

## **PROMOTING SOCIAL HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE THROUGH TRAINING IN ASSERTIVENESS**

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### **Abstract**

*Although social health has not been as prominent as the other two aspects of health – physical and mental, it is by no means less important because complete health cannot be achieved without it. Social health has been basically described in terms of interpersonal relationship and social equity and justice. Poor relationship in the workplace results in conflicts, workplace violence, bullying, mobbing, harassment and the like which have damaging effects on work productivity and company image. The paper reviewed the three ways in which people relate to one another – aggressiveness, non-assertiveness assertiveness and the dynamics of these relationships in the workplace. Assertiveness training as an intervention was, therefore, proposed against the backdrop of its established effectiveness in helping people resist manipulations of aggressive individuals especially office administrators/managers to effectively direct their subordinates without violating their rights. The paper recommended among others that corporate organizations should endeavour to employ adequate professionals such as occupational health promoters, psychologists and social workers to help maintain the employees' social wellness through appropriate social health interventions such as training in assertiveness.*

Dear Sir,

I have the pleasure to inform you that your application for the position of [unclear] has been considered and you have been selected for the same.

The salary for this position is [unclear] per annum, payable in 12 equal monthly instalments.

You are required to join the service on [unclear] at [unclear] office. You will be required to undergo a probationary period of [unclear] months.

During the probationary period, your performance will be closely monitored. If you are found satisfactory, you will be confirmed in the position.

Should you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned.

Yours faithfully,  
[Signature]  
[Name]  
[Designation]

[unclear]  
[unclear]  
[unclear]

[unclear]  
[unclear]  
[unclear]

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## **Introduction**

Man has been described as a social being and so wherever man is found, there is bound to be social interactions. These interactions, whether positive or negative, impact on the life of the individual as well as the society. On the other hand, being alienated from the society portends problem for the individual. In essence, an individual must be engaged in positive interaction with his environment to be a well adjusted individual. However, this is not always the case. Occasionally individuals are not interacting enough or are interacting the wrong way. When such is the case, the individual is considered a social misfit and constitutes a health risk to both himself and people around him.

Good social health entails having high self esteem and self confidence, as well as maintaining healthy relationship with people either in the home, at the workplace, at leisure or other social gatherings. The workplace is one place where healthy social environment is paramount for growth and productivity. However, frustrations of unhealthy family relationships can be transferred to the work environment resulting in lack of concentration and poor interpersonal relationship with colleagues. Continuous friction between superiors and subordinates, among colleagues

in the same work group, as well as organizational policies that are discriminatory do not provide conducive environment for productivity to thrive. On the other hand, frustrations at work can equally lead to strained relationships at home. McLeroy, Gottlieb and Heaney, (2002), therefore, believe that the worksite offers unique, largely untapped opportunities to enhance the social health of employees and their networks.

A recent survey showed that many people feel inadequate in dealing with social situations (Namka, 1997). There are essentially three different ways that people can relate to one another: aggressive, passive or assertive (Dombeck & Wells-Moran, 2006). These inadequacies are usually manifested in poor social skills, basically poor communication skills. Effective communication means that people think and act in a way that does not create tension between the communicator and the communicatee. Invariably, one's interaction is a product of his/her thinking and eventual communication. Being assertive according to Juarez (2000) is the art of getting understood by others by being neither aggressive nor passive, but by stating one's needs clearly and effectively. Assertiveness is an effective skill in conflict resolution. Conflict is often accompanied by anger – a natural emotion, but one that can

be difficult to handle. Expression of anger portends the risk of creating distrust, fear, and distance; acting it out without thinking things through, causes the conflict to escalate; and suppressing it turns it into resentment and hostility (Insel & Roth, 2002).

