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# Self-Empowerment during your PhD and Postdoc Training

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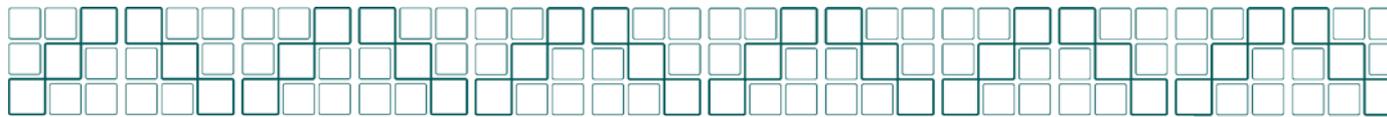


# What does a good day in lab feel like?

# What It Sometimes Feels Like

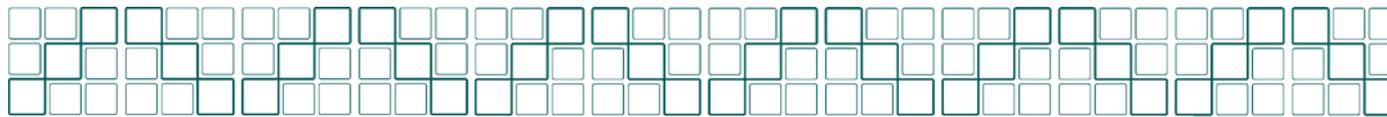
Leaping Into the Void  
Yves Klein, 1960





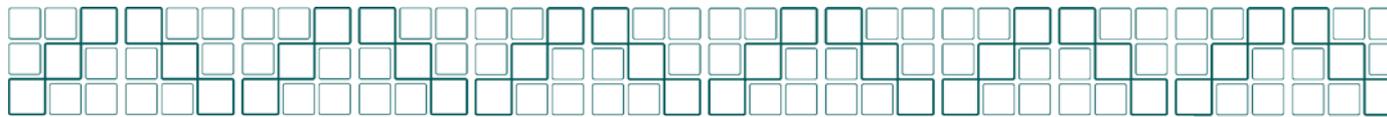
# Things That Many (All?) of Us Worry About At Times

- Competitive nature of our work
- A changing career landscape
- Concerns regarding work-life balance
- Stress in workplace relationships



# Things That Many (All?) of Us Worry About At Times

- Competitive nature of our work – *am I good enough?*
- A changing career landscape – *will I get what I want?*
- Concerns regarding work-life balance – *Can I have it all?*
- Stress in workplace relationships – *Do I fit in?*



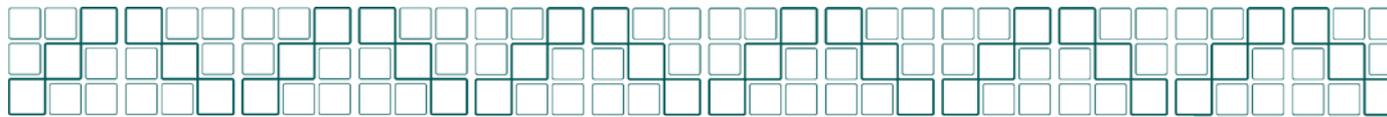
# We Have A Lot to Keep In Mind





# A Question To Start With

- In thinking about your graduate school/postdoc experience, is there...
  - Something(s) holding you back or bothering you enough to be a major distraction?
  - Something(s) getting in the way of your success?
  - Someone(s) you need to talk with?
  - Something(s) you need to change?
  
- Write -- 5 minutes, uninterrupted
  - write through blocks and don't worry about flow, grammar, or punctuation
  - You will not have to share what you write, so be honest



# Some Near Universal Truths

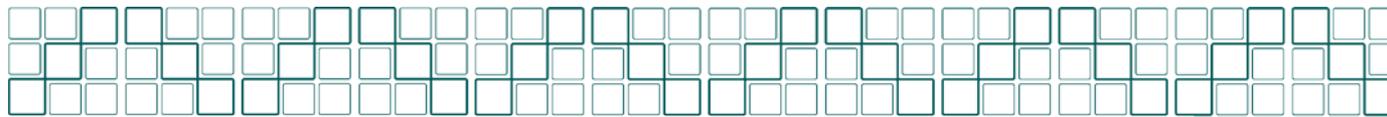
- To some degree we all struggle
  - to appropriately voice our wants, needs, concerns, and opinions
  - with when to say “no” and how to say “no”
  - to hear and respond appropriately to feedback we receive
- Different communication, conflict and work styles, **coupled with a significant power differential**, can greatly complicate workplace interactions
- **THEREFORE:** We need to be proactive and assertive to get what we want from our educational or work experience



# Group Discussion

What did you learn about difficult conversations, conflict and assertiveness from your families and cultures.

Which messages are generally helpful to you and which are not?



