

Assertive Communication with Randy Paterson

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I need to make them dance a different way. No, we need to dance a different way. That's where the control comes when people are feeling helpless in these relationships, it's usually because of a central fact. They are helpless. because they're trying to change somebody who's not under their control.

Debbie Sorensen: That was Randy Patterson on psychologists off the clock.

Yael Schonbrun: we are three clinical psychologists here to bring you cutting edge and science based ideas from psychology to help you flourish in your relationships work and.

Debbie Sorensen: I'm Dr. Debbie Sorensen, practicing in Mile High Denver, Colorado. Co-author of ACT Daily Journal, and an upcoming book on act for burnout.

Yael Schonbrun: I'm [00:01:00] Dr. Yael Schonbrun, a Boston based clinical psychologist, assistant professor at Brown University, and author of the book Work Parent Thrive.

Jill Stoddard: And from coastal New England, I'm Dr. Jill Stoddard, author of Be Mighty, the big book of Act metaphors and the Upcoming Imposter. No more.

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Hi everyone. This is Debbie, and today I am bringing you an interview with Dr. Randy Patterson. He is the author of The Assertiveness Workbook, and we're talking today in this episode all about communication and how to be more assertive. Speak up for yourself. Set boundaries, say no. I think this is a

Area where a lot of us, uh, struggle a bit and can use all the help and tips that we can get. And today to introduce the episode I have with us, Michael Harold. Michael is coming to us from Vienna. He is the strategic consultant. Yay. He's the strategic. Consultant here on psychologists off the clock, and he actually has a number of different, uh, roles in his work, one of which is that he is a confidence and communication coach, and so I invited him to share his thoughts to introduce the episode because he works with his coaching clients [00:03:00] on communication skills.

Michael, thanks for being here.

Michael Herold: Yeah. I'm super, super excited, uh, to be doing this.

Debbie Sorensen: I know that you took a listen to the episode and had a few areas related to assertive of communication that you yourself could relate to personally.

Michael Herold: Oh yeah, so I liked the, the interview so much. There was so much good stuff in there. And you refer in the interview to a course that you've taken with him, so I got immediately jealous. Uh, that I hadn't taken the course, but the, the interview itself, like it was, so, it was reminding me a lot of my old self, uh, when he talks, for example, about these different tactics that we deal with, conflict, either app easement or aggression.

And for the first three decades of my life, I was the person who would always appease, always go along with everything. And then at one point, There would be an explosion, there would be a boom, and I've had enough, and this [00:04:00] isn't like this would be an explosion that makes like a hydrogen bomb look like a small and cozy bonfire.

I quit two jobs because of that, because I never asserted myself. And that at one point I was like, You know what, I'm outta here. And he does such a good job of like showing what's the middle ground between those two things. And I wish, I just wish I had learned that a lot earlier, even though I'm still glad I left the jobs.

Debbie Sorensen: I mean, I can relate to that too. I think I talk a little bit about this with Randy in the episode that I think it, it's often the case that it's much easier to not say something or to hold back. And I think in my work with my therapy clients, I see this all the time as well. But then at some point you get tired of that or you get resentful, but then the question becomes, How?

How do you speak up for yourself and it's not always easy to do, so

Michael Herold: Yeah, absolutely. And So Randy talks about something at the very beginning of [00:05:00] the interview where he says that most stressors that we humans have are in communication with others, like 90% or so. And that really gave me some thought because I was talking with someone on. Just a couple of days ago, and she told me how has she done a survival training?

So basically get dropped on an island. Here's a knife, here's some matches, here's a flare gun. If you need any help, And I was so impressed by it because, well, how do you even survive? Where do you find all of this? But she told me that everything worked fine, but what brought her, uh, to launch the flare gun and.

Picked up after almost a week was that she was so lonely. And that was the reason. if you, if you think about being starving and, and thirsty and have like frogs crawl all over you and whatnot, and the reason you leave is you're lonely. And then on the other side, Randy talks about. Other [00:06:00] people are the biggest problem in our lives.

So it seems that there's, there's no way of like, wheezing out of this. There's no hack. We need to make this work. And the way that Randy approaches working with people and making our needs clear and setting our boundaries and and controlling our own behavior is I think one of the best ways to go about it.

Debbie Sorensen: Oh yeah. I mean, I think that really speaks to why an episode like this is important. We have such a fundamental need to be in relationships with other humans, and it's so. And complicated. I think it is stressful and downright painful at times because it's so important to us and that's exactly why we need to, to be good at this and to learn how to do it.

And if we're struggling to assert ourselves, this is a really, really important skill to have in life.

Michael Herold: Yeah, and we can model it for other people as well.

Debbie Sorensen: Absolutely. I talked to my clients about that all the time. They. [00:07:00] Point out some communication challenges coming from the other person, maybe a partner or a spouse or a parent or a friend or something, and they really would like that person to get better at communicating. And I say, Well start with yourself.

Cuz actually if you start doing it, they might follow suit and kind of pick up on some of what you're doing and and start doing it as well., And so in your coaching work, Michael, how do you, what are some of the ways that you help people? Because this is challenging, right? To help people with communication. Um, what do you find in your work with your clients in terms of what, what kind of support they need?

Michael Herold: Yeah, so there's of course skills training. Um, when I, when I talk about specifically building up my client's confidence, um, the skills are primarily dealing with difficult thoughts, dealing with insecurity and so on. Um, when we go into the communication part, then it's, it's two sides.

On one side, they need to learn the skills. What do I say? How do I say it so that I'm [00:08:00] respectful? What would be a, a formula or a, or a blueprint I could use? But the other side of that is, and I think that our listeners will find that out when they try to apply Randy's techniques, is that even though you know what you should be saying in this moment and what you want to be saying in the moment, it's still going to.

Freaking uncomfortable and the first time you are, you're speaking out, you're changing your own behavior, you're still gonna be tap dancing on a mental catastrophe curve because this is outside of your comfort zone and you just need to be ready to put in the ramps and do this a couple of times until you then get comfortable doing it.

Debbie Sorensen: I think that's such a good point. It's, you know, in the episode you're gonna hear a number of ideas and skills and even we do a little bit of role play where I. Put Randy in the hot seat to practice some examples of what it can sound like. But even if you have all the right words, it is hard. And [00:09:00] part of that is really that, you know, even if your skills are just great, you know, it does feel hard and uncomfortable.