Aggression is about dominance. A person is aggressive when he or she imposes his or her will onto another person and forces that person to submit; in effect invading that person's personal space and boundary. Violence may be used in this effort, but it is not a necessary component of aggression. Passivity, on the other hand is about submission. Passivity occurs when a person submits to another person's dominance, putting his or her own wishes and desires aside so as to pay attention to fulfilling the wishes and desires of his or her dominant partner. Such a person may not like being dominated (most people do not), but it seems like the smart thing to do at the time (perhaps to avoid the threat of violence or other coercion). In contrast to these two fundamentally disrespectful positions, *assertiveness is about finding a middle way between aggression and passivity that best respects the personal boundaries of all relationship partners.* Assertive people defend themselves when someone else attempts to dominate them, using any necessary method (including force)

to repel the invasion attempt.

These behaviour types are usually situation specific. In other words, one may be assertive in some situations, nonassertive in others, and aggressive in yet others. For example, one might be assertive talking with friends; aggressive with people who hurt him or her, and nonassertive in conflict situations or with authorities.

Gryzb and Chandler (2011) think that a lot of people lacking in assertive communication just do not feel good having to tell people they cannot do something. Or they feel obligated when a colleague asks a favour; or feel pressurised when someone senior to them needs something done. They also noted that there are even some work places where saying no is definitely frowned upon; and in, say, the police force, could be a sackable or disciplinary offence. Some administrators adopt styles of leadership that are domineering and aggressive tending to subdue their subordinates. Employees in such workplaces are more or less forced into submissiveness and passivity which is detrimental to social health. Under such conditions emotions are bottled up, resentment thrives and there is general feeling of apathy and lack of commitment.

It is important to feel self-confident at work. It determines the quality of the work

and of the worker's contacts with managers, co-workers and clients (ISW Limits 2010). People who are self-confident and assertive at work also feel better about themselves and better about their job. Assertiveness training programme focuses on teaching several important assertiveness skills, as well as in developing the desired level of self-confidence and eliminating the fear of failure and other anxieties (ISW Limits 2010) which threaten social health.

### **The concept of social health**

The concept of social health is less familiar than that of physical or mental health, and yet, along with physical and mental health, it forms one of the three pillars of most definitions of health. Social health became prominent after it was included along with physical and mental health in the definition of health in the constitution of the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2003). Social health has also become relevant with the increasing evidence that those who are well integrated into their communities tend to live longer and recover faster from disease. Conversely, social isolation has been shown to be a risk factor for illness. Wiki (2011) posits that social health is when one can get along correctly with everyone socially. In other words, it manifests in one's ability to make friends

easily, and keep them. Hence, social health may be defined in terms of social adjustment and social support—or the ability to perform normal roles in the society.

According to Wikipedia (2011), social health can refer to both a characteristic of the society, and of an individual. A society is healthy when there is equal opportunity for all and access by all to the goods and services essential to full functioning as a citizen. Indicators of the health of a society might include the existence of the rule of law, equality in the distribution of wealth, public accessibility of the decision-making process, and the level of social capital (Wikipedia, 2011). Hence, a workplace is socially healthy if it provides policies that promote equal opportunity for all and access by all to the goods and services essential to full functioning as an employee.

Social health focuses on integration of the individual into the community, conformation to social norms or standards, and adequate performance of social roles (such as parenting). McLeroy, Gottlieb and Heaney (2002) identified three aspects of social relationships: social integration or involvement; social support, and social networks. Social integration refers to the existence or quantity of social relationships individuals have with others, such as number

of social contacts or the presence of specific types of relationships (including marriage, friendships, or organizational membership). Social support refers to the functional content of social relationships such as emotional or affective support received from others; while social networks refers to the structure of the relationships and ties that exist between individuals and others in their social environment.

McLeroy, Gottlieb and Heaney (2002) opined that social health is a function of the extent and types of relationships individuals have with others; the extent of individuals' participation in social activities and social organizations is particularly determined by the social environment; and the types and extent of social support that individuals perceive as available, requested, and/or receive is partly a function of the strength and nature of the relationship they have with others. Hence, the extent of an individual's social health is predominantly determined by the extent to which the individual is properly integrated into the society, the social support available to him and the social networks he belongs to.

