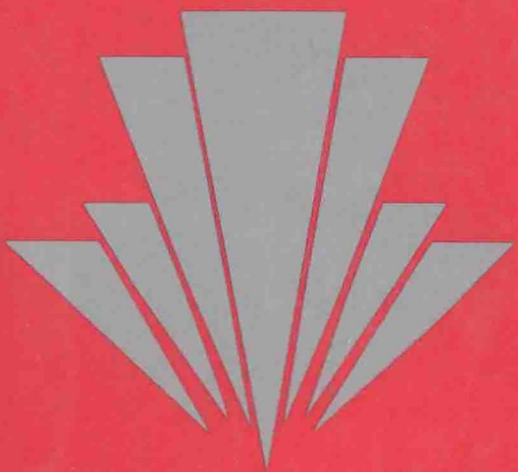
The Assertive Librarian



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by Janette S. Caputo

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The rare Arabian Oryx is believed to have inspired the myth of the unicorn. This desert antelope became virtually extinct in the ealry 1960s. At that time several groups of international conservationists arranged to have 9 animals sent to the Phoenix Zoo to be the nucleus of a captive breeding herd. Today the Oryx population is over 400 and herds have been returned to reserves in Israel, Jordan, and Oman.

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This book is dedicated to four people whom I admire immensely and who have had a positive role in my own life as an assertive librarian:

Kenneth J. Bruza, Ph.D.
Thomas J. Cinque, M.D.
Sally Harms
Vern M. Pings, Ph.D.

Preface

This book is written for all librarians and library employees, working at any level, in any type of library. My belief that the professional role of any librarian can be enhanced through the appropriate application of the principles of assertion training is based on my own discoveries as an assertive librarian, on the library situations that many assertive colleagues have shared with me, and on my experiences as both developer and teacher of library continuing education courses in assertiveness and human relations skills. Thus, the focus of this book on assertiveness is practical, not theoretical, and its scope is professional, not personal.

Assertion training workshops for librarians have been developed by the author. It is hoped that this book can serve as a text for future workshops in which personal development for application in a library setting can be introduced and practiced.

Assertiveness training is based on the theory that behavioral responses are learned rather than instinctual, and that we therefore have control over the responses we wish to learn, unlearn, and select for use. Perhaps the most distinctive characteristic of assertiveness training is its practicality. The models of behavior that are defined as assertive are presented as part of a wide range of alternative behaviors that are available to every individual as a matter of choice, adaptable and adoptable as they fit each person's unique value system, philosophy, and style. Assertive techniques are specific, definable, understandable, and workable. They can be immmediately applied in both our personal and professional lives. They enhance humanistic beliefs and provide alternatives for conflict resolution.

For the professional librarian, assertive skills can be employed in problematic situations to avoid sullen withdrawals, hostile confrontations, misunderstandings, and inappropriate emotional responses (e.g., guilt or anxiety). They can be selectively used to turn win-lose conflicts into win-win transactions. There is little to be won, however, and perhaps much to be lost, from the acquisition of abrasive and obnoxious behaviors in the guise of "assertion training." This book is meant to be eminently practical, presenting assertive techniques as a

repertoire of possible alternative behaviors which a librarian can select based on the perceived needs of each individual situation, time, and place, rather than as a standard package of presumably assertive "tricks" that can be used in a manipulative fashion without regard for the long-term interpersonal effects they may produce.

No single style of behavior can be effective for all times, in all places, for all people. Assertiveness, as presented in this text, will be considered a continuum of behaviors of varying strengths and designs. These behaviors will be shown in a variety of library situations.

In this book, library situations appear more frequently in some chapters than in others, and this may tempt readers to read them prematurely; it is strongly recommended that readers read the entire text in sequence, as each new concept builds on those previously presented. The foundations for a thorough understanding of the many nuances in Chapter 9, "The Assertive Library Supervisor," in particular, are found in Chapters 1 through 8; consequently, Chapter 9 cannot be fully understood without the framework of these previous chapters.