And I'm always so proud of myself and also of my clients when they take that step to. Speak out in a way that is a little bit of a stretch of their comfort zone. And so I think if people are prepared for that when they're trying some of these skills out, especially if that's not what they've been doing, um, I think then you can be like, Okay, well, you know, I expected that to be a little bit challenging, a little bit , uncomfortable.

Michael Herold: Yeah. And. Now that you're mentioning your role playing examples, which by the way, were great, um, I had to laugh out loud when I listened to the interview at the end because you're one of the examples you ask him to record and, um, like bring him on as a co-host or something like that. And he ly just declines, declines, declines.

And I'm looking at my calendar as like, I have a co-host intro with Debbie tomorrow. I'm like, Wait, did I just fall? Did you just like fish? And then I.[00:10:00]

Debbie Sorensen: No, no, no. . That was just a hypothetical. But he did a really good job of sticking to his guns and, uh, saying no, didn't he? I was like, Wow. That's impressive.

Michael Herold: Yeah. And yeah, I mean, we leave it to the listeners to get into all the details, but how he, especially in that demo where you really pushed him and you didn't let go, that his, his reaction was amazing.

Debbie Sorensen: Well everyone, we hope that you enjoy this conversation with. Randy Patterson.

Michael Herold: Go and take some notes.

Debbie Sorensen: Yes, that's right. Take some notes. You're gonna need a pen and a paper.

Debbie Sorensen: Well, I'm delighted to welcome Dr. Randy Paterson to the podcast today. Dr. Paterson is a psychologist in Vancouver, British Columbia. He is the director of Changeways Clinic and provides training programs across Canada and internationally on evidence based mental health practice. He is the author of several books including How To Be Miserable, How to Be Miserable In Your Twenties, Private Practice Made Simple, [00:11:00] and The Assertiveness Workbook, which is just now in its second edition in which we're going to be talking about today.

Welcome, Randy. I'm so happy to have you here on psychologists Off the.

Randy Paterson: I'm glad to be here.

Debbie Sorensen: Well, I just did a, um, the week that we're recording this, I just finished up a four week training with Randy on assertive communication and boundary setting. It was terrific. So we have a lot of skills we're gonna talk about and demonstrate today.

Randy Paterson: Great. Yeah, it wasn't four weeks. Uh, continuous, I've never, I haven't talked

quite that, that long, I think people would be completely fed up.

Debbie Sorensen: right, it was, uh, two hours a week, So an eight hour training, which was, you know, there was, it's amazing. There was so much to talk about in that eight hours, um, which is, I think, highlights what a skill this is

Randy Paterson: Yeah, I mean it's, it's hard to like cram it down to, uh, to eight hours. And even at that, I thought [00:12:00] probably some people might think it's overkill, but, uh, uh, yeah, I could have done. Four, five sessions, Six session, seven sessions. I'm constantly having to trim and figuring out what to cut out.

Debbie Sorensen: Well, it, it does, it really does speak to how it is. There's a lot to it and there's a lot of situations in which these skills are necessary and there's a lot to think about. And really, I think for most of us, it's. Lifelong process of getting better at this. Can you tell us a little bit about why it's important, like why people might be interested in a sort of communication and how people can benefit from working on these skills?

Randy Paterson: Yeah. Well, as a, as a clinical psychologist, you know, one of the things you do when you first start seeing people is you ask, Well, tell, tell

me, um, what brings you here and what are some of the stressors in your life and so on. and what you wind up with is 90% of the things that really stress people out, that burn people out, that they're [00:13:00] depressed about, that they're anxious about are their relationships with other people.

As a, as a social species, these are, are many of our biggest stressors. Now, some of these involve things like loss and grief, but many of them involve communication. How do I manage? I need in my life with what they need in their life and communicate that and come to some kind of agreement, if possible, about, uh, about how to manage our existence in the workplace, at home, in friendships, in with our family of origin.

How do we figure all of this stuff out? And assertiveness is really an essential skill to being able to do all of.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah, I was just telling you just before we got started that. End up working with clients a lot of times on this skill. And of course the training I just did with you was [00:14:00] for therapists who are helping clients with this. It's not just people who are in therapy who need these skills. I mean, I think you and I both need them in our own lives, and I think, you know, often it's unexpected, you know, it's not necessarily what a client is coming into therapy to work on, but when you kind of dig into it, it turns out that that is a big part of what's getting in their.

Randy Paterson: Yeah, I mean, having written the book, I get the occasional referral from somebody who says, Yeah, no, I wanna work on my assertiveness skills. But generally speaking, you wind up doing that kind of. Or with people who came in for depression for other things. But indeed, I, I really don't think it's limited to a clinical setting at all.

I think assertiveness is something that everybody needs to, um, to work on to, Well, I, I say to perfect, but nobody ever perfects it. Trust me on that. Uh, I wrote the book and I'm still not perfect. Uh, but, um, [00:15:00] It. It's something that, you know, if you're having human relationships, you need to be able to communicate in some kind of kind, clear, effective.

Debbie Sorensen: Absolutely. Do you think that there are times when, and we'll get into what is a sort of communication and what isn't a sort of communication here in a minute, but are there times, do you think, when. Assertive communication isn't really the best approach or where, um, maybe you wouldn't be aiming for that.

Randy Paterson: Yeah, I mean, they're fairly, fairly, um, sort of arcane circumstances. If you're in a dark alley and somebody's pointing a gun in your face, um, sort of, this might not be the best thing. You might wanna adapt more of a passive style. It's like, Oh yes, absolutely. Here's my wallet. Enjoy. Uh, . And if you are hiking and faced with a cougar, then uh, you know, looking big and threatening is probably a good idea, at least in certain [00:16:00] circumstances it can be.

Um, and there's probably other circumstances between humans, uh, where, uh, aggression might be helpful, but in the vast majority of circumstances and assertive style will work better. It may not be satisfy. You know, the reason that we're passive or the reason that we're aggressive is that we kind of want to, you know, we, we get our ire up and we wanna be hostile and sarcastic and mean to other people.