Employees spend about two-third of their waking hours in the workplace. This suggests that a lot of interactions go on within this period and within this environment. This

may be between and among colleagues, between superiors and subordinates or between employees and employers. The workplace offers a good opportunity to expand social network and obtain social support. Social support in this context refers to the types of support individuals receive, or perceive as having available to them, for the interpersonal relationships in which they are involved. Israel (1982) established five types of support that may be received through interpersonal relationships: affective support; instrumental support; cognitive support; maintenance of social identity; and social outreach.

Jacobson (1986) explained these as follows: affective or emotional support provides comfort to a person, including the feeling that he or she is cared for, loved, valued, and respected; instrumental and or material support refers to goods and services, such as a loan or money, food, or child car assistance that help solve practical problems; while cognitive support includes information and advice that help a person develop understanding for his or her work and adjusts to changes in it. Furthermore, the fourth type of support otherwise referred to as maintenance of social identity includes validation of a shared work view through feedback about behaviour. Social outreach

on the other hand is access to social contacts and roles. All types of social support except for instrumental or material support are addressed in assertiveness training which is the focus of this paper.

The workplace is well positioned to provide all these to employees through a well structured social environment. The workplace can provide healthy social environment for workers through sound policies that promote healthy relationships among workers, and respect the right of all workers irrespective of gender, ethnicity, race or social class. Nevertheless, a worker is able to benefit from social support in the workplace to the extent that he/she possesses sound social skills. On the other hand, poor relationship with co-workers and organizational management can pose problems for the employee and consequently the organization's productivity. It, therefore follows that except a worker possesses the necessary social skills, it might become difficult for him/her to cope with social situations in the workplace. Being assertive provides the enablement for the worker to cope with social situations in the workplace.

### **What is assertiveness?**

Assertiveness is a particular mode of communication (Wikipedia, 2011) which according to the counseling services of

the University of Buffalo (2009) is the ability to express one's feelings, opinions, beliefs, and needs directly, openly and honestly, while not violating the personal rights of others. Every one is born with unique potential and free will – to decide for themselves, to judge for themselves, make mistakes and learn from them, refuse requests, and say 'I don't understand' or change one's mind (Juarez, 2000). Juarez (2000:29) listed the Bill of Assertive Rights as follows.

1. You have the right to be treated with respect and dignity.
2. You have the right to have and express your own feelings and opinions.
3. You have the right to be listened to and taken seriously.
4. You have the right to judge your own behaviour, thoughts and emotions, and to undertake the responsibility for their initiation, and consequences upon yourself.
5. You have the right to make mistakes and be responsible for them.
6. You have the right to say: "I don't know".
7. You have the right to say: "I don't understand."
8. You have the right to ask for information (including from professionals).

9. You have the right to change your mind.
10. You have the right to be independent to the goodwill of others before coping with them.
11. You have the right to get what you pay for.
12. You have the right to choose your profession.
13. You have the right to practice your own religion.
14. You have the right to ask for what you want (realizing that the other person has the right to say 'no').
15. You have the right to acquire knowledge.
16. You have the right to say 'No' without feeling guilty.

### **Assertiveness as a social skill**

Social skills are most often thought of as a set of skills that allow people to communicate, relate and socialize with others (Wise Geek, 2011). Social skills include both verbal and nonverbal forms of communication. They often are the way others determine a person's status, consider people as potential friends or mates, and consider them for employment or promotions in the workplace (Wise Geek, 2011). It can be very frustrating for us and for people around us if we cannot express what we want and feel. Others can hardly respond to our needs if they don't

know what those needs are. Juarez (2009) has found that lack of social skills for effective self expression is a significant barrier to self assertiveness.

