

## EXPERTISE AND WORKING ON STRESS.

The next two vignettes involve a “casual acquaintance.” In the first, you are the “expert” and know more than the person who is talking about your area, so how and when do you offer constructive criticism. In the second, you are working on “stress management” and the person says your efforts don’t seem to be effective, so how do you respond when criticized.

### EXPERTISE

This vignette involves a casual acquaintance who talks to you naively and energetically about a subject that s(he) has just discovered and about which s(he) is excited. You have extensive knowledge of the subject and noticed s(he) has misunderstood 3 or 4 technical points. How would you respond?

#### POSITIVE ASSERTIVE:

- Obtain rapport and suggest points that will help him/her understand the subject better
- Create a kind context: Listen, reflect enthusiasm, encourage further study
- Share information in a positive way
- If harmful not to know, tell him or her
- Point out a little info and judge their receptivity
- Ask them to restate and correct, clarify misunderstood points (a little more yang)
- Reveal my experience and expertise and willingness to share info
- Encourage them to study further
- Encourage positive points and clarify those misunderstood
- Encourage us to get answers together

#### POSITIVE YIELDING

- Just listen
- Reflect their enthusiasm, enjoyment
- Only if asked, offer my opinion

#### NEGATIVE ASSERTIVE

- Tell him or her where she was wrong (no context or gentleness)
- Be overbearing and correct person, feel annoyed
- Be impatient and not listen
- Not talk to them; just turn and leave.
- Interrupt and tell them what’s wrong with their knowledge;

#### NEGATIVE YIELDING

There we no answers in this vignette we would code as negative yielding.

### POSITIVE COMBINATIONS:

\*If these were crucial points to the subject, I might point them out (85%, positive assertive; )  
15% let it go (positive yielding).

\*I'd try to point out an example (positive assertive) but if they were unreceptive, I'd let it go  
(Positive yielding)

### QUESTIONS:

\*Let them discover info for themselves ; Say nothing listen and not correct them (depends  
on affect: could be q2); could be q3/q4 (ignoring not engaging);

\*Smile to self, (depends on what smile means; is it positive acceptance: it's great to see  
someone interested in topic; my smile is to encourage them; or is it negative assertive,  
condescending, this is ignorant person not worth engaging with?

FUTURE RESEARCH could look at a) whether there are gender differences in terms of  
responses depending on whether respondent is male or female, and acquaintance of same or  
different gender. b) importance of topic for person's wellbeing (graded vignette); c) different  
degrees of "closeness to the person. In terms of wise responses, both positive assertive and  
positive yielding seemed quite good, and perhaps some combination of the two, as noted above:  
complimenting the other, gauging their receptivity to further input, offering it gently if it was  
wanted, and yielding, accepting, if not wanted, while continuing to encourage further exploration..

## WORKING ON STRESS

You have been feeling defensive and self-critical about the stress you feel when in contact with  
others. You have been doing relaxation training to deal with the stress. You feel stressed when  
an acquaintance comes up and says "You look tense. Isn't your relaxation training working?"

How would you respond?

EXAMPLE ONE (male 60) My First response (40%) would be to feel defensive, which he saw  
as appropriately assertive; second response (60%) you're right. (which we saw as positive  
yielding, but he saw as overly yielding." (He said I often feel open and vulnerable and my  
greatest wish is to be assertive."

EXAMPLE TWO. Female, 31, Response I would just glare at this person )100%, only response.(which she saw as overly assertive).

EXAMPLE THREE. female, 20, college sophomore: Response 1: “no comment unless needed” which she saw as appropriately yielding. And her second response was “I guess not.” (which she felt was overly yielding”

MODE CODING:

NEGATIVE ASSERTIVE. : Hostile, defensive, angry response: mind your own business. Get lost. How I feel is not your affair. :Fuck off. I sense you are somewhat hostile.

