

# 20

## Assertiveness

### Learning objectives: Unit 20

**People skills** Dos and don'ts of being assertive; Roleplay: Being assertive

**Reading** Hofstede's power distance

**Listening** Asserting yourself

**1** Do you know anyone like the man in the cartoon? Why is it that some people get walked all over at work, while others seem to get their own way?

**2** Complete the situations with the words in the box. Have you ever been in similar situations? How did you react?

down (x2)   in (x2)   off   on (x2)   under

- a** Your boss shoots \_\_\_\_\_ your great idea at a meeting and moves straight \_\_\_\_\_ to the next item on the agenda without giving you a chance to elaborate.
- b** \_\_\_\_\_ pressure to meet a deadline, you find the rest of your team are letting you \_\_\_\_\_ by not doing their share of the work.
- c** In the staff canteen, a group of people push \_\_\_\_\_ front of you \_\_\_\_\_ the queue – again!
- d** You're asked to take \_\_\_\_\_ a lot of extra work and are often expected to stay late at the office to finish \_\_\_\_\_ urgent business – even if it disrupts your social life.

**3** Read the short article below. What does the author say about assertiveness and culture? Do you agree?

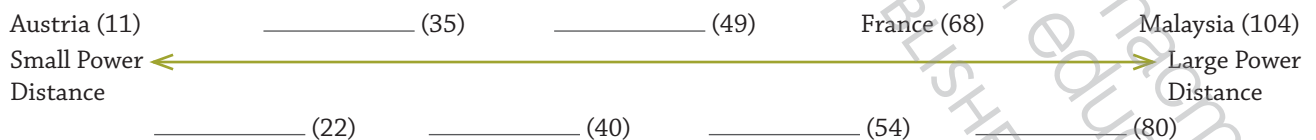


### Power Distance

How much does the freedom to assert yourself depend on the culture you work within? A great deal, according to intercultural expert Geert Hofstede. In his landmark book *Culture's Consequences*, Hofstede talks about what he calls 'power distance' in different countries. Power distance, he explains, measures the willingness of less powerful members of an organization to accept the unequal distribution of power. So a large power distance score means a lot of inequality is accepted and subordinates generally follow directives without question. And a small score means subordinates feel freer to query directives and take the initiative. Scores vary a lot from country to country. But not all companies are typical of their national culture. Multinationals, for example, tend to reflect the culture of the parent company rather than those of the countries they are located in, creating all kinds of intercultural problems in the process.

**4** Where would you place these countries on Hofstede's Power Distance scale? How about your own a) country and b) company? Check your answers on page 127.

Argentina   Germany   Japan   New Zealand   UAE   USA



1



**THE BULLDOZER**  
(aggressive)

2

I AM NOT A  
DOORMAT

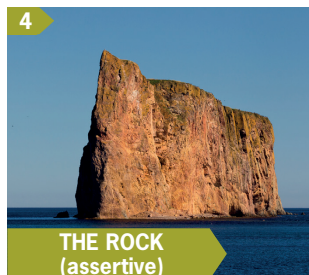
**THE DOORMAT**  
(passive)

3



**THE PRIMA DONNA**  
(manipulative)

4



**THE ROCK**  
(assertive)

5 Communication styles can be divided into four basic types. With a partner, match the character traits to the type you think they describe. The first one has been done for you.

is open and honest	<input type="checkbox"/>	stands firm	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	uses sarcasm	<input type="checkbox"/>
avoids conflict at all costs	<input type="checkbox"/>	gives in too easily	<input type="checkbox"/>	hides their true feelings	<input type="checkbox"/>
uses emotional blackmail	<input type="checkbox"/>	plays the victim	<input type="checkbox"/>	disregards your feelings	<input type="checkbox"/>
loses their cool	<input type="checkbox"/>	pulls rank	<input type="checkbox"/>	tries to get you on their side	<input type="checkbox"/>
keeps their cool	<input type="checkbox"/>	is respectful	<input type="checkbox"/>	shows empathy	<input type="checkbox"/>

6 What are the pros and cons of each communication style? Is your own style different when speaking English?

7 2.55–2.57 Listen to three versions of the same conversation and answer the questions.

#### Version 1

- What communication styles from 5 are the speakers using? Give some examples of their behaviour.
- How good a listener is Carmen? Does she at any point sympathize with Lars's position?
- Lars uses the words *sorry* and *but* quite a lot. What effect does this have?
- Carmen uses verbs of obligation (*should, have to*) to pressure Lars. How effective is this?

#### Version 2

- What communication styles are the speakers using? Give some examples of their behaviour.
- Which of the following tactics does Carmen use: flattery, bullying, blackmail? Do they work?
- Lars is quite sarcastic at times and makes some sweeping generalizations. How helpful is this?
- How successful is the outcome of the conversation?

#### Version 3

- What communication styles are the speakers using? Give some examples of their behaviour.
- Can you remember any expressions the speakers used to show empathy and understanding?
- Carmen uses specific *I*-statements to describe her feelings (*I'd really like; I would prefer it; Naturally, I'm disappointed*) and Lars politely repeats his objection. How effective is this?
- How successful is the outcome of the conversation?

8 Using what you've learned from the conversations you listened to, divide the following advice on being assertive into Dos and Don'ts by deleting where applicable:

- Do / Don't say *Yes, but ...*
- Do / Don't say *Yes, and ...*
- Do / Don't be specific about what you want.
- Do / Don't apologize by saying things like *Look, I'm sorry, but ...*
- Do / Don't generalize by saying things like *You always ...* or *You never ...*
- Do / Don't accept any valid criticisms in principle, but stand your ground.
- Do / Don't reflect what the other person is saying using expressions like *It sounds like you ...*
- Do / Don't use a lot of *I*-statements such as *I'm not happy about ..., I'm disappointed that ...* or *When you ..., I feel ...*
- Do / Don't say *You should ...* or *You have to ...*
- Do / Don't say *I'd prefer it if you ...*
- Do / Don't empathize using expressions like *I appreciate that you're ...*
- Do / Don't validate your relationship with the other person by saying things like *I think we both need to ...*

9 Work with a partner to practise being assertive in different situations. Speaker A see page 131. Speaker B see page 136.