

When push comes to shove, assertiveness training may be answer

You've been waiting in line 30 minutes when someone breaks in front of you. You:

- Strug if off;
- Displace him with an elbow jab and some colorful words;
- Inform him that the line ends elsewhere.

If you didn't choose the third alternative, you may be a good candidate for assertiveness training, a phrase that has been popping up regularly in books, magazine articles and workshops throughout the country. The University of Michigan Commission for Women will be sponsoring a workshop April 16, one of a long series that have been held at the U-M by a group called the Assertiveness Training Coalition (ATC).

The coalition is not affiliated with

U-M, although most of its members work at the university in various other capacities. They have been meeting for nearly two years to improve their own skills and to respond to requests for speakers and workshop leaders on assertiveness training both on campus and within the community, according to Charlotte Sebastian, ATC coordinator.

U-M faculty and student groups, adult education programs, churches and other organizations have booked some 50 programs with the coalition.

"Assertiveness" is a direct, honest and appropriate expression of one's desires and opinions," Sebastian explains. "It means standing up for your rights without violating the rights of others."

Many of us have been raised to believe that people will like us better if

we continually let them have their way. That is untrue," she maintains. "By attempting to never offend anyone, we usually end up destroying our relationships and hurting ourselves."

"Assertiveness training is based on the idea that behavior is learned and that with practice, anyone can learn to express their needs directly and effectively," says Sebastian, a program assistant with the Institute of Continuing Legal Education at U-M.

A typical workshop begins with films or skits depicting the contrast between non-assertive, assertive and aggressive behavior, and lively pep talks about personal rights.

Later, participants break into small groups, each led by an ATC member, to identify some of the irrational fears and emotional blocks that prevent

them from being more assertive in every day situations!

"Women in particular are trained to believe they should defer to other people's desires, hold back their opinions and avoid causing a scene," observes Barbara Murphy, assistant chairwoman of the U-M Commission for Women and one of the coalition founders.

"Assertive training promotes a kind of healthy selfishness," Murphy explains. "Everyone has a right to set their own priorities; to make decisions and to make mistakes."

For further information on the April 16 workshop contact the U-M Commission for Women office at (313) 763-2203. Groups wishing to sponsor an Assertiveness Training workshop of their own may contact Charlotte Sebastian, evenings, at 761-9612.

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