

Soft skills - career development, assertiveness, how to interview

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Agenda for today

- Looking after your career and developing it
- Good communication
- Assertive behaviours vs passive or aggressive behaviours
- The dangers of email in difficult situations
- What to do when things go wrong
- How to do a great interview
- Credits and questions

Looking after your career and developing it

- The best person to look after you is YOU!
- Make sure you have an annual PDR with training requirements discussed
- Make sure you take holidays – use your leave!
- Consider joining the BCS
- Keep an open dialogue with your line manager
- Seek help before things get too bad
- Talk to ITS3
- Talk to other ITSS in person and on ITSS-discuss
- Commit to continuous self-improvement



Communication underpins most of this talk

- Make sure yours is as good as it can be!

Passengers are reminded that...

- Which is clearer on a bus from the airport?



Passengers are reminded that it is a legal requirement in the UK for all passengers to wear seatbelts on coaches where fitted

or



You must wear your seatbelt

How to write clearly

- Think about what you want to say
- Then just write it as you would say it
- Avoid jargon, acronyms and clichés
- Get the punctuation right!
- A comma can change everything!

**basically; essentially; in essence; to be honest; I'm like; let's touch base; With all due respect; at this moment in time; at the end of the day; myself; yourself; I'm not trying to be funny...
*what irritates you?***

**I like
cooking my family
and my pets.**

**Use commas.
Don't be a psycho.**



**An apostrophe is the
only difference
between a team that
knows its shit and one
that knows it's shit**

Choose your words carefully

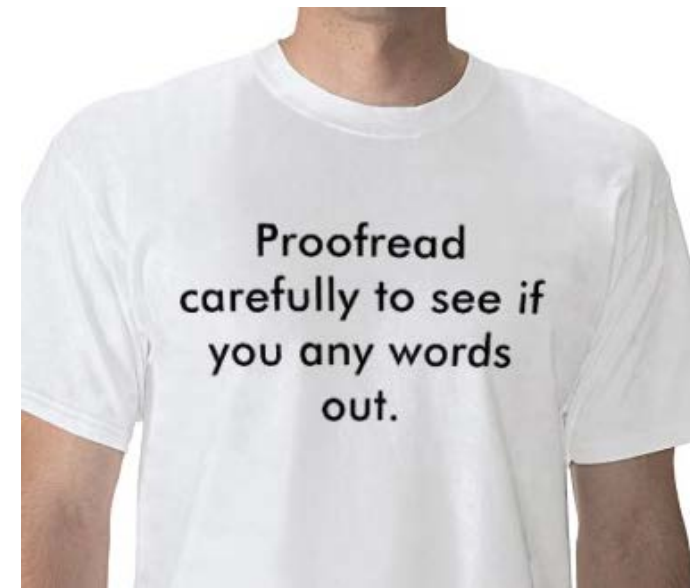
- Say what you mean and say it in a neutral way
- Avoid prefaces and adverse prefaces – they turn the listener off and/or prejudice what they think of what you say

This may not be important...
I know this sounds silly...
I may be wrong...
It's just that...
I was just wondering if...
I hope you won't be angry...
I don't mean to offend you...
I don't want to tread on your toes...
Don't take this the wrong way...
No offence...
I've been wanting to say this for ages...

...but, however,
nevertheless...

You can't proof read your own stuff

- You will miss the mistakes for the same reasons you made them in the first place!
- Ask someone else to read it for you
- Ask them what they understand by what you wrote
- Make sure what you want to say is actually on the page
- Never skip this step!



Verbal communication is about listening as well as speaking

- You wouldn't use a phone with no speaker
- So let the other person talk too!
- Listening is not just about hearing, it's about understanding and showing that you understand by reflecting back
- Non verbal messages such as body language are very important for comprehension
- Make sure the focus is on who you are listening to – not you!
 - avoid “Oh yes, that happened to me, I know exactly how you feel” – **you don't**

How to show you are listening

- Smile
- Posture
- Don't be distracted
- Mirroring body language
- Make eye contact
- Question
- Clarify
- Reflect
- Summarise
- Agree