It takes time and would work better if not interrupted/criticized. You make me feel even more tense when you ask. My sense of relaxation is related to how I feel around others who are critical. Glare at him; hit him.

APPROPRIATELY ASSERTIVE.

Ask for explanation.; tell me more; what do you mean? What makes me seem tense to you? : Relaxation is a continuum, not an off/on.

Think to myself, what a great opportunity to try my relaxation techniques

APPROPRIATELY YIELDING

Agreement, acknowledge tenseness; Yes I do feel tense.

Apparently they are not working as well as I would like. .Looks like I need more relaxation practice. Thank you for noticing and showing your concern.(great response!)

NEGATIVE YIELDING:

Become more tense and embarrassed. I’m feeling pretty tired and ineffective.

Deny it, say I don’t feel tense. Tell them it’s fine. feel defensive Internalize.

Try to forget incident (avoidant response);

Leave situation JS: Imagining this, it looks pretty q4 to me – it’s a pretty extreme response.

COMBINATION, GREAT RESPONSE:

Acknowledge my assertive intention to succeed ”I’m working on it, but it takes time.” (positive acceptance).

QUESTIONS: Sybil Carrere made a great chart coding these responses into *emotions*, e.g.,

defensive, upset, embarrassed; tense, angry; *verbal behavior* ; and *non verbal behavior* (e.g., turn away, say nothing, laugh, hit him!)

In terms of **EMOTIONS**, clearly they are not positive assertive or positive yielding. Are they negative assertive or negative yielding? JS said she felt defensive responses turned outward are

negative assertive; turned inward, negative yielding. The same with anger: Embarrassed seems q4 self blame. Are they upset with themselves (q4) or upset/angry with the other (q3)? Further exploration could address whether these emotions were antecedent to a verbal and behavioral response.

#### VERBAL/BEHAVIORAL RESPONSES:

No, it's not working; JS: could be q2 or q4, depending how the person feels about it

Take responsibility for not adequately learning training experiences Is this q1 or q2: JS Q1 if it means I am still working on it, it's a work in progress. It might be q2 if the person is saying I accept that I haven't been really committed to this work. Does responsibility imply a commitment to work harder?

Change focus of attention shrug it off; ignore remark JS: This could be q1, but might be q4 (avoidant) without any acknowledgment of the other person's comment. By change focus of attention, I was thinking the response might be along the lines of, "Isn't the food at this event great?" This seems q4 to me. Similarly, shrugging it off could be q2 or q4

Thank you for noticing Q2 (or sarcastic q3?) JS: Sounds a little sarcastic, so q3; but if it was a genuine thanks, then q2

laugh JS: Intent seems important. If it an embarrassed laugh, q4 (blaming self). If it is a rueful laugh, it could be q2 (like a self-deprecating joke)

Be upset, (as antecedent, was the response then anger out (q3) or anger in self-blame (q4)

Make excuses. JS: could be defensive q3 if means you shouldn't be blaming me, it's not my fault, and attacking the "accuser." If excuses are self-blaming, then q4

I would say let's go and have a martini JS: I kind of like this response. It is changing the focus, but not entirely (implying a drink might relax both of them). It seems bonding with the attacker. I'd code this as q1 because it's proposing a positive step that is indirectly related to the issue without being defensive.

#### WISE ACTIONS, RESPONSES:

A "defensive" feeling, being upset at being told one's actions are not working, for most people would bring up some negative emotions. The question is how does one wish to address those emotions. One person said, Depends on whether I think it's working. think about it. (A wise action, but not codable in the four modes). But this response does point out the importance of

pausing and reflecting before replying, including the idea expressed of “practicing the relaxation techniques.” We liked the responses which then acknowledged a) some progress is being made ; b) the positive effort and self-praise for that effort; and c) acknowledging there is still some work to be done; and d) thanking the person for their caring concern (perhaps a bit of a stretch, but a nice, gentle, aspirational response!:)