ASSERTIVENESS

OBJECTIVES

To successfully complete this assignment, you must study the text and master the following objectives:

- State the components of an assertive statement.

- Describe how to ask for assistance when overloaded or having difficulty with a task.

- Describe how confronting ambiguities and conflicts could have avoided a mishap.

- Describe how rank differences can influence team member's judgment and contribute to mishaps.

- Describe how maintaining a position until convinced by facts can avoid mishaps.

DEFINITION

Assertiveness is the ability of team members to state and maintain a position that may be counter to the position of others, until convinced by the facts, not the authority or personality of another, that their position is wrong. The effective team leader advocates open and questioning communication by team members. In their interactions, effective team members are mutually respectful to each other.

ACHIEVING ASSERTIVENESS

Assertiveness can be achieved if all people know they have "rights" and act accordingly. These rights are:

- The right to have and express your own ideas and feelings.

- The right to be listened to and taken seriously.

- The right to be treated with respect.

- The right to ask for information from others.

- The right to make mistakes.

HOW PEOPLE BEHAVE

How we interact with people aboard the vessel can be grouped into three behavioral styles:

- Passive

- Aggressive

- Assertive

PASSIVE BEHAVIOR

When people *allow their ideas or rights to be restricted by another individual or situation*, they are behaving passively. Actions that indicate passive behavior are:

- Use excessive professional courtesy.

- Use ambiguous statements and beat around the bush.

- Express concerns in the form of a question, rather than making a statement.

- Avoid conflict.

- Refrain from challenging questionable procedures used by another team member.

- Are labeled as, "along for the ride".

**Passive
Mannerisms**

Mannerisms demonstrated by passive people include downcast eyes, shifting of weight, and slumped body. Passive words include qualifiers such as "maybe", "I guess", "would you mind if", "only", "just", "I can't", "if that's what you want."

**Problems With
Passive Behavior**

These people tend to keep their feelings inside. Their emotions, such as fear, anxiety, depression, fatigue and nervousness may build to unsafe levels.

**AGGRESSIVE
BEHAVIOR**

When someone *invades another's boundaries or individual rights*, that person is behaving aggressively. The intention of aggressive people is to dominate others to get their own way. Actions that indicate aggressive behavior include:

- Use statements that are confrontational, abusive, ridiculing, or hostile.

- Belittle and intimidate others to build themselves up.

**Aggressive
Mannerisms**

Mannerisms demonstrated by aggressive people include leaning forward with glaring eyes, pointing a finger, and a raised tone of voice. Aggressive words include threats like, "you'd better" and "if you don't watch out." Sarcasm and put-downs like "oh, come on, you must be kidding" and evaluative comments like "should", "bad", and "must" are also aggressive characteristics.

**Problems With
Aggressive
Behavior**

Inappropriate anger, rage or misplaced hostility expresses aggressive responses. This behavior restricts communication within the team. Cohesiveness and synergy becomes difficult.

ASSERTIVE BEHAVIOR

Assertive people *recognize boundaries between their ideas and those of others*. People responding assertively are aware of their feelings. Tensions are kept in a normal, constructive, and situationally appropriate range. Actions that indicate assertive behavior include:

- Ask task-related questions.

- Suggest alternative solutions/courses of action.

- State opinions of decisions/procedures that have been suggested.

- Avoid letting rank differences threaten mission safety or performance (refuse an unreasonable request).

- Maintain their position when challenged, until convinced by facts.

- Confront ambiguities and conflicts.

- Ask for assistance when overloaded or having difficulty with a task.

Assertive Mannerisms

Assertive people stand comfortably, but firmly, and speak in a steady tone of voice. Assertive words include statements reflecting responsibility for self, "I think", "I feel", "I want," and cooperative words such as, "let's see, how can we resolve this," "what do you think", and "what do you see."

Problems With Assertive Behavior

Assertive people feel empowered to speak up and do it with respect. The team leader must be able to harness the energy of assertive team members.

HARNESSING ASSERTIVENESS

The team leader must promote and control the assertive behavior within the team. Being assertive is *not* in conflict with USCG culture. We have empowered our people to speak up! Empowering team members with the responsibility of overall team performance, encouraging feedback to trap errors and poor judgments can be highly productive and at times very challenging. The team leader should set down select rules. These rules include:

- When to speak up.
- How to speak up.

When To Speak Up

The team leader ensures all members understand that they have the responsibility to speak up. A good time to accomplish this is during the briefing process. Individuals should speak up when:

- Unsure of the events.
- Clearly believe they have the answer to a problem or the situation.
- Believe that they or the vessel are in danger.

Leader Strategy: *Effective team leaders reward assertive behavior by acknowledging it in their team.*

The **Two-Challenge Rule** (Chapter 5) may be used as a tool for knowing when to speak up. This rule is best applied between peers or within the command team (i.e. CO and XO). Concurrence, on how the Two Challenge Rule will be used, needs to be obtained before it is ever used.

