

Peaceful Life Radio

Show Transcript

Peaceful Assertiveness – How to Find Your Voice Without Raising It

David Lowry: 0:36

Hello, everyone. This is David Lowry, and my good friend, Don Drew, is alongside me. Don, let's give our listeners a preview of our show today.

Don Drew: 0:44

Today, we're diving deep into the concept of peaceful assertiveness. This episode equips you with the tools to express yourself clearly and respectfully while honoring the needs of others. Many of us struggle with conflict. Some of us play the role of doormat, avoiding conflict at all costs, and some of us play the role of the drama queen or king, pushing back with anger and aggression, creating unnecessary tension and drama. Peaceful assertiveness offers a middle ground. You state your needs respectfully; you collaborate to find solutions that work for everyone and you move forward constructively.

David Lowry: 1:15

It's going to be a great episode, and it's going to equip you with the essential skills for peaceful assertiveness, including empathy, setting boundaries, and active listening. I-statements and seek win-win solutions.

Don Drew: 1:28

David, I can't wait to get started, but before we do, I want to take a second and ask our listeners to download and subscribe to our peaceful Life radio podcast. It only takes a minute, and it will help us a lot.

David Lowry: 1:40

Now, I don't know about you, but for many years, I confused assertiveness with aggressiveness. And since we're running a peaceful life podcast, we're not going to be talking about how to be super aggressive in our assertiveness but rather how to be peacefully assertive. Do you know what the difference between them is?

Don Drew: 2:01

I think I do.

David Lowry: 2:02

You wouldn't be a host on this program if you didn't, but anyway, let's explain it. Well, the peaceful, assertive person is someone who, instead of becoming overly aggressive in the way they respond to people whenever there's a conflict or running away from our problems, we hold this middle course way. Most of us don't like conflict. So, if you're like me, you run away. And if you're like you, who tends not to be a wuss like me, you might tend to get your hackles up.

Don Drew: 2:30

That's definitely the side I fall on.

David Lowry: 2:32

So, Don and I are a great pair because I want to run away, and Don wants to go charging after stuff. So, it can get interesting. But here's the thing, if you check out, you're not even available for peace. But aggression,

Don Drew: 2:46

It tends to lead to a lot of unnecessary drama.

David Lowry: 2:48

And I don't know about you, but are you tired of drama?

Don Drew: 2:51

Yes, yes, I am.

David Lowry: 2:52

Peaceful assertiveness doesn't take either of those courses. It takes a rather brilliant strategy. The strategy is to state what you need very respectfully, collaborate, seek a solution that works for both of you, and then move forward with it.

Don Drew: 3:09

So, David, you're talking about taking the middle path. That assumes there are these two sides you've already mentioned. Can we give a little more clarity on that?

David Lowry: 3:16

Sure, what do you have in mind?

Don Drew: 3:18

Well, okay, so the side where you avoid conflict—sometimes that's called being a doormat, right? You're trying to avoid conflict at all costs, even if it means swallowing feelings or letting others exploit you, and that just doesn't turn out very well for you.

David Lowry: 3:32

Nah, and I think all of us know what it feels like to be a doormat. You go away with this empty feeling, right? Like, I don't matter to these people. And of course, you don't. A lot of people are just looking after their own needs and wants, and they're not thinking about you. And if you agree to it, then why not? What about the other one? What's the name you give that one?

Don Drew: 3:51

We call it being a drama queen or a drama king. This is a person who is going to push back full steam ahead with any anger or aggression they're feeling, shouting, intimidating, and generally making things ugly. I don't think that I'm so guilty of that extreme, but whenever I feel like I'm being threatened or there's a conflict present or whatever, I tend to go on the offensive. And that is something that takes a lot of effort and a lot of clear thinking to get control of.

David Lowry: 4:20

Sure, and before we talk more about peaceful assertiveness, I think it's important for us to know that our choice of being either a doormat or a drama king comes from the way we were raised and how we learned our default approach to solving a problem, even though it doesn't work for us 100 percent of the time or even 60 percent of the time, we choose it because we've learned how to live that way. We've learned that, hey, if I yell back, that intimidates other people, and they leave me alone. If I walk away, the problem does not seem to follow me, and I can put my mind on something else, I feel better that way. Sadly, the problem with both of those approaches is that they don't work.

Don Drew: 5:00

Yeah, and they often come from a place of emotion, like from the gut, and they don't necessarily include the head very much. The middle way, the peaceful way, requires some overt action in order to overcome that.

David Lowry: 5:11

Sure. So, let's talk about this middle path, this peaceful assertiveness path, and then we'll give you some tips on how to handle things when people aren't on the same page as you.

