



# It's Not Just What You Say, But How You Say It

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How you say something includes which words you choose, the voice with which you speak those word, or the tone that you use while speaking.

When it comes to asking questions, you can do so in an assertive way or an aggressive way. With your questions you can seek to gather information and understand a person's interest in something, or you can be focused solely on your own interest or position. Here are some of the ways your messaging can be misinterpreted or intentionally communicated.

An assertive way of asking a question is restating what the other person has said for explanation of clarification, such as, "Is that true?" "Am I perceiving it right?" "Is it how you would summarize or state it?"

An aggressive way of asking a question is, "Why don't you?" "Why do you always?" "Why haven't you?" or "Why don't you ever..." Often, asking a question by starting off with "Why" or "why don't you" puts people into the position of having to defend themselves.

An aggressive question automatically makes the other person defensive. Perhaps you've chosen a poor way to state your question. It also doesn't have to be a question. It could be just a remark.

There are assertive versus aggressive questions that you can ask. Then there is also the interest-based versus position-based thoughts behind the questions. Are you really trying to gather information and understand a person's interest in something? Or are you focused solely on your own interest or position?

Tone of voice also makes a huge difference. You can have an assertive statement, but it can be said with an aggressive tone. All of a sudden, it slips from being assertive to being aggressive. Tones can be angry, sarcastic, denigrating or dismissive, or even a mocking.

What you are saying can be influenced by the words you use, the tone you use, and even by what you want to get out of the conversation. Do you want to be aggressive or assertive with your questions? Are you interested in the other person's point of view, or do you just want to express your position? Is the tone of voice you are using the tone you intended? Be mindful of all these aspects in what you are attempting to say, and your communication will be much more effective.

A great resource for learning these techniques is Sharon Ellison's Powerful Non-Defensive Communication; her website is [www.pndc.com](http://www.pndc.com). She has such books as "Taking the War Out of Words" and other materials to help us all learn much more effective communication. She has taught seminars all over the world about this subject, and most people who have attended her seminars or read or studied her materials feel that it positively transforms their method of communication.