To date, only one research study has been undertaken to measure the effects of assertiveness training on librarians. Stead and Scamell (1981) distributed questionnaires to 72 librarians attending a management development seminar sponsored by the Special Libraries Association at a regional conference. Their questionnaire included some demographic data, a recognized scale measuring job satisfaction (Smith, Kendall and Hulin's Job Descriptive Index), and a recognized scale measuring assertiveness (the Rathus Assertiveness Schedule). The questionnaire results, from 68 usable responses, indicated that assertiveness training for low-assertive librarians may increase their job satisfaction, but that, for the subgroup of librarians 41 years of age or older, with 11 or more years of professional work experience, assertiveness training may lead to a decrease of job satisfaction in terms of relating to their co-workers. The authors collected data that showed some statistical significance but carefully point out that "any conclusions drawn from this study must be tempered by the fact that the data were derived from self-reporting measures, and the analysis was correlational in nature" (Stead & Scamell, 1981, p. 388), as well as that the data came from a very small, self-selected sample of single-type (i.e., special) librarians. They suggest a need for further research. I heartily endorse that need; I hope this text may serve as a catalyst to pique the interest of library researchers in addition to providing readers with descriptions of the practical applications of assertiveness to the library environment.

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Chapter 1
Introduction

The basic concepts of modern assertion training were first outlined in 1949, when a book called *Conditioned Reflex Therapy,* written by Andrew Salter, was published by Creative Age Press in New York. In this book, Salter described "the inhibitory personality" and defined six rules of "excitatory reflexes," which he believed would strengthen the inhibited patients he treated. These six rules of excitatory reflex concerned (1) feeling talk, or the saying of what we feel; (2) facial talk, or the nonverbal expression of our feelings; (3) frequent use of I-statements—sentences beginning with the pronoun "I"; (4) the ability to accept praise and give compliments; (5) the ability to make contradictory statements when we disagree with another person; and (6) the ability to live for the present and be spontaneous. This classic work has been identified as the foundation for the current practice of assertion training. Salter used his rules of excitatory reflexes to treat patients suffering from shyness, claustrophobia, low self-sufficiency, depression, stuttering, alcohol addiction, and sexual or psychosomatic disorders. Later behavior therapists Joseph Wolpe (1958) and Arnold Lazarus (Wolpe & Lazarus, 1966) treated people with similar problems, but in their work they differentiated between assertive and aggressive behaviors. In the 1970s, assertion training began to enjoy a widespread popularity which Arthur Lange and Patricia Jakubowski (1976), two of the leading assertion trainers/therapists of this decade, explained was the result of two important social changes in the 1960s. First, people began to place a higher value on personal relationships as a source of self-worth and satisfaction with life. Second, as alternative life-styles became more openly declared and more accepted, the range of socially acceptable behaviors was considerably expanded. The next step in this popularization process, noted by Alberti and Emmons (1977), was the acceptance of assertiveness training by minority groups as a successful means of training their members to stand up for their rights in appropriate and meaningful ways.

THE ASSERTIVE CHOICE

Assertive behavior is typified by calm, rational thinking, self-confidence, healthy self-esteem, a regard for others and for self, and a sense of responsibility. It is based on the recognition that every situation includes a variety of alternative potential responses, and that we, as rational beings, can choose from among those alternatives in order to find the responses that (1) best meet our needs, (2) allow us to avoid causing harm to others, (3) allow us to interact with other people in a productive and satisfying manner, and (4) allow us to approach the resolution of conflict in ways that maximize the gains for all parties to the conflict.

The history of humankind shows centuries in which people made behavior choices by habit, custom, or externally imposed limitations, rather than by conscious thought. It is this habitual responding that is the target for change in assertion training. The roles of behavior modification and cognitive-emotive processes in assertion training can be stated very simply: (1) all behaviors are learned; (2) assertive behaviors can therefore be learned; (3) rational thought can assist in the analysis of our learned behaviors and the objective assessment of real situations; (4) rational thought can help us select the learned behaviors we would like to abandon as well as the learned behaviors we would like to adopt and use more often; and finally, (5) a cycle of practice, feedback, assessment, and additional practice can result in the replacement of other, more satisfying, learned behaviors for those learned behaviors which we have found to be unsatisfying in the past (Ellis, 1973; Wolpe, 1982).

What Is Assertiveness?

