

## Learn to be more assertive in the workplace

Gender equality in the professional arena has come a long way in the 21st century. But while great strides have been made over the last two decades, women still face unique challenges as they look to establish themselves professionally and advance their careers.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, women still earn roughly 80 percent of what men are paid in the same positions.

Professional women often must walk the thin line between being too nice or too aggressive, a pressure not often faced by men. Assertiveness is an art for both genders, and women can take steps to be more assertive without giving the impression they're ruffling feathers.

• Be confident in your speech. It is easy to fall into "weaker language" habits when advocating for an idea. If unsure about the reaction to a proposal, you might say, "I think this is a good idea" or "I believe this will impart change." More assertive language is to simply stand behind the point: "This is a good idea." Confidence can go a long way.

• Allow people to disagree. It is acceptable for others to disagree with you. This can lead to discussion and an opportunity to present evidence why something should be done in a certain way. It also enables you to point out the strong points in their argument. Listening to all ideas can sway people in your favor, even if they don't necessarily agree with all you believe in.

• Be proactive and future-oriented. This is especially pertinent when asking for raises or promotions. Explain to a boss how you respect yourself and that your work merits the right compensation. Point out clearly defined future goals and successes you've had that warrant consideration for higher pay.

• Don't fear conflict. Conflict doesn't have to be confrontational, especially when respectable language is used and everyone is allowed to voice their opinions. Conflict can inspire great change. And remember, while you need to have solid relationships with coworkers, they do not have to be your best friends. Assertiveness in the workplace can help professionals achieve their goals and showcase their value.

## Asking for a letter of recommendation

Knowledge, skills and personality can get one far, but having the right people in your corner can open doors for new opportunities that you might otherwise never have considered. Perhaps this is why recommendations are so coveted when applying to jobs or schools.

Asking for a letter of recommendation is something that should be done with forethought. The correct approach and proper timing can mean the difference between receiving a recommendation or not.

### Who to ask

The first step is to decide who you want to ask for a recommendation. Select teachers, mentors or past employers who know you well or can validate how you performed or improved.

Remember to consider the requirements of a college or university as well. Schools frequently ask for recommendations from specific

people, such as a teacher in a certain subject. The same goes for reading job applications thoroughly.

### Ask early

Teachers may be inundated with college letter recommendation requests around application deadlines and at the end of semesters. It's better to leave plenty of time than to put teachers under pressure. The same rule applies to anyone else you're asking to write you a recommendation.

### Request in person

Underscore the importance of the recommendation by making it a personal request. Schedule an appointment with the individual and discuss why you believe he or she would be the right person to provide the recommendation. Remind the person of your attributes and point out something that exemplifies your

skills.

Speaking face-to-face shows respect and gives you the advantage to make your points personally, rather than through email.

### Make the process easier

Provide all of the necessary items to help the person along. This can include a brief résumé, academic progress report, required forms and so on.

As the deadline looms, offer concise reminders that you will need the recommendation. Offer to pick it up personally. Make copies or scan and save the original just in case a mix-up in the admissions office occurs.

Recommendations are a key part of landing a job or being offered acceptance into a college or university. Asking the right people early will translate into recommendations that paint an accurate picture of applicants.

## THE RIGHT WAY TO LEAVE A JOB

According to a 2018 report from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average person changes jobs between 10 and 15 times during their career.

When leaving a job, it is important that professionals exhibit a certain measure of grace and etiquette. Leaving a job with dignity and mutual respect can benefit professionals in the short- and long-term.

• Speak with a supervisor first. Make sure your boss or immediate supervisor learns of your plans to

leave the job first.

• Provide ample notice. Ensure that your current employer has plenty of time to interview potential replacements and train someone to take your place. This makes for an easy transition for all involved, and can show your employer that you have the company's best interests in mind. Two weeks' notice is the standard.

• Check company policy. The employment firm AG Careers suggests

reviewing company policy if you will be leaving to work for a direct competitor. There may be strict rules in place and protocol to follow.

• Don't shirk responsibilities. It can be tempting to slack off when another job awaits. You never know when you might need a referral or even a new job.

When leaving a job, professionals should always be courteous and considerate toward their current employers.

## Traits of good leaders and how you can gain skills for success on the job

Successful leaders have the skills to guide organizations on the right path. Such men and women are often the first up for promotions, and routinely relied on for critical projects. Solidifying your own leadership qualities can be just what you need to land a great job and start climbing the corporate ladder.

Good leaders often share a key array of skills. Here are

some of qualities that make strong workplace leaders:

• Being able to communicate effectively with all of the people in your work environment and beyond is one of the most essential leadership skills you can possess.

Honest communication can build trust and being open to feedback can ensure that everyone is working toward a common goal. It

also means knowing when to speak and when to listen.

• It can be challenging to manage or oversee others if you can't effectively take charge of your own tasks. Being able to self-manage involves gaining control and prioritizing goals and actions. It also extends to being able to manage emotions, recognize weaknesses and strengths and focus attention where it's needed.

• Great leaders are trusted by others. Consistently acting with decorum and respect and delivering on your promises will inspire others to trust you. Stick to your core beliefs and values.

• Effective leaders have the confidence to make decisions and stand by them. Note that there is a fine line between assertive confidence and being boastful or cocky. It may take a little

while to develop the right balance that encourages others to support your efforts.

• Delegating tasks is not a sign of weakness. In fact, it is a quality consistently found in strong leaders. Being able to delegate means you have the confidence in others to share responsibilities based on their skill sets. Delegating also promotes teamwork and lets others know you're

not afraid to share success.

• Leaders make mistakes just like everyone else. Owning your mistakes like you own accomplishments is a good trait to have. Taking blame when it's due will help increase trust in you.

Leadership skills are valued in all walks of life. Honing such skills can benefit professionals as they look to accomplish their goals and advance their careers.



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