Don Drew: 5:21

Right, we can learn to feel with more empathy. Empathy means to understand somebody, walk in their shoes, that kind of thing. Putting yourself in their place, trying to gain a deeper understanding of their concerns and motivations. And this empathy allows you to approach conflicts with compassion and openness. Another thing you can do is to work on setting boundaries. There's an old saying that strong or high fences make good neighbors, and there's some truth behind that, okay? Setting good boundaries is crucial for maintaining healthy relationships and fostering mutual respect. Another thing you can do is Clearly communicate your limits and expectations while acknowledging the

boundaries of others; all that helps our relationships with others to set those boundaries for us.

David Lowry: 6:06

One of the things that people are going to question you about this wisdom is, Well, Don, if I'm trying to be empathetic with people, doesn't that invite them to walk all over me? Aren't we trying to get away from this doormat thing we talked about?

Don Drew: 6:20

Right, it can, but there are some other things you can do. Okay, and one of those things is to learn how to be a better or more active listener.

David Lowry: 6:28

Now, it's true that when you're feeling empathy, you could possibly be tempted to not stand up for yourself but just take what anybody says, but we're not really talking about that.

Don Drew: 6:40

No, no, we're not.

David Lowry: 6:41

Let's look at it this way, Don. When we talk about being empathetic. We're talking about learning to listen to another point of view and understand where people are coming from. But that doesn't mean that we agree with everything they're telling us.

Don Drew: 6:55

No, absolutely not. We have to listen carefully to understand what you're telling us is where things like active listening become very important. We should give them our full attention and try to understand their position, even when they're not expressing their position very well. Slow down and try to give some space, if you will, to understand and appreciate that position. It's interesting that we saw this weekend in the Super Bowl when Travis Kelsey, halfway through the game, was really upset, I think at his own playing, and he started yelling at his coach, Andy Reed. Andy, in the post-game after the Kansas City Chiefs won and so forth, was actually very gracious. He said that he understood the intensity that Kelsey was bringing to the game and how he appreciated that.

David Lowry: 7:44

So, we might say, okay, I want to know more about what you're thinking. Let's make sure I understand what you're telling me. Tell me more. Words like tell me more. Or did I get all of what you're trying to tell me? And Don, I'll tell you from my own work in mediation and peacemaking, when people feel like they've been listened to and that you truly understand their position, that you aren't just advocating your position and don't even

care about them. Sometimes, they're willing to stop right there and say, okay, I think you get me.

Don Drew: 8:15

Yeah. Yeah. And sometimes, what happens is that we don't get them, okay, and we're not understanding. And then phrases like help me understand might be useful in clarifying someone's situation.

David Lowry: 8:28

Perfect. That's what we mean by empathy right there. So, we're not saying give up. We're saying, listen for the other point of view, make sure you understand it, and be able to give it back to them in a way that sounds satisfactory to them, so the other person knows, okay, this person understands what I'm saying, and they get it. And then, if you have to counter back and say I want to talk about this point you brought up right here because I have a different view. If you've given them a fair hearing, they might be more willing to listen to you.

Don Drew: 9:01

Of course, listening is really important, David, but communicating your ideas is just as important. I mean, you're basically a doormat if you don't communicate what you're feeling and so forth. Speak clearly and calmly. Use I-statements to express your thoughts and feelings without blaming or accusing others. This encourages open dialogue and reduces defensiveness.

David Lowry: 9:20

You use the word I-statement. so many people say you-statements. Instead of saying Hey Don, I feel this way, or I was thinking about the situation, and I came up with this idea I want to share with you. People sometimes turn to something like Don, you always do this when I say this, and you do this, and you do that. When we use you-statements, it creates this barrier between us. I-statements are magic.

Don Drew: 9:50

They are, and one of the things we need to think about when we're making I-statements is we own what we're saying. We're not assuming or putting off our feelings on somebody else. David, you can't make me feel something. I can explain what I feel in response to something, but I can't say that you have made me feel a certain way,

David Lowry: 10:12

I really appreciate that. Those I-statements are magic, and we need to incorporate them more. Another thing about I-statements is assertiveness, which comes when you own what you really think and feel and make a request for somebody based on where you stand in your position. When you stand in front of somebody that you're having a bit of a conflict with or maybe a disagreement with, and you say, listen, I don't think that's going to work for me, or you say, I have a different point of view, I hope you'll let me express

that now that I've listened to you. You're really standing in your power. When you can calmly say those things, make your I-statements, and own that this is how I feel. And if somebody tries to gaslight you and say you shouldn't feel that way, or I didn't mean it that way. You stand in your own power and say that's where I am right now. And I'm willing to hear differently. And I'm glad you want me to think differently. Let's talk about this.