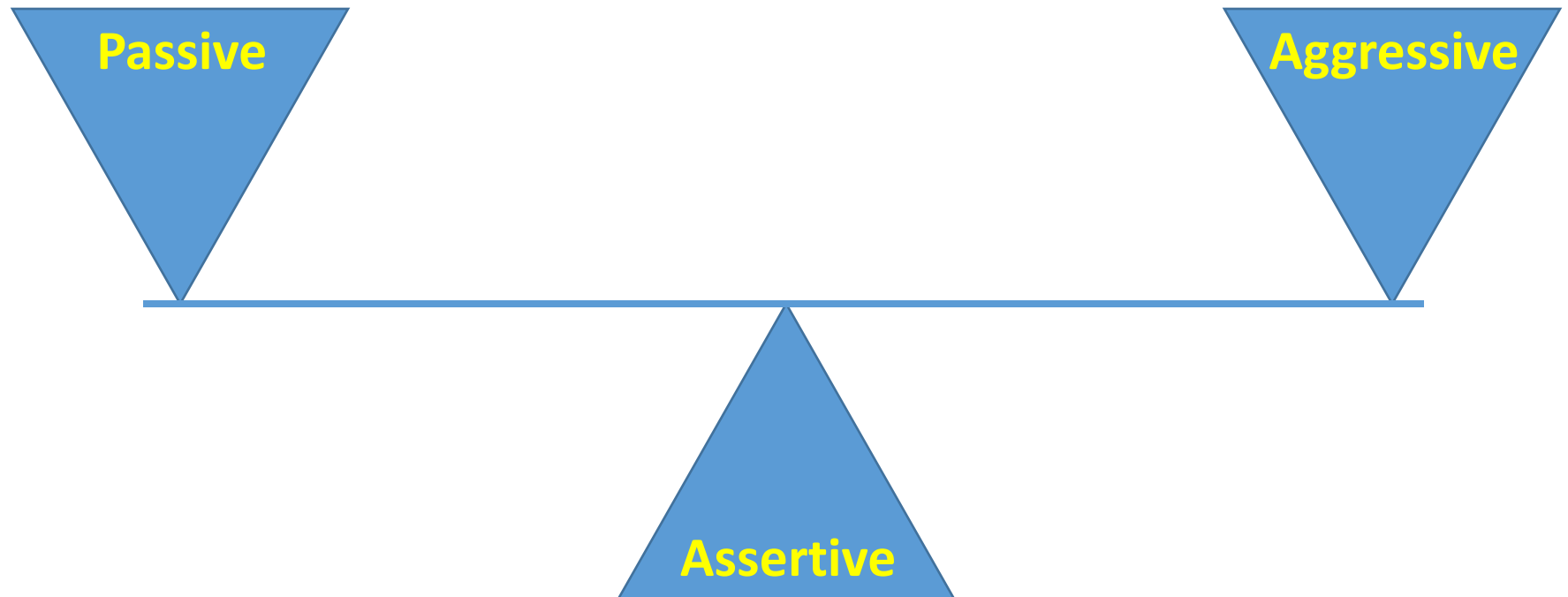


Listening exercise

- Try explaining to a your neighbour where you work and what you do
- If your birthday is on an odd-numbered day of the month then don't make eye contact
- If you birthday is on an odd-numbered month then do some web browsing on your phone
- How does it feel?

Assertiveness is a positive and effective behaviour

- It demonstrates your self-respect and your respect for others
- It's a balance – where are you?



The four types of behaviour



Aggressive



Passive



Indirect



Assertive

- We all have a mix of these
- Trick is to know how we respond in given situations
- Plan ahead so we can focus on assertiveness
- Which are you and how will you be what you want to be?

