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# How to be confident and assertive, but still be yourself

*By Dannie-Lu Carr*

In many cultures, particularly in the UK although not solely, we are pretty bad at 'bigging ourselves up'. There's still quite a Victorian stoicism that runs deeply in our veins and whilst it is a quality in many ways, particularly when it comes to our resilience, it certainly lets us down when we need to step up in terms of our confidence and assertiveness. Why? Because we are so worried about becoming 'too big for our boots', 'showing off', 'being selfish' and many more of those internal tapes that kick off in our heads, most of which were planted in there during our childhoods and really don't serve us one iota in our professional adulthood.

The good news is though, that you can still work from a high level of confidence and assertiveness and remain authentic, human, humble and anything else you deem has value for you. It's all a choice and you, only you, get to choose. The most important thing to remember about choice is that it doesn't have to be an either/or affair – you can have gradients and pepperings of whatever is most useful for you. A bit like making your favourite cake. Or curry. Delete as appropriate.

So here's some small, simple and yet solid ways that you can learn to be confident and assertive without feeling like you are having to hold up a fake version of yourself. In fact, these tips will help you step more fully into yourself. And that's going to be more energising and positive in terms of a robust and pleasant place to operate from.

## 1) Pay attention to your inner critic

I've alluded to him/her already in terms of 'the tape'. Our inner critics really need to have some spotlight shined on them in order for us to realise that those negative voices that invade our brains from dawn till dusk sometimes do not represent the actual facts of any matter. They are interpretive and often annoyingly opinionated. They are more like a running commentary, similar to those we have on a sporting event, which can be turned down, muted or even replaced at will.

Most of us pay far more attention to our negative inner critic than our positive one. My negative inner critic is on my right side of my head so I have to consciously connect in with the left side in order to hear the positives about myself and actually believe them.

This takes practice. A useful exercise here is to write it down (or



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pop it into your phone) every time someone gives you a compliment or a piece of negative feedback. Create a list. Then, when you feel like you are sliding into that negative headspace, spend a moment to look at the list and repeat them to yourself again and again. No excuses. Do it! Replace that nasty tape!

### 2) Give yourself some time

When someone asks you for something, to do a task, or a simple request, you do not have to give them an answer straight away. You can still be your charming (or not so charming, whichever is most authentic) self and say something like, 'let me think about it

and get back to you'. It's a good phrase to use if you are trying to stop the knee-jerk, less assertive responses from happening. The best way to break a pattern is to find an alternative to fill its place in your cognitive wiring, so to speak.

### 3) Step into the discomfort

I'm well aware that this is a phrase that is often used but do we ever stop to think about what it actually means? Well, if you feel anxious, nervous, under-confident, taken aback, it literally means – step forward. It can feel counter-intuitive because what our system wants to do is back away from the feelings. If you step forward however, and take your 'centre stage', your body will respond accordingly. You will look more confident, feel more confident and suddenly, as if by magic, your brain will start to work out what to do.

The trick is to hold your inner nerve and fake it till you feel it. All whilst still being in your authentic self!

*Dannie-Lu Carr co-founder of The Five Gateways, a leadership programme to empower dynamic women. See [www.thefivegateways.co.uk](http://www.thefivegateways.co.uk)*