Good communication means expressing yourself clearly (Insel & Roth, 2002). The way you communicate affects the way others respond to you. Effective communication enhances self-esteem, nurtures relationships, and helps in coping with stressful situations (Benson & Stuart, 1992). On the other hand, ineffective communication blames, denies and attacks, injuring self-esteem and relationships and can actually increase the stress in one's life. Effective communication is assertive, which simply means that the communicator speaks and acts from choice. Effective communication means that one can express one's likes and dislikes, accept a compliment, and know when to say yes and when to say no (Benson & Stuart, 1992). It also means one says how he or she feel when it is appropriate, ask for what one needs, and usually keep one's word.

### **Assertive thinking and behaviour**

Assertive thinking balances an active concern for one's own welfare and goals with an active concern for the welfare and goals of others. The assertive approach attempts to tap into one's unconditional love and



respect for self and others treat the other person in an understanding kind way, yet be able to be as direct, firm, persuasive, and persistent to accomplish in a win-win solutions. Assertive behaviour is generally understanding, open, direct, honest, caring, calm, focused, persistent, kind, and firm. An assertive person makes every attempt to de-escalate conflicts. For Juarez (2009) assertive behaviour is that which enables a person to act in his or her own best interest, to stand up for herself or himself, without undue anxiety, to express honest feeling comfortably, or to exercise personal rights without denying the rights of others.

To express honest feelings comfortably means the ability to disagree, show anger, to show affection or friendship, to admit fear or anxiety, to express agreement, or support, to be spontaneous, all without painful anxiety. To express personal rights refers to one's competency to express opinions, to work for change, to respond to violation of one's own rights, or those of others. To not deny the rights of other is to accomplish the above personal expressions, without unfair criticism of others, without hurtful behaviour towards others, without name-calling, without intimidation, without manipulation, without controlling others (Juarez, 2009). Assertiveness is largely about

expressing oneself clearly and resisting manipulation.

Assertive behaviour improves communication, solves problems better, and brings people closer than any other approach (Stevens, 2001). Treating people assertively, he submitted, will in the long run maximize chances of productive and happy relationships with co-workers, friends, family, lovers, or almost anyone. Assertiveness works best because most people like being genuinely understood and respected. When people know that they are genuinely cared for and will be treated understandingly, honestly, and kindly, they are much more likely to cooperate, care back, give back, and stay in the relationship longer. These outcomes of assertiveness are especially true of close relationships such as family, romantic friendship, and business relationships (Stevens, 2001).

Assertive communication can strengthen relationships, reducing stress from conflict and providing you with social support when facing difficult times (Scott, 2007). Stevens (2001) earlier stated that assertive thinking increase confidence and reduce underlying social anxiety. A polite but assertive 'no' to excessive requests from others will enable one to avoid overloading one's

schedule and promote balance in one's life. **Assertive** thinking and behaviour is opposed to non-assertive/passive and aggressive thinking and behaviours.

### **Non-assertive thinking and behaviour**

Nonassertive thinking focuses too much on pleasing others and meeting other's goals compared to satisfying one's own values, goals, and happiness. It is a "You win I lose" position. Nonassertive behaviour includes avoidance, withdrawal, timidity, deference, submissiveness, fearfulness, and indirectness (Stevens, 2009). Often non-assertiveness comes from being in an unfamiliar situation or in a situation where one has previously experienced negative outcomes. Such negative outcomes could be punishment or criticism.

Underground factors that can increase non-assertiveness include low self-esteem or self-confidence, general beliefs that support self-deprivation or sacrificing one's own happiness for others, lack of autonomy and internal control, too much dependency on others, lack of social-interpersonal skills and experiences related to conflict, and lack of experience dealing with other people or conflict (Stevens, 2009). Usually non-assertiveness takes its root from the family. In an autocratic family, some children may become rebellious and aggressive while others become passive,

submissive, and nonassertive. In a family where everyone is somewhat nonassertive and indirect in communication, all children may adopt that style. Many such children may then find it shocking to be around people who are aggressive and dominating, and are at a loss with how to deal with aggressive, dominating behaviour.

