



Health
South Eastern Sydney
Local Health District

Eastern Suburbs Mental Health Services

Ageing with Purpose

Being Heard: Communication and assertiveness in late-life
by Dr Karen Croot



Being Heard: Communication and assertiveness in late-life

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The miracle of communication

“we can shape events in each others brains.....simply by making noises with our mouths, we can reliably cause precise new combinations of ideas to arise in each other’s minds”
Pinker (1994, p. 15)





We think it's like this...

But it can be more like this...



But it can be more like this...



Three “A”s to help with communication in later life

Three “A”s to help with communication in later life

- Audience

Three “A”s to help with communication in later life

- Audience
- Attention

Three “A”s to help with communication in later life

- Audience
- Attention
- Assertiveness

Audience



- What a listener hears depends on
 - What's in the listener's head
 - As well as what the speaker says
- Before we say any words, we are “**conceptualising**” what we're going to say and how we're going to say it
- We usually do this without realising

Audience

Experiment:

Two people playing a game in which they are cast as detectives. They have one pistol between them.

- At some point, one person needs the pistol but knows other person also needs it
- Either it's the speaker's pistol or the listener's pistol
- Speaker's pistol: Give me the pistol! You must give me the pistol! I need the pistol!
- Listener's pistol: Could you give me the pistol? I would like to use the pistol.

Audience



- **Think carefully in advance:**
 - What information do they know already and what is new to them?
 - What is their attitude?
 - Where do I need to start? What do I need to say next?

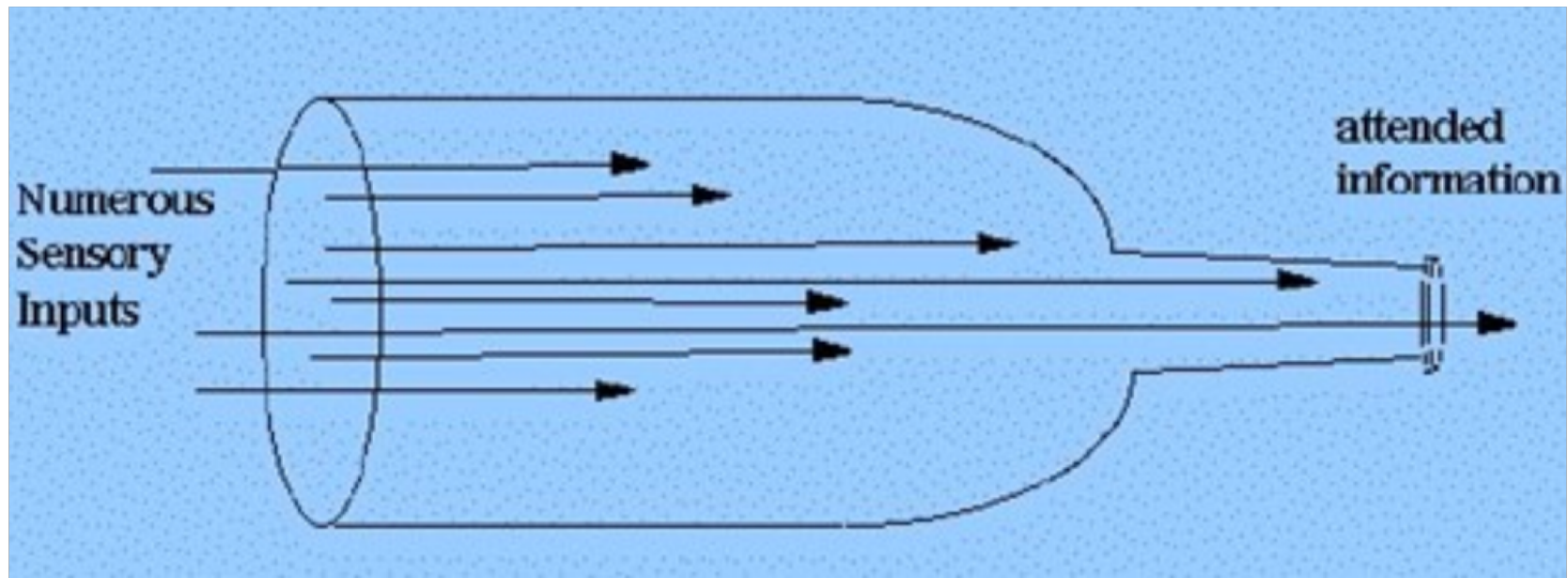
Plan what you say to help the listener understand.