And that's satisfying for about, you know, a second and a half when we, uh, let, let that off the leash. Uh, but then in the long term, it turns out not to have worked out very. Similarly, avoidance makes us feel wonderful. You know, like retreat to my position of safety. Oh, I feel so much better, uh, for a little bit.

And then I realize that the challenge that I've been avoiding is still there. I'm still gonna [00:17:00] have to go back and deal with it. So, uh, short term, those other styles can feel great. Long term, not so much usually.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah, A lot of times you end up stewing away on it if you don't say anything. It's just kind of boiling inside. There are times too, and we talked about this in the training a little bit, where you pick your battles, right? I mean, you kind of choose sometimes deliberately, you know, I'm gonna let this slide, or what are your thoughts on that?

Randy Paterson: Yeah. I mean, there are certain circumstances where you just know, you know what I'm, I'm never going to. Win this, You know, I'm never going to, uh, convince this person that the earth is actually round or that, you know, might be a good idea to get the vaccine or, you know, whatever. Uh, uh, that's not,

Debbie Sorensen: Or that my spouse should put their dishes away on a regular basis or something like this, right?

Randy Paterson: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, there are certain battles that you [00:18:00] just feel like here, uh, you know, this is pointless. I'm not gonna win it. If you have teenagers, you know, there's often so many different issues. You

think, Okay, I cannot confront this kid on a hundred things. Right? That's just not going to be helpful. I need to pick somebody in the, uh, workshop, Uh, actually just yesterday.

Uh, pointed out that she decided, you know what? I am going to confront my teenage son on a number of things, but his bed, I give up. I give up. You know, like, he doesn't make his bed. I'll live. So you, you, you do, you do pick and choose to some extent.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah, absolutely. Um, so we, this is something that I think is a big question, Right. But I'm gonna ask you to give a nutshell of it because we, you could probably talk for the whole. Plus on this topic, but what are some of the challenges? Right? Because if it was easy, we'd all be doing it and people wouldn't need to be [00:19:00] listening to this.

People wouldn't need to talk to a therapist, they wouldn't need to buy your book. But it's hard. And I think, you know, like you, you said that you work with, you know, you wrote the book literally on this. I work with clients on this all the time, and I still find it. It's such a skill. Is sometimes so hard to really access it.

So what are some of the challenges or barriers that get in the way

Randy Paterson: Well, one of the biggest barriers, of course, is that people just don't know what to do. Like what are the specific strategies for doing this stuff? And that's where, that's where the book comes in. That's where assertiveness training comes in. Uh, that's where other books come in. I'm not the only author in this topic. But even if you know what to do, it can be sometimes hard to actually do it in psych. You know, we often, uh, talk in, in, in clinical work about the difference between a, a skills barrier. I don't know what I'm doing or a performance barrier. I know what I'm doing, but I'm reluctant to actually do it. So what are the, [00:20:00] some of the things that hold people back?

One is stress. You know, stress is also called the fight or flight response. The flight response leads us into passive behavior, the fight response into aggressive behavior. If we're under stress, it's actually harder to be assertive. It actually is a huge help. If you could find a way of calming down, focusing, centering yourself, thinking about it, and then sometimes the assertive response will come to. There's also the fact of the social environment that we're in. If we've been, for example, passive our entire lives, you know, like, Oh dear, whatever you'd like, you know, that kind of, uh, style. Uh, when we change our style, the dominant message that we're likely to get back from our family is, please change back, even if the change is in a positive direct.

It's a standard thing in family therapy. You know, somebody changes, even if it's a good way, [00:21:00] you know, suddenly, uh, somehow that's not convenient for everybody. People like stability. So people also expect you to be a certain way. So if you suddenly say, Oh, I'd like to see the James Bond movie, they think, Oh my gosh, that coming from you, you must be completely fed up with. When they take that for some somebody else. But the fact that suddenly after 20 years you're saying this has great meaning. And the, the, the other main area is our belief system. A lot of people believe being assertive is, is aggressive. You know that the two are the same. Uh, being nice means being passive and doing everything for everybody else and not taking care of yourself and not setting any boundaries.

Um, some people believe that if I'm not aggressive, nothing will. That's the only way that anything gets done around here in this house, in this workplace is, is if I yell and scream and stand my feet. Um, and those [00:22:00] beliefs can hold people back as well. So there's a variety of things that, uh, that, that fall up the process.

Uh, and we try to look at those and overcome.

Debbie Sorensen: You know, I, in my own life, I think as I get older into my forties, I get, I am getting more assertive over the years. I think what used to, I used to take often default to more passive approach and still do for sure a lot of times, but I speak out a little bit more and kind of assert myself more. And it is true that there are sometimes when people have a reaction to that or. Are a little surprised by it when you do it, but I, and I do think people often see it as almost like a black and white thing. Like either you're, you say nothing or it's gonna turn into a big, huge fight. And really what we're aiming for is the middle ground there, but that can feel tricky.

Randy Paterson: Yeah. I mean, it is, it is tricky to actually come up with it. Uh, assertiveness is not just, you know, [00:23:00] watered down, aggress. Uh, it's, it's really a, a different thing. It's a different style and it's, it, it can be hard to find in a new situation. Like how, what are the words, what are the actions that will actually help me to get through this?

Debbie Sorensen: Well, this is perfect timing to break this down. So let's walk through, if it's okay with you, some of these different communication styles, starting with the, the ones that aren't assertive communication. Right? So, so can you kind of give everyone a, a brief lay of the land in terms of the other, the other styles and what those are like?

Randy Paterson: Well, when I think about about at least two of the styles, I often think about dogs. Uh, I live quite close to a dog park. The passive style is sort of the submissive dog. It's like whatever you want, you know, I'm not threatening. I. Uh, if you want it, you get it, it's okay. And the agenda [00:24:00] is really avoid conflict at all costs.

Often a person who's passive is, uh, quiet, agreeable. Um, often if you had a still movie of them, you could tell that they were doing the passive style, even though you don't know what they're saying because of their posture making themselves small. Insignificant. Trying almost to, to become invisible. We often think of the passive style as being kind of, uh, sort of sitting around and not doing very much, but actually those are often the busiest people in the world, , right, Because everybody's asking them to do stuff and they're running off their feet trying to do it.