Since 1949, psychologists have been defining and refining the definition of assertiveness, trying to state it in easily understood terms, yet also trying to instill in the definition an expression of philosophy as weil as a description of behaviors. Joseph Wolpe defined assertion as "the proper expression of any emotion other than anxiety toward another person" (1973, p. 81). At roughly the same time, Fensterheim defined assertiveness as "the act of declaring oneself, of stating this is who I am, what I think and feel; it characterizes an active rather than a passive approach to life" (1972, p. 161). Rimm and Masters (1974) said that assertive behavior is the interpersonal behavior involving the relatively direct expression of feeling in a socially appropriate manner,

while Spencer Rathus, a psychologist who has been very active in conducting research on assertive behaviors, defined it as "the expression of oneself in a positive, productive manner" (1975, p. 9). In the second edition of *Your Perfect Right,* a book that was written in part for the therapeutic community and in part for the general population, Alberti and Emmons (1974) defined assertiveness as "behavior which enables a person to act in his own best interests, to stand up for himself without undue anxiety, to express his honest feelings comfortably, or to exercise his rights without denying the rights of others" (p. 2). Jakubowski (Jakubowski-Spector, 1973) also formulated a definition that included the concept of standing up for one's rights, defining assertion as "that type of interpersonal behavior in which a person stands up for her legitimate rights without denying the rights of others" (p. 76). These latter definitions, which include the concept of rights, have been repeatedly paraphrased in the literature of assertion training for the therapeutic community (Galassi & Galassi, 1978; Groth, 1977; Hauser, 1979; Hughes, 1981; Lange, Rimm, & Loxley, 1975; Mamarchev, 1977); for the general public (Ashby, 1975; Fensterheim & Baer, 1975; Jakubowski & Lange, 1978); and for the work environment (Becker, 1980; Brockway, 1976; Caputo, 1981; MacNeilage & Adams, 1982; Pardue, 1980; Pugh, 1979).

The definitions that seem to be the most applicable to the work environment are these:

- *Assertion* is standing up for your rights without violating the rights of others.
- *Nonassertion* is not standing up for your rights (remaining passive).
- *Aggression* is standing up for your rights without concern for (or conscious avoidance of) the violation of others' rights.

Assertion. Assertive people are described as those who may insist on what they feel is correct but who will not generate gratuitous hostilities while doing so, who can confess to errors without loss of self-esteem, and who can choose to forego redress for grievances if a rational view of the entire situation warrants it (Rathus, 1975). Stated simply, assertive people attempt to strike a balance between passive and aggressive behaviors that emphasizes their self-responsibility (O'Donnell & Colby, 1979). Assertive people make requests of others, speak clearly, maintain appropriate eye contact, take less time to respond than others do, use "I" more often to describe their feelings, and are direct (Williams & Long, 1979). They also present themselves in a comfortable, confident way, take an active orientation toward

work, are able to give and take criticism constructively, and deal with anxiety and fear in ways that allow them to continue to function effectively (Clark, 1979). Assertive people communicate openly, honestly, and directly, with consideration for others, cutting through arbitrary differences in status in order to communicate on an equal level (MacNeilage & Adams, 1982) because they represent a healthy balance between self-orientation (selfishness and aggression) and social orientation (compliance and passivity) (Ames, 1977). Assertive people smile, initiate conversations with strangers, say no without feeling undue feelings of guilt (Pardue, 1980), and are both skilled in empathy and sensitive to the feelings of others (Hauser, 1979). Assertive people give and accept compliments, express love and affection, and voice personal opinions, including disagreements, without defensiveness (Galassi & Galassi, 1978). Finally, assertive people take responsibilities for their behaviors and choices of behaviors (Jakubowski & Lange, 1978).

Assertive behaviors are direct actions that allow a librarian to attempt the resolution of interpersonal conflicts in rational and considerate ways. They are characterized by honesty, objectivity, accuracy, respect for self and others, reasonable tolerance, and self-expression. Librarians who are able to give a personal opinion on a controversial issue while at the same time recognizing the rights of others to hold differing opinions, perhaps based on the same rationale and strength of affective feelings, are engaging in assertive behavior. The assertive librarian can face conflict with an investigative assurance that problems can be solved and decisions can be made through an appropriate analysis that allows respect for human rights. The assertive librarian can take appropriate disciplinary or other negative action without feeling inappropriate guilt and is equally adept at providing positive feedback such as sincere compliments and rewards. One of the most significant payoffs for the assertive librarian is the enhanced self-esteem and improved personal relationships that can result from appropriate assertion.

Nonassertion. Nonassertive people show deference, timidity, and meekness; have difficulty dealing with feelings of anger; make efforts to suppress their feelings; and feel frustrated much of the time (MacNeilage & Adams, 1982). They have a detrimental effect on the work environment as well; their reluctance to express their opinions or feelings denies their colleagues an opportunity to interact, while their frustrations lead them to disgruntlement and a negative effect on morale. The nonassertive supervisors who yield to every request easily produce confusion and inconsistency in their staff members (Hulbert,

1982). Nonassertive people are prone to suffer hurt feelings, resentment, low self-esteem, and psychosomatic illnesses (Groth, 1977). They tend to avoid seeking information, asking for help, and asking questions when they don't understand (Neiger & Fullerton, 1979). Nonassertive people have a tendency to avoid eye contact when talking with others, may sit or stand with head lowered or body drooping, and may exhibit nervous behaviors such as tics or excessive blinking (Williams & Long, 1979).