Don Drew: 11:09

David, one of the things that's really helpful about the peaceful assertiveness idea or way of being is that it seeks a win-win type of solution in life. It's one of my favorite movies, A Beautiful Mind. It was an Academy Award-winning movie from, I don't know, probably about 20 years ago, with Russell Crowe playing John Nash, who was famous for his theory called the Nash Equilibrium part of game theory. And what that was really all about was the beauty and necessity of creating a win-win situation in which everybody walks away from the conversation or walks away from the conflict with something that they want. To find a win-win solution that satisfies the needs of all parties involved. So, working with other individuals to brainstorm creative options and being willing to compromise without sacrificing your core values becomes very important.

David Lowry: 11:59

I was in a mediation not long ago, Don. And it was really important that everybody say what they wanted. It's so important. But if you can do it in a peacefully assertive way, I'm going to need this. I'm looking to come away with this if I can. But one of the things that also has to take place is you have to be willing to say, I know what I want, and I'm hearing what you want. Is there a way we can get there where we both have something? And we're not really talking about looking for a compromise, although some people think of it that way. A win-win is when we come to that realization that I can satisfy what I'm going to need here without having to take away something really valuable to you. And you can have a lot of what you want without taking away everything that I need. It's learning to work together.

Don Drew: 12:50

Isn't it true, David, though, that even in situations where conflict is present, emotions run high? And our emotions drive us to say and do a lot of things, perhaps, that aren't helpful.

David Lowry: 13:01

We do things that are regretful when we allow ourselves to go aggressive. So, peaceful assertiveness is learning how to stand confidently and proudly in what it is you believe you need and want, and you're managing your emotions effectively. Your emotions could be high, but if you can avoid letting your voice rise, you can keep in mind that this other person is valuable and important. That's important, too. I'm going to throw this concept out here, and we'll probably talk about it in another program, but there are three

important people at the table whenever you have a conflict. There's you, the other person, and there's your relationship. And I don't know about you, Don, but most of the time mediators are like, Hey, if we can get people to say, okay, I'll take this, and you'll take that, they walk away and call it good. But that's not necessarily peacemaking. Peacemaking is when you say, you know what, your relationship with me is important. Can we repair or reconcile it, even as we both try to get what we need out of this? So, the concept is that we try to reconcile as best we can given the situation we're in and the circumstances we face, and we also understand that time can change things and bring us a little closer together. Sometimes, we can't have what we once had, but can we restore it to the best possible relationship it can be, given what's happened between us? And reconciliation is important. Always keep that as an end state that you're going for whenever you have a conflict. And if you keep in mind that when you care about the relationship, you're showing self-care, but it's also putting the opportunity to have something even more valuable-- a restored friendship, a restored relationship, a restored peace between you. It's really nice to go home at the end of the day and not have a lot of drama on your mind, even if you've come to an agreement, but say, not only did we solve this, but I think we're okay now. We can move forward.

Don Drew: 15:01

Sounds good, David.

David Lowry: 15:02

What do we do, Don, if we run across somebody who is just super assertive, they don't want to play ball, they're out there to win, they got their fangs showing, they're raising their voice, they're super assertive, and, I mean, how much of that can we take?

Don Drew: 15:18

Yeah, okay, so if you're me, you have to fight the urge to push back, okay? So first of all, we try to give ourselves some time. Don't yell back, threaten, or run away. None of those really work to resolve anything. Instead, they should try to develop a sense of calm determination, stay focused on the problem, and find a solution that works for everyone. Use your words but choose them wisely. One of the things that's most important is to give ourselves a few moments of time, not try to respond in the immediate sense. Even if it means that you've got to go quiet for a moment while you think about what you're going to say.

David Lowry: 15:52

I've had a few experiences dealing with super assertive people, and I want to share a couple of stories for whatever they are worth. So, story number one, I have a job, there's something I had to do. It wasn't necessarily what I wanted to do, but I had to do it in my job because it was expected of me, and people down the line didn't like it. One of them gets on the phone and starts yelling and raising their voice at me, treating me very disrespectfully. Can we dial this down a little bit? I use words like, I know you're upset, and I know this is frustrating to you, but we need to talk about this. Well, they weren't