The aggressive style, uh, is more I get to decide what happens. You don't, If you think about a stage, uh, I'm allowed on stage. Everybody else is my audience in effect. And, um, so it's like sumo, you know, I'm trying to [00:25:00] mount everybody else out, out of the ring. Um, and the aggressive style can actually have two major forms.

Uh, we might think of it as hot anger where a person is really angry and shouting and swearing and so on. Uh, but also, Mr. Potter, I always think of sever as snape as the perfect example of old anger. You know that, that, yes, I want you to do your job. That's all I'm asking. Not really that much, is it? Is it too much to ask given that we are paying your salary that.

Do the job for which we are paying. Uh, how about this afternoon and how about competently? That's that kind of, Ooh. Cold anger

Debbie Sorensen: icy cold. Yes.

Randy Paterson: a lot of people are scared, more scared of the cold anger [00:26:00] than they are off the hot anger because when hot anger, you know, people are doing that, we often think, Oh, they've lost it.

Lost what Control. They've lost control person with cold anger is very much in control at least of themselves. The third style is passive aggressive, which is sort of a combination of the two. I think if you were to sum it up with two words, it would be, um, deniable hostility. Which is where you get your own way and you get to stick the knife in, but you get to pretend it wasn't you that did it.

Uh, or it wasn't your fault, you know? So your parents have to have ordered you to paint the bathroom and you quote, accidentally unquote, managed to spill paint every. I'm sure many parents of teenagers are familiar with this phenomenon, or indeed anybody who has ever been a teenager, um, you know, we're always late and it's always because the bus company [00:27:00] just can't keep to their schedule.

Um, we make seemingly innocent observations about lawyers knowing full well that there's a lawyer within earshot of us, uh, that kind of. So this roundabout deniable, Oh no, I didn't mean you or I didn't mean to do it kind of style. And then there's assertiveness, which is people often imagine assertiveness to be this kind of, hmm, really hard edged style.

Debbie, I'm afraid that this, uh, this, uh, podcast of yours is not, uh, going to work for me on, uh, this day. Uh, and so I'm going to need you to do it on that day because I'm a, I'm a very busy person, you know, uh, that. Uh, somewhat obnoxious, hard etched. I think that's part of what holds people back from being assertive.

Assertiveness is generally speaking, relaxed. [00:28:00] It's lovely, it's polite, it's respectful. I'm allowed on stage, but so are you. Um, it's expression of equality between people, and. It, it just tends to be quite, uh, ideally quite smooth and calm most of the time.

Debbie Sorensen: I think there's a certain. Openness and honesty. When you're really doing assertive of communication, the way you're talking about, you're just sharing what you think or how you feel, or what you want, or what you need, but you're just being very direct and honest about it, I think.

Randy Paterson: Yes, there's not a lot of people don't have to guess. In a lot of relationships, you know, with bosses, sometimes with spouses, sometimes with friends. People often feel like they're taking their own behavior and sort of dropping it into a deep well. I really not sure where it's going, and they're not sure how it's coming across and [00:29:00] they're not sure what's going on with the other person or how they're reacting or, or anything.

Uh, with a more assertive person, you'll know. Uh, and it's not that they will criticize you for everything that they disagree with, but you'll, you'll know how they react and probably you will not be rejected as a person for, for any of it.

Debbie Sorensen: So in your book, which is terrific, you offer some principles of assertive communication, some sort of. Overlying general principles that you

wanna take. And one of the, the very first one, actually one that I think is really important is related to control.

And so can you share what's your stance on control as it relates to a sort of communication?

Randy Paterson: Yeah. Well in the, uh, aggressive style, as I, as I mentioned, it's all about me trying to control other people in the passive style. It's about me being controlled by anybody who wants to. Pick up the other end of my leash.

[00:30:00] Um, in the, the assertive style, what we're doing is really exerting control over our own lives.

People often come to assertiveness training and they say, Well, I need to figure out how to change my, my husband, my wife, my kid, my. Friends, my boss, whatever. Uh, and it, they're really focused on those other people, and it comes as a bit of a surprise sometimes. When I say assertiveness is not about controlling any of those people, it's about controlling you.

It's about controlling our own behavior, not the behavior of other people. Indeed, a lot of assertiveness is about letting go of trying to control other people, other people's view of us and other people's behavior. Um, so. It involves a refocus on what are my steps in this dance. All, every relationship can be conceived of as a kind of dance between two or more people, and we're so [00:31:00] focused on those obnoxious steps that that other person is doing.

I need to make them dance a different way. No, we need to dance a different way. That's where the control comes when people are feeling helpless in these relationships, it's usually because of a central fact. They are helpless. because they're trying to change somebody who's not under their control. And, and ultimately of course nobody is.

We are under our own control. So we try to change ourselves and that changes the ecology of the relationship. You know, in ecology, you look not only at one species, you look at how the species interrelate. You change one thing, you introduce deer to an island, and this changes the vegetation on that island.

It um, So in assertiveness by changing our own behavior, we change the ecology of the relationship and often the entire relationship changes when we give up trying to control, uh, for example, whether our spouse [00:32:00] puts dirty clothes in the laundry hamper and say, I'm only washing the clothes that are in the laundry hamper.

People suddenly start putting stuff in the laundry hamper. But we did it not by controlling what they do, but by controlling what we do.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah, I think it's such an important philosophical shift. You know, people do a lot of times come into, for instance, into therapy or not, but just thinking, how can I get so and so to do this or that? And you know, that's just a place that doesn't end up. It creates a dynamic that's not good. And I do think changing your own piece of that makes a huge difference a lot of times.

Randy Paterson: Yes. One of the groups of people that I see, uh, a lot of are, uh, either the young people, um, or the parents where the young person is having difficulty achieving adult independence, and the parents are often very stressed out about this. Very frustrated, and they're saying, How can I. [00:33:00] This kid to, you know, get a job and we'd look at it and it's like, well, the parents are funding all of the food, all of the computers, all of the internet, all of the rent and so on.

And the parents have the idea that when the kid gets a job, they're going to start suddenly start charging rent. It's like, do you realize that you're putting all of the incentives in place for your son to stay home and none of the incentives for. To get out so, or, or to, to move forward in his life, whether or not he leaves home.