### **Aggressive thinking and behaviour**

Aggressive thinking focuses too much on pleasing oneself at the expense of others. It is an "I win, you lose" position. Aggressive behaviour includes many forms of domination and direct manipulation. Aggression usually aims at getting control of situations or getting one's goals met no matter what the consequences are to others (Stevens, 2001). Aggression is about dominance. A person is aggressive when they impose their will onto another person and force them to submit, in effect invading that person's personal space and boundary (Dombeck & Wells Moran, 2006).

Aggression varies from more subtle aggression and manipulation such as dishonest, charming, "con-man" behaviour at one extreme to violent, abusive domination at the other extreme. There are many variations of manipulation and aggression

between these two extremes. One key aspect of aggressive manipulation is dishonesty (Stevens, 2009). Dishonesty is used to control others for one's own benefit. The dishonesty usually hides one's true motives. For example, it is manipulative and dishonest to tell a person that you want them to do something for their own benefit, when at least part of your motivation is to do it for your benefit. Stevens (2001) further noted that judging, criticizing, out-talking, out-reasoning, out-lasting, or being louder or more threatening can all be used to dominate. Also, using money, status, physical attributes, attractiveness, or other resources to get control can become aggressive.

Being aggressive or domineering generally involves having a belief system that puts the aggressor's values and needs far above others. Aggressiveness does not consider the other wishes or discounts their communications. Three common types of aggressive manipulations are bully-type control, con-type control, and judgmental control.

The bully-type control uses some form of mental, physical, monetary, or other type of power to force or manipulate. This is the most blatant, unsophisticated type of direct domination. On the other

hand, the con-type control uses deception, lying, charm, and other verbal skills to persuade others to do what they want. Judgmental control is associated with habitually aggressive people. Such people rely on rules or a "holier than thou" or a "know it all" approach that may keep their partners feeling guilty, unsure of themselves, and off-balance. The judgmental person takes the position that he or she is morally and/or intellectually right, or has God or some other power of right on his or her side. He or she may act as though the others are morally wrong, stupid, or in some other way not as good, intelligent, considerate, assertive, loving, etc., as they should be. He or she uses these labels to belittle others and get control (Steven, 2009).

One of the disadvantages of being aggressive is that aggression typically increases other's feelings of fear, resentment, distance, and distrust. Others often feel lower self-esteem due to being dominated and become passive and withdraw or eventually fight back. In the end the dominated person may reject the dominator. Habitually dominant people often lose self-esteem in the area of close relationships and often feel very misunderstood, lonely, and/or unloved by

anyone. Individuals bring these types of behaviours into the workplace and the result of the interaction among aggressive, non-assertive and assertive workers determines the social environment in the workplace.

### **Workplace Relationship Dynamics**

In the workplace people relate to one another either to get work done or to socialize. In which ever situation, the three established modes of communication (aggressive, passive/nonassertive and assertive) are usually manifest. Most people tend to be passive by nature. Non-assertive employees are more likely to be prone to bullying, exploitation, victimization, sexual harassment, violence, mobbing, and drug abuse. They lack the motivation to do work and to be creative and can be a burden to the company leadership who may find them heavy loads to drag along. However, while nonassertive people are often giving in and allowing others to control them, they are not without means of controlling others as well. Passive methods of control (which are often not conscious) include feeling depressed or unmotivated and being a "wet blanket;" refusing to cooperate; talking behind someone's back; spreading rumours; using "sneaky," passive aggression; making fun of someone; not communicating; and

withdrawing (Stevens, 2009). These passive approaches undermine the motivation, work, progress, or happiness of the more dominating person. A non-assertive leader in an organization would most often be lacking in self-confidence necessary to take decisions that will move the organization forward. He/she is likely to be a laissez-fair administrator who hardly makes use of the formal powers of his position.