Passive behaviour

How they behave	What they say	How it feels to receive	How they feel	Consequences
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Easy going✓ Anything for a quiet life✓ Inner turmoil	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ "If you like"✓ "I don't mind"✓ "Whatever you want"✓ "It's up to you"	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Unsure if heart is in it✓ Confused✓ Uncertain✓ Irritated	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Lack of self confidence✓ Overridden✓ Ignored	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Relationships suffer✓ Get left out✓ Get walked over✓ Lonely✓ Doormat feeling

Aggressive behaviour

How they behave	What they say	How it feels to receive	How they feel	Consequences
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Shout✓ Forceful✓ Uncompromising✓ Confrontational✓ Angry✓ Don't listen✓ Putting down	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ "you"✓ "you should"✓ "your fault"✓ "You're useless"	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Intimidated✓ Upset✓ Frightened✓ Guilty✓ Angry✓ Wondering what I'm doing wrong	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Covering up low self-esteem✓ Lack of confidence✓ Drive to win at all costs✓ Pressured	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Relationships suffer & change✓ People get left out✓ Nobody wins

Indirect behaviour

How they behave	What they say	How it feels to receive	How they feel	Consequences
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Move goalposts✓ Inconsistent✓ Don't take responsibility✓ Manipulative✓ Emotional blackmail✓ Misinform and blame	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ "If you were a decent colleague you would..."✓ "You know you're really good at..."	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Guilty✓ Frustrated✓ Wrong-footed✓ Panicky✓ Inferior	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Victim✓ Insecure✓ Feel need to make themselves important	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Confusion✓ Anxiety✓ Avoidance

Assertive behaviour

How they behave	What they say	How it feels to receive	How they feel	Consequences
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Stand up for their rights✓ Respect your rights✓ Directly✓ Clearly✓ Honestly✓ Considerately	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Express wants, needs and feelings appropriately✓ "I think"✓ "I feel"✓ Lots of "I"✓ Little "you"	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Respected✓ Good✓ Encouraged✓ Clear about tasks and role	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Content✓ Everyone gets something✓ Win-Win✓ Knowing where they and others stand	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Treated with respect✓ Open and inclusive environment✓ Disagreements get resolved✓ No resentment✓ Things get done!

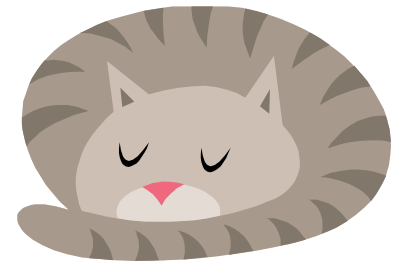
It's so easy to mess up in an email

- Face to face conversation has body language and tone as the back-channel to assist understanding
- Phone just has tone
- Email has neither!
- Language is extremely important
 - But means different things to different people
 - Oxbridge has lot of people from all over the country and indeed world with lots of different language and dialects
- Email can come back and bite – be careful what you write and it will be forward to anyone
- Don't Cc without permission and if you want to Bcc ask yourself why
- If you are a Bcc don't reply-all!



If you get a tough email

- Pause to think about it and read it several times
 - This is like listening properly
- Draft a reply but don't send it immediately
 - Sleep on it
 - Run it past a colleague to see how it sounds
- Maybe don't use email as the reply medium
- Talking over coffee etc. is very cathartic
- Try to assume the best of people, not the worst
- Think about the outcome you want and check every action you plan to take or word you write for whether it will move you closer to that outcome



Good and assertive emails are...

- ...listened to (well-read)
- ...demonstrate understanding of the situation or request
- ...empathetic
- ...say what you think and feel (self-disclosure)
- ...say what you want to happen (or not happen)
- ...work towards a solution acceptable to both parties
- ...clear and specific
- ...concise and polite

What if it all goes wrong?

- It's OK to say so and accept some responsibility
- People will not think less of you
- Saying sorry doesn't have to be an admission of guilt
- Saying sorry can be an expression of regret
- Think about the outcome you want and whether the cost of conceding a minor point is acceptable
 - it often is
- Try to resolve at as lower level as possible
- Try to resolve as informally as possible
- Don't escalate the situation by going up the management chain unless all other options are exhausted

A reminder...



