
Assertiveness Skills for Senior Leaders: Boundaries and Difficult Conversations Training Course

18 – 22 January 2027
New York





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Programme Summary

Assertiveness Skills for Senior Leaders, covering boundaries and difficult conversations, is the subject of this five-day training course for directors, heads of function and senior officials at strategic level, ending in a personal assertiveness playbook. Leaders who avoid firm requests or react too sharply create delay, resentment and unclear accountability. The programme moves from principles of assertive behaviour, through diagnosis of personal response patterns, to design of scripts and boundaries, then to application in rehearsed live conversations. Mars Training Centre UK delivers this Assertiveness Skills for Senior Leaders programme for experienced executives.

The Business Case

When senior leaders cannot state expectations clearly, decline requests calmly or address poor performance directly, problems are passed on, decisions are softened until they lose meaning and teams are unsure what is required. Leaders who speak plainly and respectfully reduce rework, keep working relationships intact and make accountability visible without raising conflict.

- Decision Clarity: Improves as requests, limits and expectations are stated in plain terms that others can act on.
- Working Relationships: Strengthen as disagreement is handled openly and respectfully rather than avoided or escalated.
- Team Performance: Rises as difficult feedback is delivered early and followed through at agreed points.

Principles and Evidence Base

- Passive, aggressive and assertive communication styles: They structure the self-diagnosis and style comparison exercises in Sessions 1 and 2.
- DESC model Describe, Express, Specify, Consequences: It supplies the script structure for requests and refusals designed in Session 4.
- Behaviour rehearsal with structured peer feedback: It governs the practice of difficult conversations in Sessions 4 and 5.

Intended Participants

- Directors who must challenge peers and superiors without damaging working relationships.
- Heads of function who need to set limits on requests and competing demands.
- Senior officials who deliver unwelcome decisions to staff, partners or the public.
- Executives who manage underperformance and must hold direct conversations early.



The programme suits leaders in finance, healthcare, public administration and engineering who face the same conversational pressures in different settings.

Learning Outcomes

1. Participants will be able to diagnose their own passive, aggressive and assertive response patterns under pressure.
2. Participants will be able to construct clear requests and refusals using the DESC model.
3. Participants will be able to justify personal and role boundaries in terms colleagues can accept.
4. Participants will be able to evaluate the likely impact of a message before delivering it.
5. Participants will be able to prioritise the conversations that most need to take place and sequence them.
6. Participants will be able to design a personal assertiveness playbook for recurring situations at work.

Programme Structure

Day 1: Assertiveness Skills Principles

What separates assertive behaviour from passive and aggressive behaviour?

- Three Communication Styles Model
- Assertive Rights and Responsibilities Statement
- Style Self-Assessment Questionnaire
- Verbal and Non-Verbal Signal Review
- Role Expectation Map

Day 2: Diagnosing Response Patterns

Where do you give way, and where do you push too hard?

- Pressure Trigger Log
- Situation and Response Matrix
- Peer Observation Checklist
- Inner Dialogue Reframing Sheet
- Relationship Impact Review

Day 3: Setting Boundaries and Making Requests

How are limits and requests stated so that others can act on them?

- Boundary Statement Format
- Saying No Response Ladder
- Request and Agreement Template
- Workload Negotiation Script
- Managing Repeat Demands Plan



Day 4: Designing Difficult Conversations

How is a hard message structured and rehearsed?

- DESC Script Builder
- Feedback and Underperformance Outline
- Disagreement With a Superior Brief
- Opening and Closing Line Bank
- Rehearsal Observation Grid

Day 5: Applying Assertiveness Skills in Live Conversations

Is the playbook ready for the conversations waiting at work?

- Applying the Session 2 Trigger Log to Real Cases
- Testing the Session 3 Boundary Statements in Role Play
- Rehearsing the Session 4 Scripts With Peer Feedback
- Sequencing Conversations by Priority and Risk
- Completing the Personal Assertiveness Playbook

Methodology

The programme uses behaviour rehearsal supported by short structured exercises. Participants bring anonymised situations from their own roles, build scripts, practise them in pairs and trios, and receive specific feedback on wording, tone and delivery. Discussion centres on what was said and the effect it had, not on personality.

- Suggested activity: Rewriting a passive and an aggressive message into an assertive one using the DESC model.
- Suggested activity: Role-playing a refusal to a senior colleague and receiving observer feedback.
- Suggested activity: Rehearsing an underperformance conversation and revising the opening line.

Capstone Output

Each participant completes a personal assertiveness playbook. It holds a style self-diagnosis, a set of boundary statements, DESC scripts for three recurring situations, a conversation sequence by priority and a short review routine. The playbook is used before demanding meetings and reviewed monthly to record what worked and adjust the wording.



Frequently Asked Questions

Is assertiveness skills for senior leaders suitable for people who already manage large teams?

Yes. Assertiveness skills for senior leaders assumes experience of leading others and focuses on the conversations that become harder as seniority and visibility increase.

Which models does assertiveness skills for senior leaders rest on?

Assertiveness skills for senior leaders rests on the passive, aggressive and assertive styles model, the DESC model and behaviour rehearsal with structured peer feedback.

How is the playbook from assertiveness skills for senior leaders used at work?

You use the personal assertiveness playbook to prepare for demanding meetings, reuse the scripts for recurring situations and review wording monthly.

How does assertiveness skills for senior leaders differ from a programme on negotiation?

Assertiveness skills for senior leaders centres on stating limits and expectations clearly, while a negotiation programme centres on reaching agreement between competing interests.