

THE NICE GIRL'S GUIDE TO PLAYING HARDBALL

So, you know that girl who never says no, always gets fobbed off and is rubbish at getting a refund? Well, you *did* know her – because she's about to show her tough side! By **Gemma Askham**

You're in a queue, you're in a rush, and someone pushes in front of you. You huff under your breath, begin to seethe, and open your mouth – and then you stop. It's busy. People will look. What would they *think*? So you keep schtum and leave feeling angry with *yourself*.

"I'm terrible at getting what I want," admits Elizabeth, 27. "I always want to make a good impression, which means I usually end up getting fobbed off or apologising to the very people I'm trying to complain about." Put simply, we're bad at ballsy.

Brits say sorry up to eight times a day, apologising even when we aren't at fault – which gives us a gold medal in politeness, *and* being walked over. Research by Harvard Medical School found that not speaking our mind in the workplace makes us three times more likely to hit a career glass ceiling – because we are less understood by our bosses and seen to be worse problem solvers.

So, what's with our assertiveness Achilles' heel? "We want to be ►



It really wasn't the time or the place for Riverdance



She was doing a great job of pretending not to notice eight fit men in Lycra

◀ liked so much that it stops us from speaking up. We're trapped in the need for peer approval," explains psychologist Anne Dickson, author of iconic assertiveness manual *A Woman In Your Own Right: Assertiveness And You*. "But people confuse the idea of being assertive with being aggressive. Being ruthless or self-centred or putting someone else down is aggression." Assertiveness, Anne argues, is about two main elements: 1, cutting yourself slack from people-pleasing, which "over time, makes us so resentful, frustrated and tired" that it turns into anger. And 2, overcoming anxiety. "We say, 'Oh, I'll make that difficult complaint when I feel really confident,' but we put it off because confronting someone makes us anxious," she explains. "Assertiveness is managing this anxiety; knowing, 'I am nervous, but this is important to me so I'm going to say XYZ.' Essentially, it's about

being ballsy at times when you don't feel ballsy." Which doesn't actually sound mean or bitchy – and being assertive isn't something 'in' you, it's learnable. "The skills are like stepping stones over a fast torrent of water," Anne adds. "To start with, you step tentatively across; with practice, you won't worry." Here are four ways to be more badass, starting now...

1 THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU WANT – AND SAY IT

The last time your flatmate bought milk was so long ago, One Direction hadn't even been conceived. But you don't bring it up – you cough up, *again*. "The last thing we do is actually say what we want," admits Anne. We fear rocking the boat and being seen as rude, and we expect others to realise what we want without us having to say it. "You think, 'I shouldn't have to spell it out,

surely they know me,' but no one's telepathic," she adds. If you're not sure exactly what you do want, such as when dealing with a customer services department, ask yourself, "What would I like to be *different*?" Then go in armed with that information – it's your ammunition. "It's only when we have a specific goal in mind (eg a replacement product or compensation) that we say it with any conviction."

2 BEAT THE ANGER TRAP

When you're being fobbed off, it's easy to slip from self-confident to confrontational, but when that happens, the other person gets defensive, and you get nowhere. "There are several words that trip you up," says communication expert Kay White, author of *The A To Z Of Being Understood*. "The worst is 'Why?'. Using 'What?' (eg 'What's this meeting about?') rather than, 'Why do we have ▶



There was a reason she always caught the bouquet at weddings...

7 TOUGH-GIRL TECHNIQUES TO USE TODAY

Kay's tips to overcome being overlooked

1 Use your space In meetings, men spread themselves, and their papers, out to 'claim' the area. Copy this. Then lean forward and make direct eye contact.

2 Replace 'I' with 'we' "I want..." can sound aggressive. But, "We need..." links what *you* want to what *they* want.

3 Say someone's name It hooks their attention like a whistle and makes you sound more confident.

4 If you want something, say so Quickly! Rather than, "I might be able to

help," which has doubt, say, "Leave it with me," or "Great, I'll be involved with that."