- Relationships are everything in distributed, complex and heavily devolved environments
- Good communication, good assertiveness and good soft skills are key to making relationships work
- IT people often under-rate this and neglect their own soft skills
- Don't let that person be you!
- Relationships and reputation take time and care to build but can be destroyed very easily

Top tips for good interviews

- This is just advice from me after being on lots of panels on both sides of the table
- It is not official advice
- There is no right and wrong way to interview
- I hope it will help you with career progression, hopefully within our collegiate University

Being an interviewee

- If you are being interviewed that means that on paper the panel thinks you can do the job. Believe them!
- An interview is your chance to prove you are the best person on the shortlist for the job
- Interviewing is hard so make it easy for the panel

Preparation is vital

- Take your time over preparing – longer than the application took
- Ask who the panel members are and learn about them
- Research the organisation
 - Look for press mentions, web, social media etc.
- You have everything the panel has bar the questions – use that material!
- Check selection criteria and have action stories for each
- Be ready to plug gaps in your applications

It's OK to ask in advance!



- Format of interview
- Panel members and the job titles
- Will other staff be giving an informal view?
- Will there be any tests?
 - Preparation time and equipment?
- Will you be expected to give a presentation?
 - Can you use handouts or will there be PowerPoint?
 - Handouts are good because the panel can keep them
 - I think PowerPoint is dull for a small interview panel

Don't be forced into an unannounced phone interview

- Have stuff ready if you do want to accept this
- Ask for a more convenient time
 - But don't keep them waiting too long!



Good communication is vital

- Write back thanking them for the invitation
 - Confirm the time, length, and place
- Mention one or two things about the organisation you are looking forward to discussing
- Think about what might worry each panel member about you and try to reassure them
- Don't wait for invitations – use the open questions or your own questions
- Email panel members and thank them after the interview – mention some good stuff!

The first impression makes WAY more difference than it should

- Dress, grooming, shoes, smell, bling!
 - Wear smart and comfortable clothes, not brand new ones
 - Shirts with “new” folds are a dead giveaway!
 - Make sure clothes fit
 - Collars way too big look silly
 - Too much perfume or aftershave is a no-no!



- Smile, eye contact, handshake, say a greeting
- DO NOT BE LATE!
 - Always apologise profusely if you are
- All sets the tone for the whole interview
- May also influence others you meet on the way in and out
 - Don't let your guard down for a minute!
- Say positive things on the way in to the interview

Over-dressing is as bad as under-dressing

- Be in the vicinity at start, end, or middle of day to find out what people wear
 - Be just a little bit smarter than that
 - Men: take a spare tie or put it on just before interview
 - Women: take spare tights if you're wearing them



You really need to check in a mirror!

- Check

- Teeth
- Nose
- Makeup
- Hair
- Zips & buttons
- Jewellery
- Tuck your shirt (blouse) in!



Body language may say more than you want it to

- Sit up straight and lean forward a bit
- Look the interviewer in the eye
- Both feet on the floor, legs not crossed
- Smile!



It is JUST about you!

- Not hypothetical
- Not about your time
- Not about theory
- Not about “us” or “we”
- Panel wants to know what YOU have to offer and what different YOU make



Answer questions carefully

- Stick to facts and actions/behaviours
 - Tell stories that are about you
- Avoid one-word answers
 - Good interviewers should make that easy
- Don't be negative about yourself
 - Play things up not down (but be honest)
- Listen to the question carefully
 - Maybe repeat it as start of answer
 - OK to ask for clarification too



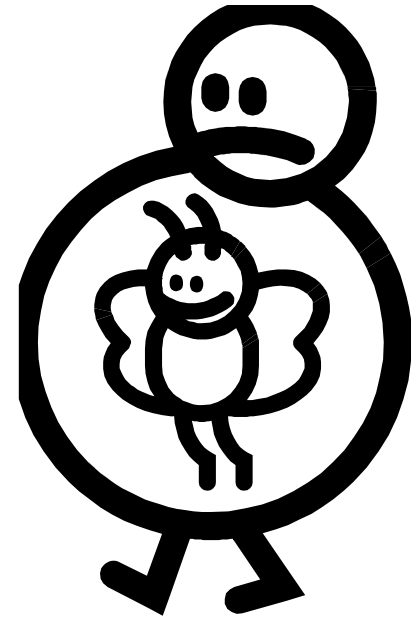
Internal candidate interviews should not be any different to external



- I often have to remind people of this
- You should never say “you know”
 - Never assume you don’t need to say something because you think people know it about you
- These happen a lot in places like Oxford
- None of the panel should have a vested interest in hiring you or not hiring you
 - If you feel that’s the case then raise it before the interview
- Panel members should not write references
 - So don’t ask them!