Alberti and Emmons (1982) make a distinction between generalized and situational nonassertion. Some people are generally nonassertive, acting timid, shy, or reserved in most or nearly all circumstances, while others are normally able to function adequately, in self-enhancing ways, but become unassertive in certain situations that cause them undue anxiety.

Passive behaviors are characterized by nonaction. The passive librarian is characterized by avoidance behaviors, silent acceptance, self-denial, and overtoleration. The nonassertive librarian allows, for example, powers external to the library to dictate policy, procedure, or collection development decisions without providing his or her professional opinion on appropriate service rationale or library administration to those outside powers. Assertive behaviors do not guarantee acceptance of a librarian's input, but nonassertive behavior does guarantee that such input will not be accepted, as it is never offered. Nonassertion provides very little satisfaction to the librarians who choose it; it may bring some short-term satisfaction in avoidance of the dreaded conflict, but it brings a long-term decrease in self-esteem and a feeling of helplessness. Nonassertive librarians may begin building a large store of unverbalized resentment toward the people perceived as having power, and this resentment can severely limit their ability to behave assertively. When it finally becomes clear that they must speak up on an issue, their verbalization too often explodes into inappropriately aggressive complaints and hostility.

Aggression. When we think of aggression, we often think of hostility, rage, violence, and other extreme outward expressions of anger and frustration. We may also think of extraordinarily fierce competition. The usual goal of aggression is domination, or winning, forcing the other person to lose. Winning is ensured by humiliating, degrading, belittling, and overpowering other people until everyone but the aggressor is weakened and less able to express and defend their needs and rights (Lange & Jakubowski, 1976). Aggressive people are stubborn and resistant to change. They are highly defensive of potential damage to their self-esteem because their self-esteem is

usually rather low and vulnerable; thus, they make extra efforts to make it appear to be high and invincible. Their requests are made as demands. They are impulsive, reacting instantaneously to the stimulus of real or perceived opposition from others. Aggressive people blame others for the negative things that they experience.

Aggressive people express anger in destructive ways, intensifying interpersonal conflict rather than helping to resolve it; aggression is a behavior that is intended to threaten or injure the security or self-esteem of others (Hoffman, Kirwin & Rouzer, 1979). Aggressive people may inflict harm or violate others' rights by verbal or nonverbal, direct or indirect, immediate or delayed, conscious or unconscious means (Duncan & Hobson, 1977). Aggressive people often exhibit assertive behaviors such as honesty and clarity, but their goal-directed behavior includes manipulation, domination, excessively inappropriate fury (instead of controllable anger), and hostility (Ellis, 1976).

Aggressive behavior in a library may appear as irrational tirades by supervisors over subordinates' errors, or conversely, by irrational rages from subordinates against supervisors. It may be indicated by brusque responses or no response at all to patrons at the reference desk, refusal to listen to reasonable requests for exceptions to rules, refusal to perform certain functions or to assist certain patrons, conscious fiscal irresponsibility, purposeful attacks on staff morale, or vengeance through evaluation forms and memorandums. The aggressive librarian may find some short-term satisfaction in a momentary feeling of superiority but suffers great loss in terms of long-term destructive action on interpersonal relationships.

Passive-Aggression. Aggression is characterized as very direct, but it may also be expressed in indirect ways. MacNeilage and Adams (1982) define passive-aggression as "the unhappy marriage between superficial acquiescence and underlying resentment, bitterness or rage" (p. 6). Typically aggressive people may exhibit bullying and bravado as standard modus operandi; passive-agressive people appear to exhibit nonassertive behavior. The clinical definition of passive-aggression is "a mechanism of defense, a personality trait, or maladaptive pattern of coping behavior" (Perry & Flannery, 1982, p. 164). In Chapter 8, the difference between defense mechanisms and coping mechanisms will be reviewed. It is important to determine, when you must deal with passive-aggressive people, whether their behavior is a result of a defense mechanism or a maladaptive coping mechanism.