willing to do that. They were still angry and raising it. So, I went to a different level and I said: look, we need to talk about this, but I have a rule. I'm not going to be yelled at, and I'm not going to be disrespected. When you feel ready to talk with me, call me back, and we'll talk. And then gently, I didn't throw the phone down or anything. I put the phone down. I tried not to be accusatory or blaming. I did say I don't let people yell at me. But I was observing what that person was doing. They were yelling at me, and I was setting the boundary. The boundary is I don't let people yell at me. And I got a callback, and the person was a bit apologetic, and we went forward like it didn't happen, and we got to where we needed to get, that, that was one. Another one is I've learned to be more of a game player. In peaceful living, you learn that conflict has a beginning, middle, and end, and if you know where you're headed in the conflict situation, you don't feel so overwhelmed. Sometimes, when people have conflict, they think, Oh my God, what's going to happen? Is this going to go on for years? No, it doesn't have to. All conflicts have a beginning, middle, and end. And your goal is to get from the beginning to the end with your head held up high, knowing that you did everything on your part to make it possible to be successful if they want it to be. So, when you know that's your goal when the other person is yelling, screaming, or being unreasonable, you can allow yourself not to show reactivity. You can say, I know where I am in this conflict. I know that we're not to the end yet, so I'm expecting a little bit of anger. I know that this is the beginning part where emotions run high. Even my emotions are running high right now. But we know that at the end, we don't want to keep it that way. We want to set a stage where we can get there. So, I've had several situations where when people are talking loud to me, I bring my voice down a little bit lower. I say those things that we talked about earlier, like, okay, tell me more. I want to make sure I understand what you're saying. Oh sounds like I don't know everything. What do I need to know? By the way, you won't wilt if you ask those things. If you're trying to be empathetic, you will not wilt. You will not, fall through a crack. You don't become invisible just because you listen. Sometimes it's really hard to listen to those other people, right? But you can take it.

Don Drew: 18:48

Like I said before, emotions can get away from us. And we sometimes feel the need to respond right away. I mean, it's rarely helpful if we can create some sense of space and some moments. I think you did that when you were talking to this individual on the phone. They weren't going to stop pushing whatever it was that they were trying to say to you. And it became obvious that there was not going to be the possibility of a resolution in that instant. You didn't shut down the conversation. You left the conversation open. It's just that you said the conversation is going to be handled in a different manner and under different conditions.

David Lowry: 19:27

And this is one of the things that if you go into mediation work, you'll find that you have to tell parties to talk to the mediator rather than each other. Because they usually won't yell at the mediator, but they're very tempted to yell at each other. And if you say no, just look at me, just look at me, and tell me what you want, and then you feed it back to

the other people, and you can all be in the same room at the same time. And you'd be amazed at how sometimes having a person sitting in between you and you speak to the person in the middle changes the whole dynamic. Let's do a few FAQs. Frequently ask questions. And then we'll close out our show for today. So, Don, what are a few things that you would recommend for us to practice peaceful assertiveness in daily living?

Don Drew: 20:10

You can practice peaceful assertiveness by actively listening to others. We've talked about that. Expressing your needs respectfully is setting up your own personal boundaries and seeking mutually beneficial solutions to conflicts.

David Lowry: 20:22

I think it's important for everyone to realize that you should speak up. Speak up respectfully but speak up for yourself. Here's another question: Is it possible to be too assertive?

Don Drew: 20:33

Yeah, I mean,

David Lowry: 20:35

(laughter)

Don Drew: 20:35

Yes, all you got to do is drive down the highway and see that it is definitely possible to be too assertive or even aggressive when that happens, though, I think the most important thing to do is remain calm and as you were giving in your example, assertively communicate your boundaries. The most important thing is to try and avoid escalating the situation and I mean if you need to ask others for help absolutely do that.

David Lowry: 20:59

Yes, we're not talking about assertiveness that is aggressive or over the top. We're talking about you being respectful, compassionate, and empathetic but standing up for yourself in that calm, respectable way. There is so much power in that we can't even begin to tell you. Here's another question. Can you handle conflicts the way we've talked about, in peaceful assertiveness, without compromising your values?

Don Drew: 21:25

As a professor, I spend a lot of time with my management students, talking to them about the importance of understanding their personal values and maintaining them, especially in their workplace. It's important to maintain values and have a strong alignment of values with organizations and so forth. So, not compromising values is extremely important. At the same time, we need to be open to compromise and collaboration when we're in conflict with somebody else. It's the only way we're going to get through that, and everybody must maintain their integrity and maintain a

relationship. That's really critical. You have to know those values. And that's worth giving some thought to. And maybe that's a topic we want to look at some point in the future. But focusing on finding solutions that both uphold that integrity while respecting the needs of others is really what is most important.

David Lowry: 22:13

You're right. One last thing. What if it doesn't work? What if peaceful assertiveness doesn't work?

Don Drew: 22:20

Wow. Okay. If it doesn't resolve a conflict, then you may be forced to seek mediation or professional support to facilitate communication and find a mutually acceptable solution. That may be a formal thing, or it may be that you find a third party that you both can trust and can help you with it. Remember that some conflicts require more time and patience to resolve effectively.

David Lowry: 22:42

Yeah, this isn't a magic bullet, but it is an approach that you can use, and it should be your go-to approach. This should be your new peaceful life where you are always peacefully assertive.