Um, it's really about changing what the parents do rather than what the, what the son does. If it's the parents that I'm seeing. Similarly, the young person is trying to change his parents, and I'll point out I don't think you can do that. It's one of the reasons we leave home

Debbie Sorensen: Mm-hmm. . Yeah.

Randy Paterson: think of it as a standard developmental task for human beings. It often takes place around the age of 30, whereas you give up on changing your parents and reforming them.

Debbie Sorensen: Right. [00:34:00] Accept them as they are. Yeah.

Randy Paterson: Yep, I've been trying that for a long period of time. It's not working. So I guess I need to let them have those beliefs that they have, but I decide what my beliefs will be.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah. Before we get into the specifics of assertive communication and, and do a few examples, I wanna just ask you really quickly, one of the things we talked about, In the training that I just wanna

acknowledge our gender differences in the styles. And I was wondering if you could just say, cuz certainly I can relate to that idea from my own life.

Um, can you just say a couple words about, um, you know, what the general pattern is, is with that?

Randy Paterson: Yeah, I think that, um, In our society with a long history of, of, you know, different socialization for males and females, some of which is changing with time, but possibly not enough or not fast enough or, uh, you know, it's hard to overcome, [00:35:00] uh, all of the sexism of the past. Um, but I think that many, uh, Women are expected to adopt that passive style, and many men in some traditional settings are expected to be these sort of, uh, silent and or hostile pushy guys.

And this leads them into one style or another. Um, there's also the problem. If you take a script, for example, a work script, um, John, this file needs to be completed by Friday. I would like you to get your team together and organize the work so that that happens. Some script like that. And we give that script for a male actor to read and a female actor to read and then ask the audience, Please rate these people in terms of their characteristics.

Uh, the woman is [00:36:00] somewhat more likely to be rated as obnoxious and pushy, and the man is somewhat more likely to be, uh, rated as an effective leader. So this is. Very difficult situation to find ourselves in. Um, and I think what it may mean is something that's completely unjust and unfair, which is that I think men are given more latitude, uh, in many circumstances, uh, for their behavior.

Uh, and that women may need to be, in some ways more skillful at, at, at being assertive.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah.

Randy Paterson: Um, which is sounds completely unfair and, and, uh, , and I'm the wrong gender to be saying that.

Debbie Sorensen: No, I'll, I'll agree with that. Cause I do think women, you know, it's like they're very reinforced often. I mean, this is a generalization, but reinforced for that more passive, passive, agreeable, [00:37:00] likable approach, you know? And I think can. Get labeled a certain way if they are more assertive or aggressive.

And a lot of times men can get really reinforced for the more aggressive approach over the years. And I definitely have seen that in some of my work with men, especially when I worked at the VA and there were a lot of men coming through. And then, and then part of what we are doing with this skill set is learning a different way that's probably more effective for both, but we have to sort of learn a new way of doing things.

Randy Paterson: Yeah. A lot of guys, for example, will think that by being assertive, you know, and ramping it down a bit, uh, that they're, um, they're giving up their power. They're actually not, they're gaining it. You know, the reason that they're coming into treatment is that they're not, you know, that that style is just not working for them.

It's fouling up their relationships. It's fouling up their workplace, um, their co. Are not liking them very much. Their employees are, are, uh, [00:38:00] turning over at a, a really high rate. That style just does not work for them and for, uh, many others. Sometimes, uh, uh, women, the, the style of, I'm going to do things for you until you're happy with me, that's not working for them either.

Again, these are gross oversimplifications for the genders, uh, and. You know, feel free to ignore them completely, but,

Debbie Sorensen: Right. Total generalization, but there's a lot to that. And I mean, I do think that, you know, as a woman myself, who, as I said, often defaulted. More passive approach. After a while you just get tired of it and you're like, No, I don't

Randy Paterson: yeah. Listen, I'll do all this stuff for you until you stop asking. Oh, wait. Hey, that never happens.

Debbie Sorensen: Right. Yeah. So I wanna get a little bit more into the nuts and bolts here of how to Right. And. I thought it would be most fun to [00:39:00] do some examples and to hear how a, a pro approaches some of

Randy Paterson: Oh, oh, oh. I'm being set up. I could feel it.

Debbie Sorensen: I know. No pressure. No pressure, Randy? No. Well, and actually one thing we can do is do a few examples and just see how it goes and then talk about it afterwards. Like highlight what worked and what didn't work if, if you're up for that. Okay. So the first thing I wanna do is talk about how to express an opinion.

And I think this is important, you know, part of assertive communication, right? Is that sometimes you wanna just get your opinion into the. And speak up for your own beliefs, right?

Randy Paterson: Yeah. And hopefully do it in such a way that you're not implying that anybody who has another opinion is an idiot, right? You're, you're trying to create space on the stage for your opinion and space on the stage for the other person's opinion if they happen to disagree with you.

Debbie Sorensen: Okay, so let's try that out. So I [00:40:00] am here in Denver and you're over there in Vancouver. And so we're gonna have, we're gonna express some opinions about that, and I'm gonna start by saying that. Randy Denver. It's really amazing here. We're so close to the mountains and it has great weather, and I really think that you should probably move here because Denver is much better than Vancouver.

Randy Paterson: Ah, yes. Well, I've been to Denver and I, I've quite liked it, in fact, and I love the mountains there. And, uh, and yet I haven't moved there because in fact, Vancouver is actually, uh, more suited to me. It really depends on your values and what's important to you, I think. And uh, Vancouver also has the mountains.

I kind of think that the mountains in Vancouver are even a little bit more easily accessed than Denver. Uh, we could measure it out and see. I'm open to contradiction on that, but I think that's [00:41:00] true. I can be on a ski hill in 20 minutes from where I live. Well, let's face it, I can be in the lineup. Um, I also like being in the ocean, uh, and being around the ocean from my office.

I see the ocean. Uh, and I, you know, Don't recall being able to see the ocean from Denver. Uh, so I think I, I think for me that's really useful. A lot of my travels in my life have, uh, have been to Asia and I was in Hong Kong at one point and, and somebody said, you know, there are no good chefs left in Hong Kong.