Passive-aggressors who are responding to defense mechanisms are unaware of the aggressiveness of their intent. They see themselves as victims, as people for whom things just always go wrong. They are very successful at hiding their true feelings from themselves, often more successful at that than at hiding those true feelings from others. A colleague who truly likes you may hide her/his resentment at your being named the chair of an exciting new committee and sincerely congratulate you, then show up late for every meeting or procrastinate on committee assignments s/he agrees to do for you. When a defense mechanism is responsible for this behavior, a passive-aggressive person will have absolutely valid excuses for each lapse: tardiness is the result of being unable to find their minutes from the last meeting (which were right there a minute ago) or being unable to end a telephone conversation in time; procrastination is caused by illness or overwhelming demands on their time by someone with higher authority than yours. It is important to note that these passive-aggressors *do not consciously know* that they are doing these things purposely.

Passive-aggressors who are using maladaptive coping behaviors are aware of the aggressive intent of their actions, however. They attempt to hide their aggression by expressing it in passive ways or by exhibiting it in nonactions. Their behavior is the result of deliberate conscious thought, a maladaptive coping mechanism that successfully allows them to be aggressive without experiencing the overt social sanctions offered to aggressors. Common work examples of deliberate passive-aggressive behavior are dawdling, procrastination, intentional inefficiency, stubbornness, and forgetfulness. These are the people who harm you by:

1. Agreeing to perform a task for you but not meeting your deadline or forgetting about it completely.
2. Consistently misunderstanding what you want: "*I thought* you said...."
3. Consistently procrastinating and accompanying it with attempts to instill guilt in you: "Don't be so impatient."
4. Frequently, but intermittently, forgetting routine assignments, requiring you to monitor them daily.
5. Chronic tardiness.

Table 1 compares the characteristics, consequences, and payoffs of assertive, nonassertive, and aggressive behavior.

Table 1
Comparison of Behaviors

	Nonassertion	Assertion	Aggression
Characteristics	Tolerance when your rights have been violated; emotional dishonesty; indirect or no communication; self-denying; inhibition; weakness.	Standing up for your rights when they have been violated; emotional honesty; direct communication; self-enhancing; lack of inhibition.	Standing up for your rights by denying or violating the rights of others; emotional honesty with inappropriate extreme expression; self-enhancing at others' expense; lack of inhibition.
How You Feel	Timid; shy; helpless; meek; hurt; anxious; humiliated; "I'm nobody."	Confident; self-respecting, satisfied that you are treated with respect; "We're both somebody."	Righteous; superior; courageous; depreciatory of others; may feel guilty later; "You're nobody."
How Others Feel	Frustrated by your inaction; overvalued by you.	Valued; respected; satisfied; maybe guilty if others have been aggressive with you.	Devalued; unrespected; used; defensive; humiliated; hurt; manipulated.
How Others Feel About You	Irritated; disgusted; pitying; disrespectful.	Respectful, although there can be adverse reactions from nonassertive others.	Angry; vengeful; disrespectful.
Approach to Conflict	Avoiding open conflict; rarely showing anger.	Bringing conflict into open; expressing anger to assist in solving problems.	Seeking conflict; expressing anger to punish and control.
Conflict Outcome	Your needs remain unsatisfied.	Your needs are usually satisfied.	Your needs are usually satisfied at others' expense.

Table 1
Comparison of Behaviors (continued)

	Nonassertion	Assertion	Aggression
Action Pattern	Underreacting.	Acting directly, appropriately.	Overreacting.
At Work, Superiors Tend to	Discount your opinions; ignore you; take advantage of you.	Trust you; invite your participation; negotiate with you.	Challenge you; punish you; retreat from you.
Payoffs	Avoidance of conflict; tension; unpleasantness.	Increase in self-esteem; improvement in interpersonal relations.	Venting of emotions immediately; superior feelings.
Payments	Building up resentment and anger; risk of explosion into aggression at inappropriate time or place.	Possible break-down of relationships with others who will not accept your assertiveness.	May have build-up of guilt; probable loss of interpersonal relationships.
Intent	To please; to gain approval.	To communicate; to solve problems.	To dominate; to control.
T.A. Viewpoint	I'm not OK; You're OK.	I'm OK; You're OK.	I'm OK; You're not OK.
Leadership Style	Fleeing; giving in.	Negotiating; evaluating; acting.	Controlling; dominating; intimidating.
Decision Making	Making decisions that avoid conflict or that allow others to make decisions.	Making own decisions based on information and needs.	Making own decisions; ignoring impact on others; trying to make others' decisions for them.