# Two Constructs of Self Derived From our Culture(s)

- Independent selves
  - Values and emphasizes being unique, making a clearly defined contribution, being heard and influencing others
  - Primary focus is on our own needs, opinions, and goals
- Interdependent selves
  - Values and emphasizes relationships, adjusting to others, shared responsibilities, and respect for authority
  - Primary focus is on supporting the group/collective and maintaining tradition

Clash! How to Thrive in a Multicultural World; Hazel Rose Markus and Alana Conner; See <http://www.cultureclashes.org/> for information



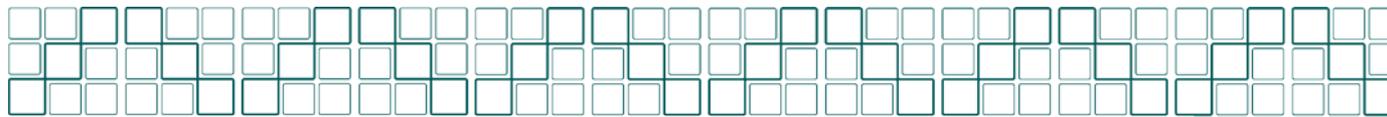
# How This Might Impact Communication

	<b>INDEPENDENT</b>	<b>INTERDEPENDENT</b>
Relationship with boss and other colleagues	More equal and fluid	Unequal and fixed
Willingness to be assertive	High	More difficult given power difference
Focus of exchange	Clarity in the message, getting work done and meeting individual needs	Group needs, saving face and preventing embarrassment; harmony and agreement
Style of communication	Direct	Indirect



# Important Range of Styles/Approaches

- **Passive** (indirect): accepting or allowing what happens or what others do without active response or resistance
- **Aggressive** (direct): pursuing one's aims and interests forcefully, and without care about the long-term consequences to the other or the relationship
- **Passive-Aggressive** (direct/indirect): Indirectly pursuing one's aims by saying one thing and doing another
- **Assertive** (direct): having or showing a confident and clear approach to meeting your needs



# What They Look and Sound Like

	<b>PASSIVE</b>	<b>ASSERTIVE</b>	<b>AGGRESSIVE</b>
<b>General</b>	Vague, submissive, unclear message	Firm but polite; clear message	Forceful and unkind; clear message but often missed
<b>Eyes</b>	Averted, looking down	Eye contact	Narrow, emotionless
<b>Posture</b>	Stooped, tense, closed; makes body smaller	Relaxed, open, welcoming	Leaning forward; body made bigger
<b>Hands</b>	Clenched, together, rigid	Open, friendly gestures	Pointing, hands on hips, clenched fists
<b>Outcome</b>	May not get what you want since it may not be easily understood through your message	Better chance of getting what you want and feeling heard	May alienate people even if you get what you want



# Why We Are Not Assertive At Times

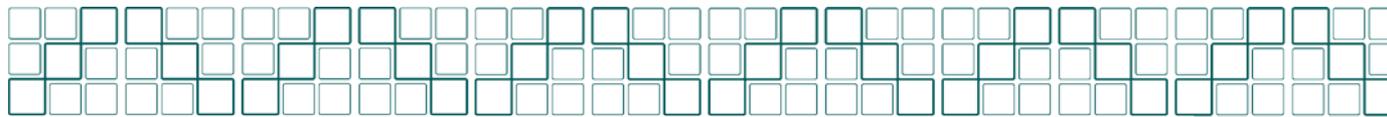
- We don't always know what we want or need
- We are afraid of displeasing others or of not being liked
- We don't believe we have the right to be assertive, in general or in a specific situation
- We lack the skills we need to effectively be assertive

ANY OF THESE APPLY TO YOU?



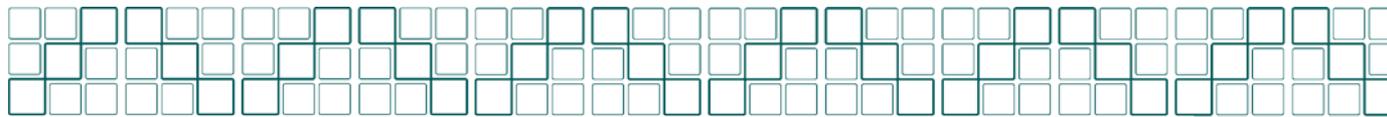
# Self-Reflection – Journaling Exercise

- Think about an important relationship at work or at home. Consider a time when you struggled to communicate effectively. Focus on what happened, why it happened, how it made you feel and anything you wish had gone differently.
- Now focus on a time you communicated effectively. Focus on what happened, why it happened, how it made you feel and anything you wish had gone differently.



