

assertive vs. aggressive

showing a confident personality vs.
ready/likely to attack or confront



The truth is powerful. It can also be painful.

If you're the type that prides yourself on always telling it like it is, you might consistently remember the first part of this reality, while sometimes forgetting the second. Sure, constructive feedback can help your team grow, your entrepreneur friend improve her business, or your supplier better serve you. But flat out criticism can also hurt people's feelings and harm relationships.

Being assertive doesn't mean being aggressive or bossy—it's about communicating clearly and objectively.

Do you know how to be assertive and not aggressive?

Is there a way that you can you get your point across honestly and efficiently, without causing your co-worker to burst into tears? **Spoiler alert: There is.** Here are a few tips and strategies you'll need to be direct, without coming off as aggressive or abrasive.

Be Constructive This is a *big differentiator* between a person who's direct, and a person who's aggressive. Just because you're willing to put your thoughts out there, doesn't mean you're entitled to point out all sorts of problems without presenting any solutions.

If you and your team are piecing together a report, saying something like, "This table of contents is a mess. It makes absolutely zero sense," is direct, but it isn't the least bit helpful. However, a statement like, "This table of contents doesn't make sense to me. I think we could move Section B ahead of Section A to make it flow better," shares your views, but also proposes a fix to the very problem you're pointing out. That element is important to not only avoid sounding mean and pushy, but also to be a valuable, contributing team member.

Watch Your Tone You've heard it time and time again—your **tone** and nonverbal cues often say more than the words that are actually coming out of your mouth. So, it's important that you're conscious of both of these things.

Saying, "That'll never work!" with a sharp, snarky tone is a lot different than saying, "That may not work because..." with a more pensive, soft quality to your voice.

Yes, the statements are essentially the same. But, the way you present them makes a world of difference. The former undoubtedly seems *insulting*—like you're disgusted at just the thought. The latter? It shows that you actually gave the suggestion some consideration, before determining it wasn't the best course of action.

Comment on the Work, Not the Person To avoid being perceived as an attacker, you need to ensure that all of your comments address the work, process, or results—not that specific person. Instead of saying, "Your idea is not great. It'll never work," try something like, "This method isn't our best approach."

Again, you're still making your point. But, you're doing so in a way that doesn't feel like a personal attack on someone's intelligence.