They're all in Vancouver. And you know, he was right. Uh, we. Wonderful Chinese food, wonderful Japanese food, uh, um, Indian food, Thai Malaysia. We have, uh, such a wonderful collection of, uh, different [00:42:00] tastes and flavors, and that's such a great aspect of life here. I'm sure that Denver has its positives as well, and a different person might prefer that

Debbie Sorensen: Well, I'm packing my bags. That was very convincing So, and, and again, it's not about trying to win this, but Can, so can you just give us

a few features of what you did there, what you were trying to do there to, That was a, I think, quite effective. , um, in getting your point across there. So what were some of the things you were, you were doing, Randy, that were, um,

Randy Paterson: Well, yeah. Well, one of the things is that I wasn't saying that everybody on the entire planet, uh, should feel exactly the same way. Uh, I was saying that this is how I feel. I might have the secret conviction that I'm actually right. Um, but that's not helpful in the communication with you, giving you space to be a separate person with separate [00:43:00] values, separate ideas, separate things about what you want.

Um, So I was deliberately creating space for that. I was also acknowledging the positive points of your, um, your opinion. You know, Denver's uh, proximity to the mountains is in fact lovely and your ski ski hills and so on, you know, whatever. Uh, so I was doing that. I was acknowledging the positive points, but I wasn't, um, necessarily going along with your, uh, your view.

You know, I wasn't promising to move to Denver. I. Pointing out how I, how I feel, and what are the things that I value about, in effect my side of the argument.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah, and as the recipient of this different opinion from mine, I felt like it just kind of opened. To listen to you cuz you didn't come in really strong with You're wrong or you should

Randy Paterson: Denver's horrible. Oh my God. Oh, uh, yeah, none of that.

Debbie Sorensen: yeah. Cuz that [00:44:00] would've kind of shut it down. And I would be like, Denver's great too, you know, But instead I was like, Okay, well let me hear this point of view.

So I think that's really effective. You were very direct about it, but you weren't, hard line my way or the highway about it.

Randy Paterson: No, and I could imagine putting in some things that might be slightly assertive or I could put in a little passive aggressive tone. Uh, I might say something like, you know, and if you happen to get injured in the mountains, you can go to any hospital you want cuz it's not dependent on your insurance company.

That might be just a little bit of a pin prick, you know, like just a little bit of a mm a, a a twist.

Debbie Sorensen: Mm-hmm.

Randy Paterson: And that would be another agenda. That's not about what's, you know, like that's not Vancouver,

Debbie Sorensen: Right, right. It could be tempting Yeah.

Randy Paterson: Wells, things that I value, but never, never. That's question

Debbie Sorensen: [00:45:00] Yeah. Okay, so let's move on to another example. Um, and in this case, instead of expressing opinion, I'm gonna ask you, At, let's say there's something I'm doing that you don't like and you would like for me to, um, you would like to ask me to change it. Okay. And so the example I thought of is imagine that we're still doing your, um, you know, your seminar that you've been teaching.

And I was, I kept talking over you, interrupting you, jumping in, talking too much and kind of dominating the conversation. It's, you're, you're the presenter here. Um, and so you're starting to get to the point where you're. I think I need to say something. Okay, so what would you say?

Randy Paterson: Debbie, thank you so much for your points today. You know, you've made so many of them and they're all exactly on. It. Um, you'll notice though that there are 42 people in our, in our, uh, seminar, and some of those people really haven't [00:46:00] spoken at all, and I'm really trying to draw them out as well. And so as I ask questions, you'll notice that, uh, you know, you'll have your hand raised or your microphone unmuted.

I'm not actually gonna go to you. I'm gonna go to them, the ones who haven't said anything. Uh, and. Really to try to balance things out a little bit. So, uh, if you've got some really important things you really wanna make sure that come out in your, uh, uh, in, in the webinar, uh, do speak up about those. But you might want to, uh, hold back on others cuz otherwise I'll randomly, uh, pick on those and they won't be the, the points that you really want to.

Debbie Sorensen: Okay. Great. Very gentle, but also very direct. Um, so what, what were some of the features of that that you were, what were some of the things you were trying to do there?

Randy Paterson: Well, one, one feature of it is that it's well practiced because in every [00:47:00] workshop, especially live workshops that you do, there's

always one person who sits close to the front end. It's kind of like your private workshop for them.

Debbie Sorensen: I won't ask if that was me in the workshop. I just did.

Randy Paterson: was, in fact, it was not you. And in fact, we, I was missing one of those.

There was nobody, That's one of the

Debbie Sorensen: Okay,

Randy Paterson: workshop doesn't happen. Um, no. Uh, but one of the things that I was doing is I acknowledging the good points. You know, that in fact, usually when a person is doing that, they do have some good points. And I might have said, you know, Oh, I especially liked your point about driving.

Just acknowledge something positive rather than, Oh my God, there was just so much of what you were saying. I just, you know, like give it a rest, put a socket it right. Rather than that, acknowledge some of the things that they've done, uh, well, but also acknowledge the excess of it and why. Am I confronting you?

What am I doing? Like what is [00:48:00] my motive here? My motive is to even it out for so that everybody gets a chance to talk. So I'll tell you that. So rather than simply I need you to do less, uh, I'll point out I need them to do more.

Debbie Sorensen: Okay.

Randy Paterson: only way they're gonna do that is if there's some space

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah, , right. Okay, great. Now I wanna do one final example, and this one I'm gonna make it a little harder for you. I'm really gonna push you a little bit more here. So here's what what we're gonna do. I'm gonna make a request. This is a, a saying, no example. So I'm gonna make a request of you and actually, once I make the request, I'm gonna pause to see if you have feedback for, because one other part of assertive communication is making a request, and I learned some skills from you, Randy.

So let me, if this is okay, this, Uh, I'm gonna make the request and then pause for feedback, and then we're gonna, I'm gonna, um, push you a [00:49:00] little

bit with saying no. So I'm gonna, I'm not gonna be the easiest person in the world to say no to. Okay? All right. So here's the

Randy Paterson: I've run into them before, so go for it.

Debbie Sorensen: So, um, Randy, I'm in kind of a bind with the podcast right now cuz I have a few interviews lined up and one of my co-hosts has been out sick and I'm really, I need a guest host who can help me by doing an interview.

