

Which Assertiveness Skills Count Most?

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Summary

Data collected online from a diverse group of 3,060 participants from 71 countries (59.7% from the U.S. and Canada, mean age 24.7) were analyzed to determine (a) which of four empirically-based assertiveness competencies best predicted four self-reported positive life outcomes and (b) how well those life outcomes were predicted by assertiveness, passiveness and aggressiveness scores on our online test. The four assertiveness competencies were Communicating Proactively, Expressing Your Needs and Desires, Standing Up for Yourself, and Presenting Yourself Confidently. Regression analyses showed that Presenting Yourself Confidently was by far the best predictor of all of our criterion variables: happiness, personal success, professional success, and number of friendships. Assertiveness was positively correlated with all four; passiveness was negatively correlated with all four; and, notably, the correlations between aggressiveness and all of the criterion variables were close to zero and either non-significant or marginally significant. For both assertiveness and passiveness, no effects were found for race or country, but significant effects were found for gender, sexual orientation, and education. For aggressiveness, no effects were found for country, but significant effects were found for race, gender, sexual orientation, and education. Our results also confirmed the value of assertiveness training: Assertiveness scores were significantly higher for participants who had had some form of assertiveness training and were positively correlated with the number of training hours. Overall, the study confirmed the findings of other studies showing the superiority of assertiveness over passiveness and aggressiveness. It also provided support for the value of a competencies approach to understanding assertiveness and suggested the special value of Presenting Yourself Confidently. We describe this competency in detail and offer possible explanations for its importance.