Aggressive employees increase co-workers feeling of fear, resentment, distance, and distrust. They may eventually become lonely and feel rejected. Such behaviour does not foster cooperation among workers in achieving tasks and reduces the opportunities of building social networks and supports. Aggressive employees are likely to be confrontational and rebellious towards the management. They are usually labour union activists. They are also likely to be involved in workplace harassment, violence, bullying and mobbing. European Network for Workplace Health Promotion (ENWHP) (2010) maintained that aggressive behaviour hurts the mental health of everyone in the organization and creates a psychologically unsafe work environment filled with fear and anxiety. They observed that the prevalence of harassment, violence and bullying is staggering noting that the result of a survey

by The Workplace Bullying Institute (2010) gave the following statistics:

1. Thirty-seven per cent of workers have been bullied: thirteen percent currently and twenty-four per cent previously.
2. Forty per cent of bullied individuals never tell their employers and sixty-two percent of the employers who are told ignore the problem, hoping it will stop on its own, not knowing what to do.
3. Forty-five per cent of targets suffer stress-related health problems.

Bullying is repeated, unreasonable or inappropriate behaviour directed towards a worker, or group of workers, that creates a risk to health and safety (ENWHP, 2010).

Since it has been noted that aggressive individuals are ambitious and have phobia for failure (Stevens, 2009), they may become highly competitive at work. This can have a mixed effect on work: it may boost creativity and high performance; it may also lead to unhealthy rivalry among employees.

Also, workplace mobbing which is ongoing systematic bullying of an individual by his/her colleagues (ENWHP, 2010) can take the form of rudeness or physical intimidation. But often it is subtle and possibly unintentional, involving social ostracism and

exclusion. Over a period of time, continuous mobbing may likely erode the self-esteem and self-confidence of the mobbed employee.

Signs of mobbing in the workplace include:

1. conversations stop when someone comes into the office;
2. someone is not invited to meetings he/she normally had been included in;
3. information essential to someone's job performance was withheld; and
4. during interactions with the person, co-workers are either hostile or passive-aggressive; (ENWHP, 2010).

Mobbing can be highly injurious to an organization's progress. The Canada Safety Council (2008) reports that victims of mobbing spend up to 52% of their time at work defending themselves, networking for support, thinking about the situation, losing motivation and becoming stressed.

An aggressive thinking person is likely to be an autocratic administrator since Stevens (2009) noted that they often honestly believe that they are "right" and others are "wrong." He also believes that habitually dominant bosses often lose self esteem in the area of close relations and often feel very misunderstood, lonely and/or unloved by

anyone. This may only increase his or her aggressive behaviours as a form of defense mechanism. He also asserted that aggressive thinking individuals either doesn't know how to be assertive or think that aggressive means are more effective. There is a difference between leadership and dominance: good leadership is inclusive, developmental, and a force for what is right. Good leadership does not dominate non-assertive people; it includes them and involves them. Stevens (2009) had noted that dominance as a management style is not good in any circumstances. It is based on short-term rewards and results, mostly for the benefit of the dominant, and it fails completely to make effective use of team-members' ability and potential.

The fact is that most excessively dominant people are usually bullies. Bullies are deep-down very insecure people. They dominate because they are too insecure to allow other people to have responsibility and influence, and this behaviour is generally conditioned from childhood for one reason or another (Stevens, 2001). Most times the dominant bullying behaviour is effectively reinforced by the response given by non-assertive people to bullying. The bully gets his or her own way. The bullying dominant behaviour is rewarded, and so it persists.