5 Ditch the word 'can't' People are only interested in what you *can* do.

6 Ask questions If you're asked a hard question, deflect it by asking one back. It makes you clearer about what's being asked and buys time to respond.

7 Acknowledge anger Say, "I'm sorry you feel that way, let's look at what we can do." You're not apologising, you're acknowledging how they feel.

◀ to go to this?') is warmer, and you'll get information – not a sharp retort."

3 DON'T ASK FOR PERMISSION!

How many times have you heard yourself say, "Can I just say something?", "Is it OK if I ask a question?" or "Hi there, it's only me"? A lot, right? "We use 'just' and 'could' and 'only' to be polite, but they take your power away," says Kay. "Instead, go for: 'Hi, it's Jane here', 'Can I speak to...?', 'Let's try...!' These are more certain and more assertive."

4 'No' is your friend

You don't want to go out tonight. You can't think of anything worse than going out tonight. Unfortunately you *are* going out tonight because your friend just asked and you said yes. It's ironic that the only thing we have no trouble saying no to is using the word 'no'. "I can't even walk away from a charity person in the street," admits Jennifer, 26. "I've given my details, donated money I couldn't afford – all out of politeness." And, as Anne explains, "There's a lot of satisfaction in stretching yourself to achieve 50 goals when anyone else would only achieve ten." But the more you say yes, the more people expect you to always say yes – and it's exhausting.

The key message to remember is this: "When you say no, you're refusing the *request*, not the person," says Anne. So, you're not personally insulting the hairdresser by saying no to a fringe she's suggested – you just don't want a fringe. "Practise saying no," adds Anne, "and don't follow it up with a lengthy excuse." It's fine to say you feel guilty, but don't reel off a long-winded explanation of how you'd love to come out, and you really want to, but you've promised someone else and you're really tired and you would another time, but... This gives the other person time to try to change your mind – they see you're wavering. Say no. Move on. Done. ▶



Quick, lads – he’s nicked the biscuits!

YES, MY SELF-WORTH DOES LOOK BIG IN THIS!

4 ways to know you’re amazing

“Give a compliment or positive feedback every day – it will make you feel better about yourself. When you’re praised, say thank you, make eye contact and smile – savour the moment,” suggests Sue Hadfield, co-author of *How To Be Assertive In Any Situation*.

“Accept yourself as the unique individual you are. In your head, say, ‘I am allowed a voice, I am allowed an opinion and I can always change my mind – whenever I want,’” says psychologist Dr Cecilia d’Felice.

“Make a list of what you like about yourself, beginning, ‘I like...’. Not ‘quite like’ or ‘isn’t too bad’,” says leadership consultant Anni Townend, author of *Assertiveness And Diversity*. “Before a difficult decision, remind yourself of all the brilliant things on this list.”

“At the end of each day, look back on what’s been good and what you’re glad of in life – even if it’s something really small,” adds Anni. “The more you feel confident, the more you’ll see the positive in people and situations.”

ROCK YOUR ASSERTIVENESS IDOL

All you need is some inspiration. Who’s on your Team Tough Girl?

- **Miranda from *Sex And The City*** “She stands up to her friends, and she’s open and honest (rather than bitching behind their backs) – her assertiveness makes her a better friend.” **Liz, 27**
- **Tulisa** “She was publicly ridiculed when her sex tape came out, but she quietly got her apology with dignity and came out on top. She sent out a really strong message: ‘Don’t mess with me.’” **Anna, 25**
- **Miriam O’Reilly** “She’s the presenter who successfully sued the BBC for age discrimination, setting a precedent for all women. She inspired me never to take any bullshit lying down.” **Molly, 25**
- **Katie Holmes** “For quietly arranging her divorce from Tom Cruise. Everyone saw her as the timid, obedient wife, but she displayed her cool, composed side with a plan that knocked everyone for six – including Tom.” **Joanne, 29**
- **Rihanna** “You just wouldn’t mess with her. She does what she likes, and oozes body and sexual confidence. I think everyone wishes they could channel their inner Rihanna.” **Sophie, 31** @