

ARTICLE REPRINT

What Is Your Negotiating Style?

Following the principles of behavioral psychology, there are essentially three types of negotiating styles – passive, aggressive, and passive-aggressive. In negotiations, each style can work, sometimes; however, we think anyone, regardless of their natural negotiating style, can adopt an *assertive* approach to negotiating that delivers consistent, superior results for all parties to the negotiation.

The passive style negotiator seeks to avoid offending anyone at all costs. You are a passive negotiator if you would rather avoid expressing your wants and needs if it conflicts with the wants and needs of your negotiating partners. It may be difficult to get you to agree to anything, but rarely do people get mad at you. On the surface, you appear congenial and even compliant. You are seen as a “nice guy.” What your negotiating partners often miss is the resentment you harbor because you rarely get what you want.

The aggressive negotiator plays the role of the bully. You may be an aggressive negotiator if you make loud demands, push people around, and find ways to punish people who don't give you what you want. You've learned that your aggressive style is rewarding, as you often get what you want. The downside, of course, is that the people you push around will usually find ways to retaliate against your bullying. If they retaliate via outright confrontation (either physically or psychologically), the negotiation becomes antagonistic. If they retaliate by avoiding you, it is likely that you'll operate without information or knowledge that could help you in the future. The aggressive style negotiator can never be sure if her negotiating partners cooperate out of respect or fear.

The passive-aggressive negotiator is an angry negotiator. If you employ the passive-aggressive style, you often appear to be the “nice guy,” rarely asking directly for what you want, until something, and it could be anything, brings on an explosion of anger. When you are driven to your breaking point, your outburst might be direct, but is often indirect. You will work behind the scenes to sabotage cooperation and agreements. Because you don't often get your way, you find a way to even the score.

Whether your natural style is passive, aggressive, or passive-aggressive, we recommend the *assertive* style of negotiating. Whether the negotiations are among family members or friends or among co-workers or customers, assertive negotiators recognize that everyone has the right to express their needs and to get at least part of what they want in their negotiations.

Assertive negotiators are comfortable expressing their own legitimate needs, standing up for their rights, and setting appropriate limits in any negotiation. All this can be done without trampling on the rights of others, who, by the way, also have the right to negotiate assertively.

Negotiating assertively considers the needs of all the parties in the negotiation and helps focus the negotiation on the problem and the solution. The assertive style allows you to work toward solutions without drama and without anger. As in all interpersonal communications, clear, direct and non-aggressive interactions work better than blaming others, bullying, or employing behind-the-scenes tactics that sabotage the negotiation and damage relationships.

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