Assertiveness increases self-confidence and facilitates the communication of ideas at work. With increasing competition, the importance of being assertive at the workplace is being realized to a greater extent. It's not just seen as a matter of survival, but as an indirect, powerful tool to increase productivity and efficiency (Pant, 2006). Hence, training workers in assertiveness can boost productivity and efficiency in the workplace

### **Assertiveness training**

Assertiveness training is a form of behaviour therapy designed to help people stand up for themselves – to empower themselves in more contemporary terms (Wikipedia, 2009). It helps people to learn how to think and act more assertively. By thinking more assertively and learning key assertion skills one can improve one's interpersonal competence and be more confident in almost any type of interpersonal situation with almost anyone (Stevens, 2009). Assertive responses promote fairness and equality in human interactions, based on a positive sense of respect for self and others. Assertiveness is a response that seeks to maintain an appropriate balance between passivity and aggression.

Assertiveness training dates back to the 1970s when it was used to improve mental health and encourage personal growth among women (Wikipedia, 2009). The approach was introduced to encourage women to stand up for themselves appropriately in their interactions with others, particularly as they moved into graduate education and the workplace in greater numbers (Gryzb & Chandler, 2011). Today, assertiveness training is used as part of communication training in settings as diverse as schools, corporate boardrooms, and psychiatric hospitals, for programmes as varied as substance abuse treatment, social skills training, vocational programs and responding harassment (Wikipedia, 2009). It is a broad approach that can be applied to many different personal, academic, health care, and work situations.

Assertiveness training is often included within other programmes, but sometimes can stand alone. Corporate programmes for new personnel sometimes offer assertiveness training as part of communication or team work groups, or as part of a programme on sexual harassment. Specific areas of intervention and change in assertiveness training include conflict resolution, realistic goal-setting, and stress management (Scott, 2009). She further describes assertiveness training typically

beginning with an information-gathering exercise in which participants are asked to think about and list the areas in their life in which they have difficulty asserting themselves. The next stage in assertive training is usually role-plays designed to help participants practice clearer and more direct forms of communicating with others. The role-plays allow for practice and repetition of the new techniques, helping each person learn assertive responses by acting on them. Feedback is provided to improve the response, and the role-play is repeated. Eventually, each person is asked to practice assertive techniques in everyday life, outside the training setting. Role-plays usually incorporate specific problems for individual participants, such as difficulty speaking up to an overbearing boss; setting limits to intrusive friends; or stating a clear preference about dinner to one's spouse. Role-plays often include examples of aggressive and passive responses, in addition to the assertive responses, to help participants distinguish between these extremes as they learn a new set of behaviours.

Assertiveness training is not only meant to help non-assertive individuals resist the domination and manipulation of aggressive individuals, it is also meant to help aggressive individuals relate well with people while being mindful of their rights. Some people in

positions of authority seek assertiveness training in order to learn how to persuade people to do as they wish without having to become a bully.

Learning specific techniques and perspectives, such as self-observation skills, awareness of personal preferences and ~~assuming~~ personal responsibility are important components of the assertiveness training process. Role-play and practice help with self-observation, while making lists can be helpful technique for exploring personal preferences for those who may not have a good sense of their own needs and desires.

To become assertive, it is important to learn the right skills and have adequate motivation to use those skills in the right situation. Assertiveness skills mean the ability to express yourself and your rights without violating the rights of others.

### **Techniques of Assertiveness**

Some techniques of assertiveness that have been in use include broken record, free information, fogging, negative assertion, workable compromise, desk scripting and transactional analysis (Juarez, 2000, Businessballs, 2009).

Broken record otherwise known as persistence derives its name from the days before CDs, when vinyl was the dominant

medium for audio reproduction. A faulty or dirty vinyl disc might 'stick' and repeat the same short snatch of music over and over again until the stylus was lifted from it. In the broken record technique, a request is repeated over and over again until the desired response is obtained or a workable compromise is reached. Attempts at distraction or changing the subject are rejected.

