How to be assertive in interviews

What is assertive behaviour?

Assertiveness is the ability to communicate with others in a confident, clear and direct manner. It has been described as "The Art of telling people what you would like them to do, in a way that they don't feel threatened or put down". It differs from being aggressive, where you may get what you want, but might upset people and hinder your progress in the long run.

Assertive behaviour helps you to:

- Say "No" to the requests of others in a firm but polite way when you don't want to do as they say
- Avoid being manipulated or put off by others
- Listen better to what others are saying
- Stand up for your rights
- Ask for what you want
- Achieve "win-win" situations where both parties are happy with the outcome of the situation

Being assertive helps you to exercise more control over your life and relationships, and thus may help to increase your self-confidence. It helps you to express your own opinion clearly and respectfully, remain calm and positive, and maintain self-control.

Some people confuse assertiveness with getting your own way all the time, however assertive people recognise that other people have rights too. There may be occasions when you take the decision to back down on an issue because you understand that sometimes compromise is needed.

Being assertive in interviews

Assertiveness can be an important factor in performing well at interviews. In interviews assertive behaviour will help you to come across as a confident candidate who is likely to be capable and productive. It is characterised by:

- Firm clear voice
- Eye contact with the interviewer
- Being relaxed rather than nervous
- Open body posture (e.g. don't have your arms and legs folded tightly)
- Simple, clear language which expresses what you want to say
- Direct open manner
**Assertive Responses:**

Assertive responses are based on clear, open and straightforward communications.

They demonstrate a respect both for the interviewer and yourself, such as saying what you mean without being impolite or asking for what you want without making demands. It often helps to understand what it is that you want to achieve from an interview or a job offer. Knowing your ‘bottom line’ ensures you are prepared to negotiate and understand what a fair deal would be for you.

Assertive behaviour is not specifically designed to get you what you want in all situations, in fact it involves negotiation and compromise. This style of response is far more likely to create a positive impression than either aggressiveness or non-assertion.

**Examples of being assertive in an interview:**

1. The interviewer asks you a series of questions that require detailed answers but gives you little opportunity to set out what you have to offer.

Answer the questions, but say that you would like to add some information that you consider to directly support your application. Expand your answers so that you provide more information than the questions demand, relating your responses specifically to the job description.

2. The interviewer asks you a situational question for which you have no relevant experience and do not have a precise answer to.

Explain that you do not have a specific experience that relates to the question, but go on to offer a probable answer of what you would do in that situation based on logic, limited knowledge and common sense.

3. You feel extremely nervous at an interview, and you are quite sure that your nervousness is apparent to the interviewer.

Admit your nervousness with as much good humour as you can muster, adding a very brief explanation: such as that the situation is unfamiliar and that the outcome of the interview is very important to you.