

Assertiveness watch outs & what to do instead

Assertiveness is an important skill that supports your communication and influence at work. However, it can feel difficult to do and there are approaches which can limit your effectiveness. Being aware of the common 'watch-outs' helps you to adapt your approach to assertiveness.

Ideas for action



1 **Watch out:** Too much talking **What to do instead:** Assertive statements

Too much talking can dominate discussions and mean that you miss key points. Instead listen & try assertive statements to set the direction for where a conversation should go next:

- 👉 "Now feels like the time to..."
- 👉 "Shall we begin by..."
- 👉 "Why don't we..."

2 **Watch out:** Over caveating **What to do instead:** Own your 'I'

Phrases like "it's probably a silly idea" or "it might just be me" cloud clarity and reduce your impact.

Use clear "I" statements to share your view confidently and invite other perspectives:

- 👉 "I think we should consider..."
- 👉 "I have a different perspective/take on this"
- 👉 "I have some first thoughts I'm happy to share..."

3 **Watch out:** All about me **What to do instead:** Invite others

Assertiveness isn't just about sharing your own point of view - it's also about including other people in a conversation: Try:

- 👉 Noticing who has been overlooked/is actively thinking and create space for their input.
- 👉 Ask: "Do you have a point you want to add?", "What's your view on this?"

4 **Watch out:** Energy overload **What to do instead:** Mirror enough

Too much energy or enthusiasm can sometimes come across as overwhelming and reduce your credibility.

Mirroring enough is adapting your energy to a person or situation without losing what makes you, you. Try:

- 👉 Asking quick questions to sense check the energy vs. assume - e.g. "How are things?"
- 👉 Noticing their reaction will help you adapt your approach to reflect their energy.

5 **Watch out:** Robot risk **What to do instead:** Start with empathy

When you're nervous, it's easy to slip into "robot mode" (too scripted/serious) and lose connection. Starting with empathy will engage the people you're talking to.

- 👉 Acknowledge how people are feeling e.g., "I imagine you're..."
- 👉 Ask: "What would be most useful for you today?"

Coach yourself questions

When does your assertiveness matter most at work?



What meeting or moment in the next month could you experiment with your approach to assertiveness?



Recommended resources



Watch our **7 minute Empathy Skills Sprint** on how to understand different people's perspectives.



How to be assertive (without losing yourself)
Article on authentic assertiveness by Amy Gallo.



Sarah and Helen explore the difference between assertiveness and aggression in episode **#276** of the Squiggly Careers podcast.