

# Don't Act Like Prey!

A Guide to  
Self Leadership  
for Women

**SPECIAL BONUS  
CHAPTER**

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This PDF is intended as a companion to the book, *Don't Act Like Prey!* by Susan L. Farrell, available from Amazon.com, or [susanlfarrell.com](http://susanlfarrell.com).

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# Additional Aspects of Being Assertive

## ■ **Predators and Prey**

When it comes to predators and prey, cats fall into an interesting category. We usually think of them as predators, and they are. They hunt mice, rodents, birds, and other small animals.

Cats can also be prey. They are prey to dogs, fox, coyotes, hawks, owls, and other predators that are bigger than they are.

Have you ever watched a cat that feels threatened? Or watched kittens play-fighting? They puff their fur out, especially the fur on their tails, and stick their tails straight up. They place their bodies sidewise to the threat. They stand on their toes and arch their backs. All of this is an attempt to look bigger than they are. They hiss, growl, and lash out with their claws in an attempt to look meaner than they are. It is as though they know they are the prey in the situation and are trying to look at least as fierce as the predator so the predator will back off.

Sometimes we need to do something similar. We may feel like prey, but we need to act like we are not. We need to act assertive, even if we do not feel assertive.

Just as cats use body language to send a message, so can we. Standing on our toes and arching our backs will not do, of course. But we can stand tall. We can stand straight. We can put our shoulders back. We can pull ourselves up to our full height. If we are sitting we can sit tall and straight. This gives the impression that we are more confident than we may actually feel.

In your mind, compare someone with this upright body posture to someone who slumps, who hunches her shoulders, who seems to be trying to hide. Can you see the difference? Who would you think was more assertive?

We cannot puff out our hair as a cat does its fur, but we can dress and groom ourselves to look professional. A good rule of thumb is to dress one level up from where you are in the organization.

Again, in your mind's eye, picture someone who is dressed professionally, who has her hair styled, and who has appropriate makeup for the situation. Now picture someone who is dressed very casually, hair not clean or styled, and no makeup. Who looks more professional to you? Who appears more assertive to you? Even in an informal situation where it is most appropriate to dress casually, at least make sure you look neat and clean.

We should not hiss and growl, even though it might be satisfying sometimes. We can, however, control our voice. To be assertive, we need to speak up so that others can hear us. A voice lacking volume sounds passive. We can talk in a calm, controlled voice. We can communicate with facts and figures rather than with emotions. Even if we do not feel assertive, we need to speak as though we are assertive.

Think of someone who sounds assertive to you. How does she speak? How does her voice sound?

All of this sends a message that we are confident, even if we do not feel confident. It sends a message that we are assertive, even if we feel passive. If we look and act assertive, it helps convince others that we are assertive. More importantly, it helps to convince us.

There is an old saying, "Fake it until you make it." There is a great deal of truth in this. I prefer to think of it as practicing to be the person I want

to be, however. Rarely are any of us good at something the first time we do it. We have to practice. And practice some more! Acting as though you are assertive, even if you do not feel assertive, is not any different from practicing so that you become better at a sport or other activity.

On the next page, complete the table to help you determine how you can appear to be more assertive. How many of these things can you start doing tomorrow? How about today?

Table B-1 **Appearing Assertive**

What can I do with my **body language/posture** to make myself appear and feel more assertive?

What can I do with my **dress and grooming** to make myself appear and feel more assertive?

What can I do with my **voice** to make myself appear and feel more assertive?

## ■ Be Assertive With Yourself

In the book, *Don't Act Like Prey!*, the emphasis was on being assertive with other people. It is also important to be assertive with yourself.

We all have doubts about ourselves and our abilities. It is important that we stand up for ourselves, with ourselves. We need to be assertive and determine whether our doubts have validity. If not, then dismiss them. If they do, then determine what to do about them. Would it be advantageous to gain additional knowledge, skills, or experience?

If we do not defend our dreams and goals, especially against the negative voice in our heads, no one else ever will.

We also need to be assertive with ourselves when facing our fears. We all have fears. This is normal. What is important is that we face those fears and continue on despite the fears rather than give up because of the fears.

When we are passive with ourselves, we let our fears and doubts rule us, we let them hold us back. When we are assertive with ourselves, we stand up for ourselves and what we want from life. We do not let the negative voice in our heads rule us.

On the next page is a table. Write what doubts and fears you have that may be keeping you from achieving your goals and dreams. Next to each one, write what you can do to be assertive with yourself to overcome these doubts and fears. The action may be to simply dismiss them because they are just not true. The action may be to gain education or skills to overcome them. Or the action may be to accept a weakness and move on anyway. The only right answers are those that are right for you!

Table B-2 **Facing My Doubts and Fears**

My fears and doubts include:	My actions to overcome them are:

## ■ Business “Aggressiveness”

It is very common to be told that in business, especially in sales, you have to be aggressive to succeed. Whether you are aggressive or assertive often becomes a matter of semantics.

It is completely possible to be driven, motivated, tenacious, persistent, resolute, determined, and relentless and still be assertive rather than aggressive as defined in *Don't Act Like Prey!* It is very possible to be all these things to be successful and still treat your customers, suppliers, and co-workers with respect.

Remember, it all comes down to respect.

One of the simplest ways to show you respect your customers is to keep your promises. If you say you will do something, do it, no matter what. If you are not sure you can keep a promise, do not make it.

Another way to show respect is to be honest. This does not mean that you have to tell the customer everything. There is such a thing as confidential information. But do not lie.

Listening to your customers and trying to understand their needs is another way to show respect. It is also good business.

Doing these things with your suppliers, co-workers, employees and supervisors shows that you also respect them.

If your supervisor calls you aggressive, and intends it as a compliment, and you know that you have treated your customers with respect, then accept the compliment and keep doing what you have been doing. If you call it assertiveness, your supervisor calls it aggressiveness, and you are both talking about the same thing, who cares?

If, in your mind, the only way you can be successful is to be aggressive, then I recommend creating a new definition. Be “respectfully aggressive.” This will accomplish the same thing, or perhaps more. You will probably find that when you treat other people with respect, they respect you more, and you become even more successful.

On the following table, list your thoughts on what you think you need to do to be successful. Do you consider these things assertive or aggressive behaviors? If aggressive, can you do them in such a way that you still show respect to others?

Table B-3 <b>Assertive or Aggressive?</b>		
What do I think I need to do to be successful?	Do I consider these to be assertive or aggressive behaviors? Why?	Can I do these things with respect?

Remember, whatever you decide to do or not do is up to you. Also remember that you, and you alone, are responsible for your decisions and the outcomes of those decisions.

Best of luck in your journey to find the delicate balance between passive and aggressive behavior called assertive!



# About the Author

Susan has always loved to learn. She was one of those geeky kids who liked school and looked forward to starting each new school year. Her love of learning has continued throughout her life. Her learning has occurred not only through formal education but also through lessons learned from personal and professional life experiences. She is also an avid reader.

A normal extension of a love of learning is a love of teaching. Susan has completed this in various positions through teaching and training her employees, co-workers, associates, and customers. She has taught as an adjunct instructor at business colleges. She has also informally coached employees, associates, and friends in advancing professionally and personally.

Susan speaks nationally on personal leadership for women. She has more than 25 years of management, consulting, and training experience, including owning her own business, SLF Consulting & Training. She has been speaking nationally for more than 10 years and is a professional member of the National Speakers Association. Her speaking style is clear, concise, and features fun and insightful anecdotes. She has the ability to truly connect with her audience.

*Don't Act Like Prey!* is Susan's first book. She is inordinately pleased with the opportunity to share her message with an even larger audience.

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