Attention

One of the biggest threats to being heard is if the person is not paying attention when you start...

...or finish

Only the information you are paying attention to gets through



Attention is essential for memory

Attention is essential for memory

Read the bold print.

Somewhere **Among** hidden **the** in **most** the **spectacular** Rocky Mountains **cognitive** near **abilities** Central City is Colorado **the** an **ability** old to miner **select** hid **one** a **mes** sage box **from** of **another.** gold. **We** Although **do** several **this** hundred **by** people **focusing** have **our** looked **attention** for **on** it, **certain** they **cues** have **such** not as found **type** it **style.**

- **What was it about (bold print)?**

- **What was it about (bold print)?**
- **Among the most spectacular cognitive abilities is the ability to select one message from another. We do this by focusing our attention on certain cues, such as type style.**

- **What did the other words say?**

- **What did the other words say?**
- **Somewhere hidden in the Rocky Mountains near Central City an old miner hid a box of gold. Although several hundred people have looked for it, they have not found it.**

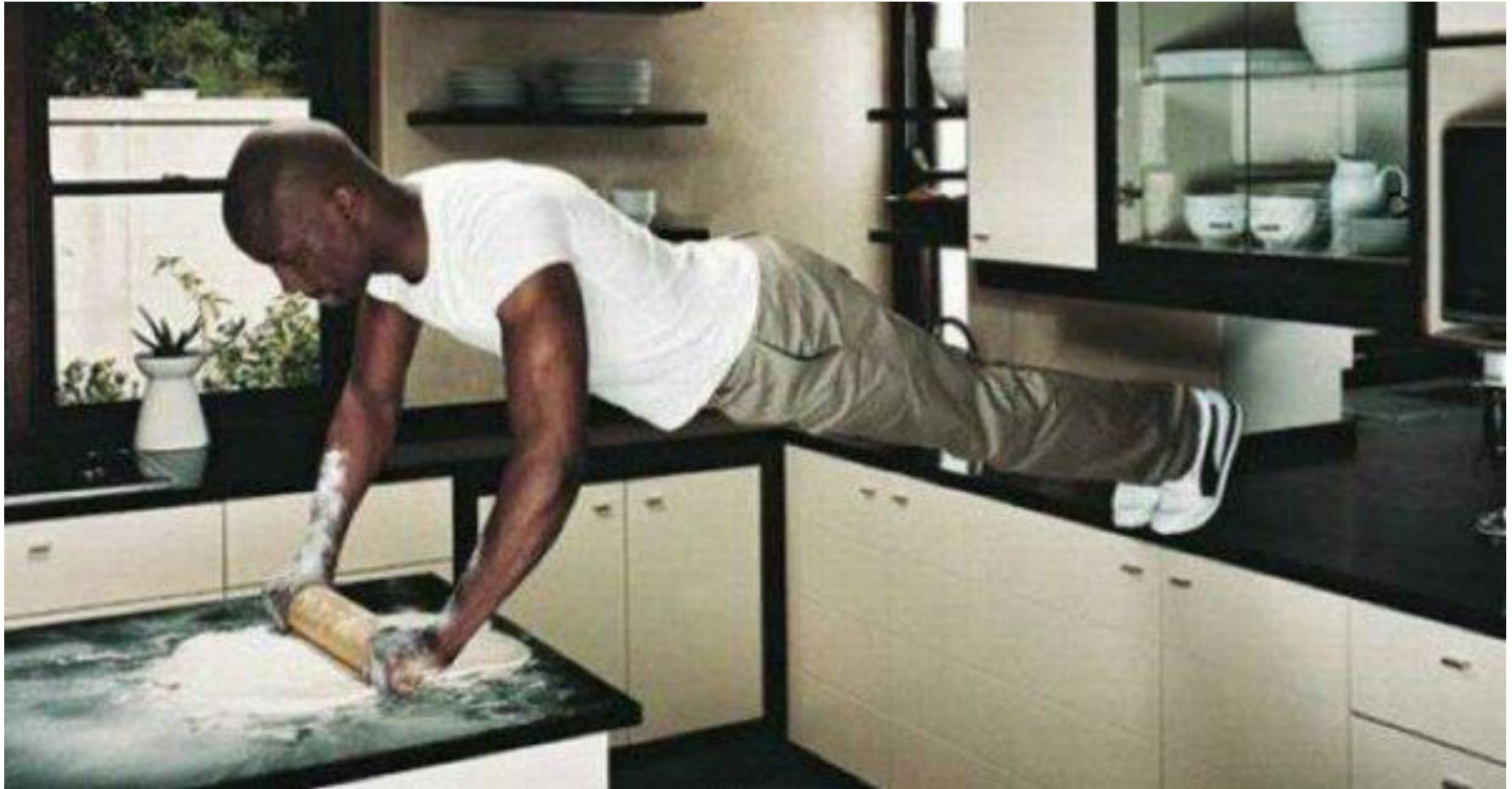
Attention

- **If the listener isn't paying attention, what you say won't go in.**
- **We can only remember what we pay attention to.**

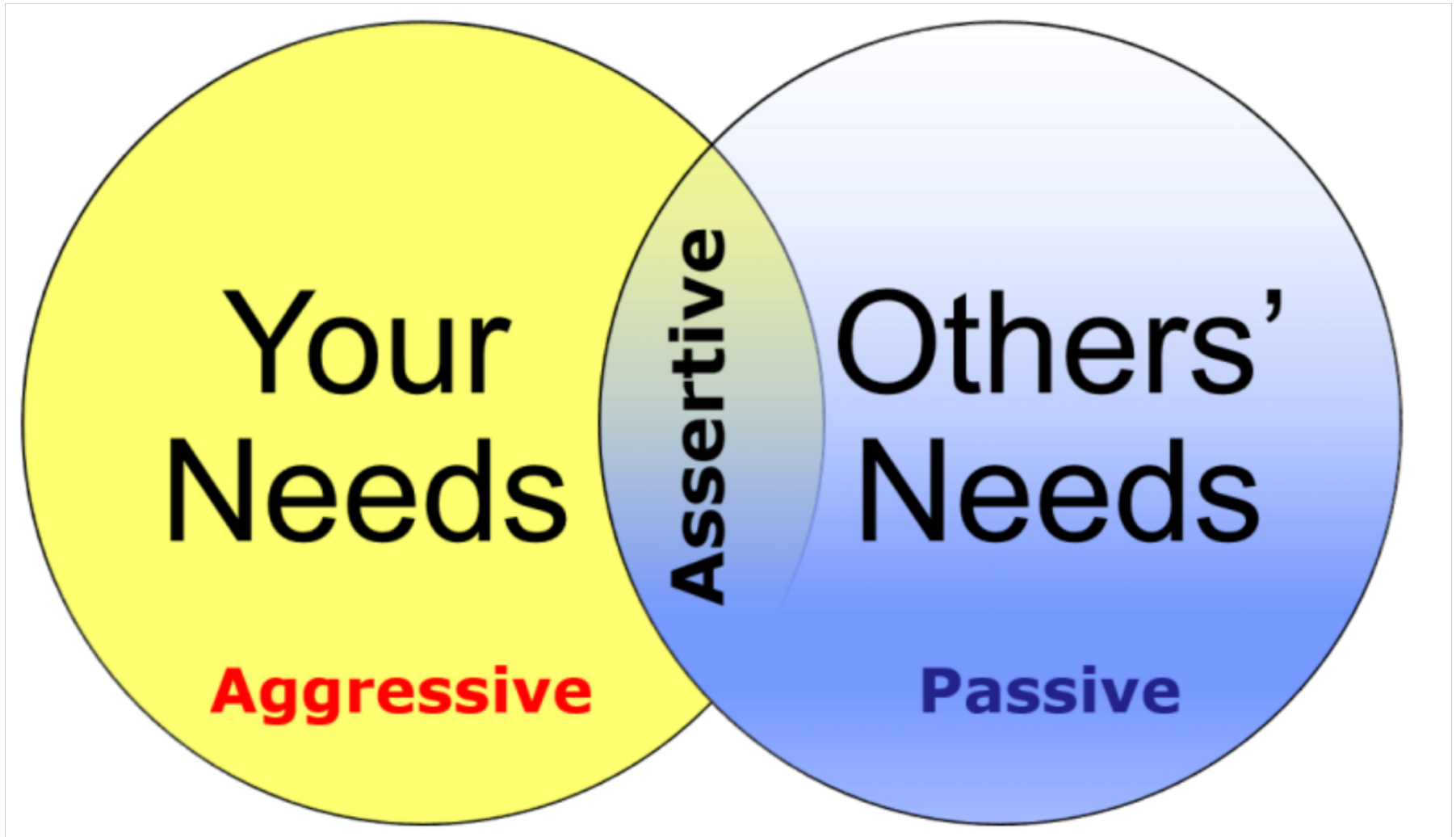
Now is not the time...



