have a better shot if you stop diminishing your statements with words that make you appear to lack confidence in what you're saying.

Imagine you have a great concept to share with your team at your weekly meeting. If you start with something along the lines of "This is just an idea, but....," you'll end up selling that idea short. Rather, get up and say something like "My idea is to do so and so. Here's why it'll work."

3. Aim to always know what you're talking about

It's hard to confidently state your position when your data or knowledge set is fuzzy. So, if you're trying to make a case for something at work, be sure to have all the facts on hand to back up your claims. While a more naturally assertive person might manage to argue a point forcefully without solid information to support it, if you're not the self-assured type, being confident in your research can make a big difference in how convincing you are. So if you expect to be put on the spot at an upcoming meeting, go in prepared.

Some people shy away from strong language at work because they fear it'll backfire. But the truth is, there's a big difference between being assertive and being aggressive. Whereas the former has a positive connotation, especially at the management level, the latter quality can damage careers. As long as you recognize that and don't cross the line, you have little to lose by being more assertive. In fact, your colleagues might come to respect you more once they see that you're capable of standing your ground.

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The more confident you appear at work, the more likely you are to succeed. Learning to assert yourself can not only help your career, but make your whole workplace experience more enjoyable.

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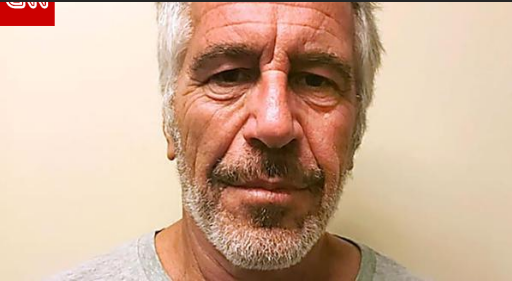
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