And I know you're, you're busy, but, um, I was just wondering, would you be able to carve out a couple hours next week to do a few guest interviews for me? Okay, so I'm gonna pause. How did I do? With this request.

Randy Paterson: That was pretty good. That was pretty good. That's, that's almost exactly what I would recommend for somebody, uh, doing this. You're, you're giving the background, so you're not just hitting me with, can you be my, uh, guest interviewer, or you're my co interviewer. Uh, you're orienting me to this situation.

Why is this an issue for you? And then you're being [00:50:00] quite specific about what it is, uh, that you're asking for.

Debbie Sorensen: Okay.

Randy Paterson: very good.

Debbie Sorensen: Okay. Yay. Okay, so those are some, some ways to make a request. Okay. So now let me have you, um, okay, so can you do this guest home host thing for me, Randy? Just, just take a couple hours.

Randy Paterson: Well, thank you so much for asking. I mean, that's, that's, that's nice of you that you think that that's something that I could, uh, uh, manage and that I would be a good enough interviewer to meet your high standards. Um, this fall I'm really committed and so unfortunately I'm not taking on anything new.

Debbie Sorensen: I know you're so busy and I would not ask you this, um, if it was an emergency, but I think you'd be so good. And also, I really think it would be good for your career because I know you're, you know, you have this new book out. I think, who knows, It could open a lot of doors for you. I think. I actually think, you know, you could probably move a couple things around next week and just squeeze it in.

Randy Paterson: [00:51:00] Well, you might be right that it, it would be, uh, beneficial to me. Unfortunately, I'm not taking on anything new this fall. I know better than to, uh, over pack my schedule.

Debbie Sorensen: Well, I wouldn't ask if I wasn't really, really desperate. Are you sure? Can you just help me out with this, please?

Randy Paterson: No, I'm afraid I'm not taking on anything new this fall.

Debbie Sorensen: Okay. All right. You stuck to your guns,

Randy Paterson: I stuck to my guns. I am disappointing you in, in that imagined scenario. Uh, and but I'm trying to make it shorter and I'm trying not to go overboard with my explanations. So one of the things that, uh, I don't wanna be doing is giving you excuse after excuse after excuse, because you will sense, ah, this guy's gonna run out of excuses sooner or, So I give my answer, and then as the person [00:52:00] keeps asking, my answer gets more and more brief.

I just reiterate, But I try to maintain that same kind tone in my voice as much as I can. You know, I don't get, Oh, for God's sake, I already told you no. You know, I, I'm trying not to have that enter my voice instead. Uh, I really appreciate such a difficult situ. That must be really hard, but I, I'm not taking on anything now, so I'm, you know, empathetic but not moving.

Debbie Sorensen: So we're really talking here. I mean, this is a saying, no skill. It's also, you know, it's one way of setting boundaries. You were talking earlier about, you know, if you don't set some boundaries at some point you're just gonna take on more and more. You're gonna be run ragged, burn out, all that kind of thing.

Um, I liked the idea that, or I like your idea that people can keep asking all they want and it's up to you to decide. To say yes [00:53:00] or no. Could you just say more few more words about that? About like why this skill is such an important one?

Randy Paterson: Yeah, I run into a lot of people who are just so annoyed and so frustrated because like, why would they ask me to do that? That's so unreasonable. These people around me are just a pack of users. The moment I hear the word users, I think, uh, so this person is allowing themselves to be. What they're really trying to do is control other people and make them so they don't ask, and they're feeling threatened by the fact that other people are asking

them to, you know, drive them to the airport, paint my kitchen, do this, do that, finish all of these reports by Friday, whatever.

Um, and, and, and they're trying to think, how do I get these people to stop rather than. Exerting their own control and [00:54:00] being able to say no. And if they can say no, then it doesn't actually matter what people ask. You know, somebody can ask me, Can I have your house? It's totally allowable. Right? That's fine.

It doesn't threaten me at all. No, no, you can't. Sorry. Sorry if my, Sorry. Sori is a tricky word. Sorry, can mean I know I should, but I'm not going to. But it can also mean I'm sorry that I am disappointing you. I'm sorry for the emotion that you're feeling, but I actually have the right to my own house. So sori is a little marker word that you wanna like pay attention to.

Which way

am I using

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah.

Randy Paterson: Uh, I think it really is beneficial to a lot of workplaces if you have no boundaries, but it's beneficial to them. Uh, in the short term, in the long run, uh, you wind up with more burnout, you wind up with more, um, absenteeism, [00:55:00] uh, you wind up with more turnover and you wind up with a fair number of employees on, um, stress leave.

Uh, I, I've noticed I've done a lot of work for rehab coordinators and so on, and then. Professionals that are assigned to people who are, uh, on stress leave or uh, leave for mental health issues and so on. And there are some companies that've got like 20% of their staff off on leave and you think this is not helpful for that company.

I've noticed this myself very early in my career. When I would first have an assistant, I would give them a task to do and I would think, Okay, well that seems to be going well. Let's give them another task. Oh, that seems to be going well. Let's give them another task. And I didn't realize, but I had a hidden belief, my cognitive therapist, but I didn't realize it.

I was having this hidden belief that I wasn't looking at, which is it? Once their full day will tell. And I had somebody working for me who once they were full, would not tell me [00:56:00] because they thought it was the term of the, of the,

the work that their job was to just take whatever was given. Uh, and, uh, I since then have realized you really need your employees.

To be able to speak up and say, I'm full now, or, which of these is the most important, cuz I'm not gonna get to all of that this week. You know, and I, I rely on that because often when I'm giving over a task as a, as an employer, I have no clue how long it will take. I might be giving a 40 hour job, I might be giving a three hour job.

I don't know. Uh, we'll see. Uh, and so I really need, I think it's really important that employees be able to give that feedback to people in, in, Since Covid people have been talking about this idea, is it quiet, quitting? Is that the term that people are using?

Debbie Sorensen: Yes, that's right. Quiet quitting.

Randy Paterson: Yeah. [00:57:00] Part of it. I mean, some of that is kind of like, Oh, I just give up.

I'm so burned out, I'm just gonna do the bare minimum. Fair enough. But some of it, it's like, No, I'm going to work for the hours that I'm going, uh, getting paid, and then I'm gonna spend time with my family and friends and my other interest in life that's not quite quitting, That's having boundaries, , you know, that's having a life.