It's OK to be nervous – the panel might be too!

- It shows you care
- Everyone is to some extent
- Good Interviewers should put you at ease
- Try to relax
- Drink from the glass of water
 - It can buy you time
- Practise with a friend/colleague first
- Laugh at yourself if you mess-up
 - “just look at what those nerves have done to me”



Panels will sometimes test how you react under pressure

- These might feel like trick questions
- They are probably not
- Don't argue
- Be truthful
- NEVER criticise your current boss, tutor, colleagues etc.
 - It shows you as disloyal
 - Some questions can invite this. RESIST!
- Be careful mentioning major stuff not in CV/application
 - They may wonder what else you missed out!



You'll need some questions ready

- Fine to have notes prepared
- Focus on what you can offer the organisation rather than what it can offer you
- Be positive and deferential
- Not “Tell me...” but, “ I’m really interested in joining this organisation and there are a few things...”
 - Why the vacancy?
 - Do you have any reservations about me?
 - Where do you see the post in 5 years?
 - What is the top priority for the first year
 - Do you promote internally?
- Don’t ask about salary etc. at this stage

A good exit is as important as a good entrance



- Finish on a good note
- Make eye contact
- Shake hands
- Thank the panel and say you enjoyed it (if you did)
- DO NOT start negotiating terms, even if they try to make you do so
- If asked, it's OK to say when you could start the job

Second interviews

- Dress differently
- Show you remember people and say how much you enjoyed the first interview
- It may be informal but remember you are still always on trial
 - Beware booze and food!
- A second interview is not a second chance
 - Probably refining of the decision
 - Maybe a check by a very senior person who won't have time to interview lots of people
 - There may still be other candidates. Ask!



Finally...

- Remember your job is not to convince the panel you can do the job
 - They already believe that
- You have to convince them you are the BEST for the job
- So research hard and prepare as carefully as you can
- ITS3 can do mock interviews if you want to practice

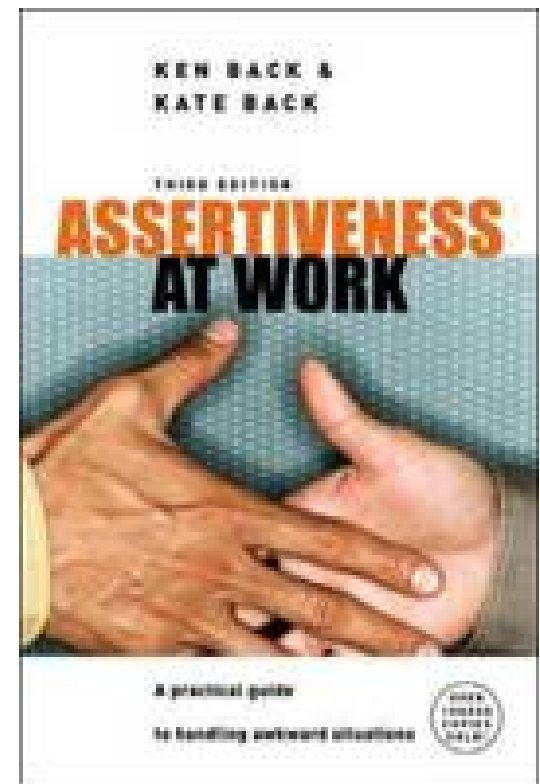


References

- “Brilliant Interview” Ros Jay, 2005 (2nd Ed), Pearson Education Limited
- “Brilliant answers to tough interview questions”, Susan Hodgson, 2008 (3rd Ed), Pearson Education Limited
- <http://www.redgoldfish.co.uk/cvinfo/toughquestions.aspx>

Huge thanks to...

- Hannah Boschen of the Oxford Learning Institute
 - for letting me use some of her material about communication and assertiveness
 - Hannah recommends this book
 - ISBN: 0077114280
 - ISBN: 9780077114282



Any questions?

- Thank you for coming to this session
- I hope you have found it useful
- I welcome feedback
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