Free information involves two skills. First is listening to the clues other people give about themselves. This free information gives one something to talk about, and avoids those awkward silences, when one ask oneself, "What do I say now?" In addition, it makes it easier for people to talk about themselves, when one shows interest in things important to him or her. The second skill is self disclosure which involves disclosing information about oneself – how one thinks, feel, and react to other person's free information. It allows the social communication to flow both ways.

Fogging involves training oneself to stay calm in the face of criticism, and agreeing with whatever may be fair and useful in it. By refusing to be provoked and upset by criticism, one removes its destructive power. For instance, if someone criticizes one's work, one can probably agree that it could be better. Wikipedia (2009) believes that this technique



will have been discovered accidentally by many people who work in jobs that involve a lot of contact with the general public, many of whom must surely practice fogging regularly without being aware of the term. The point in fogging is that it robs your critic's words of their destructive power. While superficially it may seem like a submissive strategy, it is in fact assertive because of what it implies. By refusing to become upset or angry in the face of criticism, one is denying one's critic the satisfaction of seeing one being intimidated and disempowered. If somebody is just trying to bully one, and his or her words are not overpowering, there's a good chance that he or she will turn his or her attention to someone else who is easier to intimidate.

Negative assertion, on the other hand, is a skill that teaches acceptance of errors, and faults without having to apologise by agreeing with hostile or constructive criticism of negative qualities. It simply means agreeing with those parts of the criticism that are valid, but without allowing oneself to become consumed by guilt and self-loathing. It allows the individual to look more comfortably at negatives in his or her own behaviour or personality without feeling defensive and anxious or resorting to denial of real error, while at the same time reducing critic's anger or hostility.

Transactional analysis involves the analysis of human interaction and the roles people play. The central idea of transactional analysis is that human beings have three basic 'ego-states': parent, adult, and child. People move between these three ego-states, or states of mind, whether or not they are in fact parents, children or adults. People often switch between the different ego-states unconsciously in response to others' behaviour. If someone is in the child ego-state, and is behaving irrationally in a way that obstructs other's aims, the other may slip into the parent ego-state and try to control him or her.

DESC scripting is a technique for framing complaints or requests. The acronym 'DESC' stands for 'Describe, Express, Specify, Consequences'. In the 'Describe' part of the DESC, script, one says what seems to him or her to be happening. In the 'express' part, one says how it is making him or her feel. In the 'specify' part, one may say what one would like to happen. Finally, in the 'Consequences' part, one says what will happen if he or she does not get what he or she want. Finally, in using verbal assertive skills, it is sometimes practical to offer a workable compromise to the other person, or to cooperate when offered one.

One problem that has been persistently associated with assertiveness training is the tendency for participants to "overdo" the new behaviour and come across as aggressive rather than assertive. However, Scott (2009) assures that such problem would most likely disappear with continued practice of the technique.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

The paper has drawn attention to the role of social health in promoting wellbeing and productivity in the workplace as well as the problems that arise as a result of poor social skills especially communication skills in worker relationships. Three ways of communication among individuals were reviewed and the dynamics of these modes of communication in the workplace. Assertiveness was identified as the best way to maintain a healthy relationship and the effectiveness of assertive training in helping individuals adjust to social situations and maintain good social and working relationships in the workplace was also established. Also, the fact that many people are passive or non-assertive in their relationships, and considering the negative and devastating effect of such behaviour underscores the need for corporate organizations to fall back on assertiveness

training as a means of boosting productivity and promoting company image.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the above conclusions reached, the following were recommended.

1. Social workers, psychiatrists and other health promotion professionals should be more actively involved in the workplace for boosting social health in the workplace especially in assertiveness training.
2. Occupational health laws should include policies and regulations that promote social health in the workplace such as those that provide increased support to employees and their families.
3. Professional bodies and NGOs that are concerned with occupational health should engage in serious advocacy for the passage and signing of occupational health bills into law.
4. Assertiveness training should be included in the curriculum for the training of social workers, psychiatrists, health educators and other health promotion professionals.

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