Debbie Sorensen: I agree with you. It's like a sad state of affairs that what is just really setting some work boundaries and deciding I'm not gonna let work take up every second of my day has now labeled us quiet, quitting, when that's actually a very healthy thing to do, isn't it?

, I think speaks to what was sort of become the norm.

Randy, I just wanted to move into a final piece here, um, that you had in your training and in your book about giving and receiving both positive and negative feedback. And I wanted to just start by saying that, all of the above can be difficult, right?

Giving and [00:58:00] receiving positive and advocate of feedback, and I thought it was so interesting the way that. Talked about that and and write about that, and I just really appreciate the work that you're doing in this area. I think I thought it was really helpful to me.

Randy Paterson: Oh, well thank you very much. That's, uh, that's lovely.

Debbie Sorensen: Okay, good job. You passed your own test because I just gave you some positive feedback and you accepted it very simply and graciously. And I'm pointing that out because I actually think that's, a lot of times people feel uncomfortable when they are given positive feedback and they might, um, you know, they might deny it or reject it or minimize it or something like that.

Randy Paterson: Absolutely. Whereas what's tempting for people, and I suspect even more tempting for Canadians than for Americans, is like, Oh no, it's terrible. It's this silly little book that, you know, you know, we want to, uh, discard any positive feedback that we [00:59:00] get. And it really is the throwing away of a gift. You know, it's an insult to the person who's complimenting you and try not to insult them.

You know, it's a gift. You accept it with graciousness.

Debbie Sorensen: Yes, that's right. And negative feedback in my opinion, can be even more tricky and difficult to give Anne to receive. I think that, you know, getting negative feedback sometimes can really sting and we might wanna avoid that at all costs sometimes. And then also giving negative feedback can be really hard, I think.

Often I will be really reluctant to give somebody critical feedback or negative feedback. And so I was wondering if you could say a little bit about why is negative feedback so difficult to give, and what are some pointers that you have for giving someone negative feedback?

Randy Paterson: , well, part of it is that negative feedback tends to be quite potent. You know, when you give it, people are like, Oh my gosh. They're, they're, uh, they remember it a [01:00:00] lot. Uh, they remember it more than positive feedback often. And so it's helpful to, if you're in a situation where you're gonna have to give negative feedback, remember to give a ton of positive feedback when the opportunities arise for that as.

But when you're giving, uh, negative feedback, one principle is private is better than public. Generally, not always, but generally, uh, you know, the idea of praise publicly, uh, criticized privately or correct privately. You wanna be clear

about what it is that you're talking about and you wanna set boundaries around it.

You know, inevitably a person's who's hearing, oh, uh, um, if your attendance was a little bit better, that would be helpful right at, at work or school or whatever. Uh, They're wondering what else is there in this train? Is this the firing speech? Is this the, I hate everything you do Speech. [01:01:00] Is this the, I'm divorcing you speech.

And so it's helpful if you, uh, preface your negative feedback with some positives, uh, where you're pointing out, This is really great about your job. I'm really glad about that, and this, and the attendance could be better. So what this does is it provides a frame around the situation where it's reasonably clear that you're not rejecting them in toto, you are, uh, just pointing out something in particular that could be improved.

You also want, when you're giving this feedback to give the feedback, um, with your goal in mind. Like, what exactly do you want to change? And it's so tempting to give feedback about a person's charact. I'd like you to be smarter about this. What? Like what do we really expect them to do? Neurosurgery to like up their IQ by 20 points that like they don't [01:02:00] have the ability to do that.

I'd like you to respect me. They don't have the ability to do that, right? We cannot change how we feel, at least not perfectly or instantly. I would like you to be here by 9:00 AM. That they can. So we focus on behavior, not on character, not, don't be so lazy. Uh, don't be so careless. I would like miss to happen.

What exactly is it you're looking at? And also, it's best to focus on what would be better, What would you like as opposed to what are you hating? You know, I would really like it if everybody was here on time because we have the 9:00 AM meeting. Um, and uh, uh, that's when we set out the work for the. As opposed to, I would rather, there wasn't your empty seat sitting there,

Debbie Sorensen: I think that's really good general feedback to kind of, you know, [01:03:00] end on here, which is that this piece around just being very specific, anchored in a specific behavior instead of just this kind of attack on the person. I mean, I think that goes a long way in marital disputes and. All kinds of settings.

It's like you wanna just say, Hey, you know, this thing that you've been doing, You know, could you do this instead? Or just keep it really, you know, straightforward and kind and respectful,

Randy Paterson: Kind, respectful, straightforward, and behavioral. Absolutely. And and included with the positives. Yeah.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah. Well, there is so much more we could talk about today.

Randy and I am gonna refer people to your workbook because, Full of helpful information to help you work on this skill. And because it's a workbook, I think it's really, you know, practical. There's like good information in there, but there, you know, it's all about practicing this skill and working on it.

So I really recommend people check that out. Um, Randy, where can people find out more about what you're up [01:04:00] to? Um, can you point people towards your webpage and any other resources that they might be interested?

Randy Paterson: Yeah, my webpage is randy Paterson.com and um, cuz I have the Scottish version of the name, not the English one.

There's only one T in Paterson. Um, and I have a YouTube channel called Psychology Salon, All one word. And if you just go to YouTube and type that into the search engine, you'll find it. And something usually goes up there every couple of weeks. Um, I also have an online course page. With some courses for the general public and some courses for mental health professionals@psychologysalon.teachable.com.

In references to all of those can be found at my website, randy Paterson.com and of course the books can be found at any online book seller in, in including the one we've all been using through the pandemic ,

Debbie Sorensen: which shall not be named. Yes. Well, we [01:05:00] will also , we will also link to all of these resources on.

Our show notes for today's episode, and I highly recommend both the book and then also your trainings cuz you really are, you know, do some great presentations. And so I wish all of our listeners all the best in practicing their assertiveness skills. And Randy, thank you so much for your time today. Even if you won't be taking over as a guest cohost, I do appreciate your, your expertise.

Randy Paterson: Great. Well thank you very much. It's been a delight.

Debbie Sorensen: Thank you.

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