What To Say

Informative and inclusive messages enhance team performance and often are critical to mission safety. These messages provide key information about the situation and its risks, the effectiveness of decisions and observed errors. This information must be clearly and precisely conveyed, and well timed. To facilitate this communication, it should have all of these elements:

1. An Opening.

2. A Specific Concern.

3. A Problem Statement.

4. A Solution.

5. A Request for Feedback.

MESSAGE FORMAT	SAMPLE MESSAGE
Opening:	OOD,
Specific concern using an owned emotion:	QMOW is VERY CONCERNED.
Problem Statement:	We have FIVE FEET under the keel, and it is shoaling.
Solution, if any:	Good water is to port. Recommend come left 30° to 270°T.
Request for feedback:	Do you suggest we call the CO?

Remember your ABCs...
*Be **A**CCURATE, **B**OLD, and **C**ONCISE!*

CONFLICT: Differences Of Opinion

Conflict should be viewed as "differences in opinions," not fights or arguments regarding an issue. Unresolved conflict between team members can lead to reduced communications, distractions, and higher than normal levels of stress. In short, unresolved conflict leads to unsafe conditions.

DEALING WITH CONFLICT

The ways of dealing with our differences are related to our behavioral styles and are as follows:

- Passive Approach
  - Avoid
  - Accommodate
  - Suppress
- Aggressive Approach
  - Force
- Assertive Approach
  - Collaborate & Integrate

Effective Conflict Resolution

Effective resolution of conflicting opinions requires us to perceive *all positions as modifiable and to focus on solutions*, not on defending positions. It is imperative that the team leader resolves any lingering conflicts before they affect safe vessel operations.

FACTORS AFFECTING ASSERTIVE BEHAVIOR

Two factors have been identified that influence our decision to "speak up" or be assertive.

1. Our perception of the reaction of others to the situation and,

2. Perceived obedience to authority

Generally, in a group setting, if we see something wrong we first look at how others are reacting before we speak up. When we look at the reaction of others, we are checking to see if they appear concerned with the situation. If we find that others do not appear concerned then we will probably be reluctant to speak up.

We may also not "speak up" because we believe we are just following orders or that speaking up would represent questioning authority.

Team leaders can reduce these barriers by ensuring that team members understand that assertive behavior is demanded of all personnel. Junior members must be confident that senior leadership has empowered them to speak up, without fear of reprisal.

MAINTAINING ASSERTIVENESS; Alert To Barriers

Mutual respect and restraint promotes assertive behavior. However, miscommunication, misperception and other factors can create barriers. All team members must be aware of these potential barriers and share the responsibility of eliminating them. These barriers include:

- Lack of confidence in ones own ability.

- Perception that someone is not approachable; or by his/her position, rank, or knowledge should already know what is happening.

MAINTAINING ASSERTIVENESS; Alert To Barriers (Cont.)

- Perception that the leader is not interested in input. Conscientious leaders, in trying to promote assertive behavior, may do just the opposite. Be careful in how you ask for input; "*Read between the lines!"*

    Example: After the navigation brief the CO asked the assembled if, "any of you have any better ideas". Not surprisingly, no one had an idea better than their boss did.

- Fear of the answer; maybe the problem will go away.

- Fear of reprisal if a junior challenges a senior team member.

- Desire to avoid conflict and the perceived obedience to authority.

SELF-QUIZ #7

1. What is assertiveness?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. Describe passive behavior.

_____

_____

3. Describe aggressive behavior.

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4. Describe assertive behavior.

_____

_____

5. Name the five parts of an assertive message

   a. _____

   b. _____

   c. _____

   d. _____

   e. _____

6. What are the barriers to assertive behavior?

   a. _____

   b. _____

   c. _____

   d. _____

   e. _____

   f. _____

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ANSWERS TO SELF-QUIZ #7

1.   Assertiveness is the ability of team members to state and maintain a position that may be counter to the position of others, until convinced by the facts, not the authority or personality of another, that their position as wrong.   8-1

2.   When people allow their ideas or rights to be restricted by another individual or situation.   8-2

3.   When someone invades another's boundaries or individual rights, that person is behaving aggressively.   8-3

4.   Assertive people recognize boundaries between their ideas and those of others.   8-4

5.   a. An opening.   8-6
                 b. A specific concern.
                 c. A problem statement.
                 d. A solution.
                 e. A request for feedback.

6.   a. Lack of confidence in ones own ability.   8-8 to 8-9
                 b. Perception that someone is not approachable; or by his/her position, rank, or knowledge should already know what is happening.
                 c. Perception that the leader is not really interested in input.
                 d. Fear of the answer; maybe the problem will go away.
                 e. Fear of reprisal if a junior challenges a senior team member.
                 f. Desire to avoid conflict.

Student Notes

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