Now is not the time either...



Assertiveness: What it is



Assertiveness: What it is NOT



Aggressive communication style:

- Think “rhino”
- If provoked, a rhino is likely to charge

Assertiveness: What it is NOT



Passive communication style:

- Think “hedgehog”
- When threatened, a hedgehog throws up a protective shield by raising its prickles

Assertiveness: What it is NOT



Passive-aggressive communication style:

- Think “cat”
- A cat does what it wants, doesn't listen to you, but always cuddly

Hey Sillies! ♥

I noticed you guys keep forgetting to pick up your dog's poopies so I took it upon myself to bring by some baggies. I assumed you're all out because why else wouldn't you clean up after your dogs?

Oh! I also helped out by dropping all the said poop conveniently in front of your door, for easier clean up.

You're welcome! ♥

**What
communication
style is this?**

I-statements



- Let others know your thoughts and feelings without blaming them

When you said/did _____,

I felt _____

because _____.

In future I would like _____.

Example

I-statement: “When you leave your dishes on the table, I feel frustrated because I don’t like the mess but I also don’t want to clean it up for you. In future, I’d like you to put your dirty dishes in the dishwasher.

Compared with You-statement:
“You’re such a lazy pig! You never help with the dishes!”

How could you say this using an I-statement?



Picture credit: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-01-28/serena-williams-screams-during-australian-open-final/8220316>



When you said/did _____,
I felt _____
because _____.
In future I would like _____.

Possible I-statement to the umpire if there was sweat on the court:

When there is **sweat on the court**, it makes the surface very slippery and I slipped and lost that point just now.

I feel **really angry** because this is a **Grand Slam final** and every point counts.

In future I would like **the ball-boys and girls** to be more vigilant about wiping up any sweat on the court.

How to be more assertive

- **What is my style: rhino, hedgehog, cat?**
- **Learn to use I-statements**
- **Keep emotions in check**
- **Notice our body language**
- **Baby steps: start small**
- **Give yourself time/ask for more time**
- **Practice**

Where to find support when communication is hard

- **Friends, family, social network**
- **GP**
- **Psychologist – managing anger, stress, anxiety, fear (GP can refer, Medicare supported)**
- **Relationships Australia**
- **Internet: “assertiveness skills”**

Audience: Plan
what you say to
help the listener
understand

Attention:
Choose a good
time and get
their attention



Assertiveness: Your needs
matter and their needs matter



Picture credit: <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/news/andrew-sachs-dead-manuel-fawlty-towers-5-best-moments-a7451566.html>



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