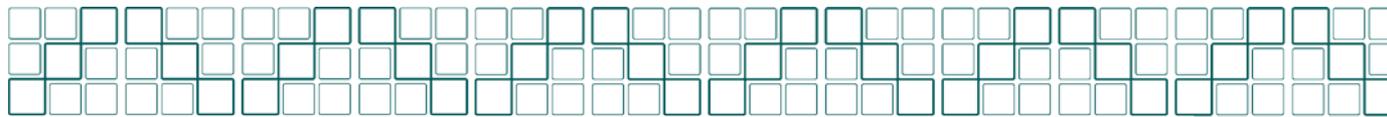
# Factors to Consider

- Two perspectives
  - Intimacy of the interaction
  - Status of the target
- Situations
  - intimates
  - friends and acquaintances
  - service workers or strangers
  - people with status or in a position of authority

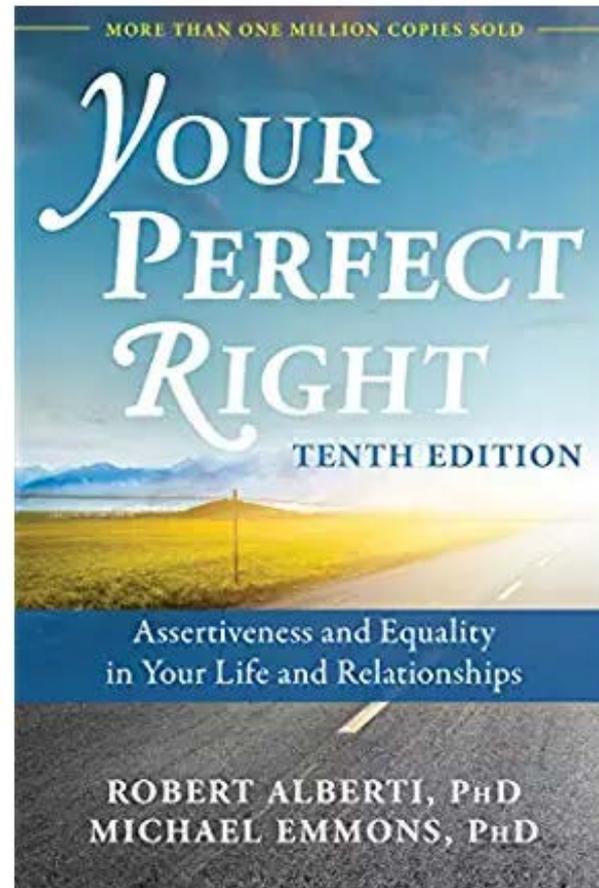


# Strategies for Assertive Communications

- **I statements:** Taking responsibility for your feelings, wants, and needs AND expressing them clearly
- **Empathic listening:** periodically summarizing what we think the communicator thinks, feels, means and needs – without agreeing.
- **Fogging:** Calmly responding with a minimal response focusing on any truth in the statement without being defensive or argumentative.
- **Stuck Record:** repeating what you want, time and time again, without raising the tone of your voice, becoming angry, irritated, or involved in side issues.
- **Negative/Positive Inquiry:** Using questions to probe the meaning of feedback when you want/need more information to facilitate your learning



# Great Resource





# Saying 'No' and Making Requests

I'll feel guilty if I say "no"/make my request  
It's my boss so I can't say "no"/make my request



Agree, say "yes"/ignore your own needs



Your own needs are not met  
You feel resentful, tired, and used



# Deciding Whether to Say 'No'

- Some questions to ask yourself:
  - Will it help me reach one of my important goals?
  - Will it advance my career?
  - Will it provide some intangible benefit important to me right now?
  - Does it have a deadline (do I need to do it now)?
  - What else is going on? Where does this rank in my priorities?
  - Is it a request from someone I can not ignore?
  - Is it a request from someone I really care about?
  - Will it matter a week/month/year from now?
  - Will it matter if I don't do it?



# Effective Ways to Say No

- I am so sorry, but I have a lot going on and really can't take on anything new right now.
- I am so sorry but I can't come this time; perhaps another time?
- I would like to help you learn how to \_\_\_\_\_, but this is a very busy week for me. Would you like to schedule a time next week to meet and talk about it?



# Assertiveness Toolkit

- Four prep questions:
  - What is the **best** possible outcome?
  - What is the **worst** possible outcome?
  - Are there some middle outcomes I can be happy with?
  - Are there things I can offer to mitigate the concerns of the other party?
  
- Who can help me prepare?
- Who can add to my safety?



# Time for Practice

- Something you have been putting off discussing with someone important to you

OR....

- You are concerned that a new fellow's project is quite close to what you were planning to do/take with you
- You think your thesis advisor is holding you back from writing and defending
- You want to talk with a colleague who hurt your feelings when s/he did not give you credit in their departmental seminar yesterday
- You want to take one day a week off for the summer to do an internship in your university's \_\_\_\_\_ office
- You want to talk with a colleague who never cleans up after using the \_\_\_\_\_



# First Principles

- You are the only expert on you
  - your PI, program directors, colleagues and others (including loved ones) may wish to provide input, but it is your choice
- There is no such thing as an ‘alternative career’
- It takes inner strength and resilience to find your voice and to be the person you want to be



# And Things To Remember

- Self-awareness is the first step
- Personal growth is a part of life-long learning
- We have to put the O<sub>2</sub> mask on ourselves first
- Asking for help is nearly always hard (but nearly always part of the solution)
- We have to identify and deal with old and maladaptive coping strategies
- Holistic self-care is the foundation of resilience
  - We cannot be resilient without a self-care practice!