

## Assertiveness-building and using the physical space around us.

How we use space is as much about assertiveness and exhibiting confidence, as is micro-body language, posture, the clothes we wear and verbal dexterity.

Books on body language, comment about the space around us and how it can be divided into a number of concentric circles – a series of invisible bubbles.

- The **intimate zone** of up to 18cms is reserved for people you are happy to be touched by.
- The **personal zone** beyond this and up to 1.2 metres is for family and close friends.
- The third circle - up to about 3.5 metres - is your **social area** where verbal communication is at the expense of touch and relations with colleagues and clients are conducted.
- The outer fourth zone is your **public zone** and the one we frequently ignore. Verbal communication is not at work, but our non-verbal gestures can indicate much about how we see ourselves and the image others have of us. We can still see each other and make impressions.

How we use this last and formal space is as much about assertiveness and confidence-building as is micro-body language, posture and deportment, the clothes we wear and verbal dexterity.

The development of assertiveness and confidence-building has links to the work of **Oscar Newman** in the 1970's and his theory of Defensible Space.

He proposed that in public places, vandalism occurs because individuals have no sense of commitment and belonging. Look at the misuse of subways, public lifts and high-rise flats to see this. Newman suggested that by creating more intimate and community-focused buildings, residents would have a greater sense of ownership. Outsiders would be more easily identified and deterred from committing offences.

Having a greater stake in the public zone can alter the behaviour of others in our everyday lives and help assert your own position.

**Example:** Whilst the beach is empty in the early morning, a tourist lays out his towel and belongings to sun bathe. He draws a circle in the sand around his “camp” and settles down. The circle is significantly larger than he needs but as the day progresses other tourists do not venture into his space. Others are embarrassed at walking into this zone even though it is in the public zone. A classic example of where assertive behaviour can influence the behaviour of others.

## Putting this into practice.

**How do we conduct ourselves in the following situations where you are in the public zone?**

- Walking alone down a corridor.
- Entering a lift already occupied by a few people.
- Selecting a seat on a bus and there are a few passengers already on board.
- Choosing a seat at a fast-food outlet and a few tables are already used.
- Entering a social get-together organised by your workplace.

For each of the above situations consider:

- your **thoughts** as you enter these public zones.
- your **body language** as you actually move in the territory.
- your **choice of position** in relation to others and where you are.

**Postscript.** In our working lives an expression of our self-image and how others perceive us lies in our choice of office layout. Here is a whole new domain for exploring passive, aggressive and assertive behaviour.

| <b>Checklist for assertiveness when in public space.</b>  |
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| Head and chin up. Imagine the camera is below you.  |
| Straight back and shoulders out.  |
| Open-body language.   |
| Raised eye-brows to encourage an open face.   |
| Smiling with the eyes and not just the mouth.   |
| Use of eyes to scan and invite communication.   |
| If you have to carry anything do so with poise rather than looking like a donkey.   |
| Wear your clothes well. You have invested in them.  |
| Assertively command space rather than passively relinquishing it to others.   |
| In a public space you are not involved in verbal communication, so have optimistic thoughts which can be exuded through your body language. |
| Have a presence.  |
| Acknowledging others.   |

