

Lack of Assertiveness

Have you ever been afraid to speak up in a group setting or when you had a concern about safety in operations? You might suffer from a Lack of Assertiveness. We need to have the ability to challenge others when necessary and state our views without being aggressive. A person who practices assertiveness with respect behaves in ways that expresses confidence, knowledge, and opinions while showing respect for others. We need to:

- Speak openly, but respectfully
- Use a conversational tone
- Make good eye contact
- Let our expressions match the message
- Consider different viewpoints
- Believe self is equal to others

Consider these examples and think about what you would do.

A Controller, uncomfortable about the lower-than-expected pressures at pumping stations along the pipeline and a reduced flow rate at the delivery, shut the system down. The Control Center Supervisor and a Field Supervisor discuss the issues and direct the Controller to start back up so the Supervisors can monitor the pressures. The Controller thinks that is a bad idea. *The Controller did start the line back up and pumped 1000 barrels without a pressure rise because there was a rupture.*

You are a Field Operator. During a startup, it is taking longer than usual for the pressure rise to reach your facility. You asked the Controller why it is taking so long for the pressure rise. He said the line needed to pack. It has never taken it that long to pack in the past. You think there might be a leak. The Controller is not a pleasant person at the best of times and gets unpleasant when someone questions his authority. *I was the Field Operator and kept telling the Controller we should shutdown even though he did not take the advice for 45 minutes. There was a rupture that contaminated the water wells of many citizens. The company paid to install a water system for the small town on a mountain.*

Use these “Five Simple Steps for Assertiveness” from “*The National Fire Fighter Near Miss Reporting System*” by Todd Bishop.

1. Get the person’s attention.
2. Say, “I have a concern.”
3. State the concern with relevant details.
4. State a solution.
5. Obtain agreement or buy-in.

Another method from the Healthcare industry is also helpful:

1. What I see:
 - “I notice the shift change process takes about three minutes and there is little reference to the controller log.”
2. What I’m concerned about:
 - “I am concerned that the shift change conversations may not be thorough.”
3. What I want:
 - “I want the control room supervisor to observe at least two shift changes each month and provide coaching on the process.”

