

Press Release

For Immediate Release

1st December 2009

Maidenhead, UK

How can you be more assertive and get what you want?

Assertiveness is about knowing how to express yourself without being aggressive. By being assertive you can have a win - win outcome!

Suppose, in a rare moment of entrepreneurial zeal, you decided to set up a business with learning to learn (L2L) as your product. You need some funding to get going so you decide to approach the Dragons' Den.

How would you approach the Dragons?

Presumably you would start by making a robust case for learning as a valuable output. Learning provides the gateway to absolutely everything anyone wants to achieve. No individual, organisation or society can survive without learning. Learning can never be declared obsolete. Learning is the only sustainable competitive advantage, and so on.

Of course, as you make your pitch to a row of dispassionate-looking business angels, you are careful to be enthusiastic and suitably assertive. You have butterflies in your stomach, but you know only too well that adult-to-adult, assertive behaviour will serve you best in this demanding situation. To appear doubtful or submissive is definitely not on. On the other hand, to come across as too pushy and aggressive runs the risk of alienating your audience.

Despite your best efforts, you are alarmed to see that the business angels still appear to be unmoved; arms crossed, no smiles or encouraging nods. The trouble is that you know that what you have said so far is the easy bit; the case for learning as an invaluable output is, as they say, is a no-brainer. However, the product you want to market is not learning as an output, it is learning as a process (L2L).

You try to explain that learning is a skill which, like any other, needs to be worked at, honed and polished. You say that too many people are lazy learners, taking this precious process for granted and therefore not learning nearly as effectively as they could if they mastered the process.

But, try as you might to make the case for learning as a learnable skill, the business angels do not really get it. They have two big hang-ups. Firstly, they can not envisage how people could be helped to get better at learning. Surely, it is a natural process, something everyone is born able to do? Secondly, they can not see how to make L2L attractive. It is not sexy enough to excite them.

Appreciating that you have a hill to climb, you give examples of how such things as study skills, mind maps, accelerated learning techniques and puzzles to exercise the brain have been shown to improve peoples' learning skills. These examples of brain-friendly practices help the sceptical business angels to begin to see what you are getting at. But they still have problems envisaging how this will grab people in the way that, say, holidays or hobbies do.

They ask you some awkward questions; what market research have you done to establish a felt need? What is the business case? Where are the figures demonstrating the likelihood of a decent return on their investment?

Your heart sinks. They can not see that learning is an utterly laudable, beneficial process and that some things in life are self-evidently useful and do not require proof. Breathing for example – does anyone doubt that breathing is essential to survival? Similarly, it is obvious that no human being, organisation or society could function without learning.

Central to your argument is the idea that learning is a learnable skill, something capable of development, something you can get better at. Many people (not just business angels!) have difficulty accepting the notion that learning is learnable. There is a widespread assumption that human beings are built to learn, that it is 'a given', something you can not help doing so long as you have senses (sight, hearing, touch etc) supplying information to your brain.

They argue that babies have the capacity to learn from the word go, long before they can speak or think about how they are doing it. They 'just do it' and we know they do because of observable behaviour changes (an outward sign that learning must have occurred). This must mean, say the doubters that learning is a reflex, i.e. something that human beings do not have to learn to do.

The business angels still look sceptical. Undaunted, you come back at them giving them plenty of examples of 'givens' that are amenable to improvement through deliberate practise. Muscles are 'givens' but they need exercise to develop them. Breathing is undoubtedly a basic reflex, but there are numerous techniques that can help us learn to breathe more effectively. The temptation, of course, is not to bother to exercise muscles, or to learn to breathe properly, and to leave the process of learning on automatic while you busy yourself with other things.

Then you have a nothing-ventured-nothing-gained brainwave. You pick on the most doubtful looking business angel and directly ask him to give an example of a recent success and what he learnt from it. He quickly tells you about a recent investment risk he took that proved to be a success. You probe further to tease out some lessons learned and, like most people; he struggles to give come up with anything specific. You quietly point out that this is not because he had not learnt, but because he had not developed the skill of crystallising his learning and turning it into something capable of articulation.

To your surprise, another business angel suddenly shouts out, "Ah, I see what you are getting at! If people got better at identifying what they have learnt from their experiences, they would make fewer mistakes, have more successes and be able to share their learning with other people. Count me in!"

This is a clear case of how assertiveness had won the day.

To help you become more assertive, take the 'Assertiveness' questionnaire which is part of the Behaviour Series by Peter Honey Publications Ltd. This questionnaire will show you how to safeguard your rights in a way that does not violate other people's rights. Explain how to express yourself in ways that are clear and unambiguous and guide you on how to be open and honest about your motives and intentions. For further information visit www.peterhoney.com/content/InterpersonalSkills.html

END

###

Company Profile:

Peter Honey Publications Ltd was founded by Dr Peter Honey – a leading guru on learning and behaviour and their impact peoples' performance in the work place. He is a prolific author, consultant and speaker.

The company publishes a range of resources to help individuals, teams and organisations make learning a priority. Products include online self-assessment questionnaires, booklets for learners and manuals for trainers. The best known product is the Honey and Mumford "Learning Styles Questionnaire" which was first published in 1982.

All the products are used globally with core markets in the UK, US, Australia and Europe. Customers include Blue Chip Companies, Local Councils, Universities, over 100 NHS Trusts and many training consultants and executive coaches as well as individual learners and students.

The mission at Peter Honey Publications is to create success through learning. Learning, the most important of all human capabilities, will never become obsolete. Continuous learning is the key to sustained innovation and competitiveness.

Contact:

Harminder Ramanay

Marketing Manager

Peter Honey Publications Ltd

Harminder@peterhoney.com

www.peterhoney.com