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A 1980s bestseller transformed women's lives by teaching them how to be assertive. Forty years on, it's being republished. But do modern women really need a book to tell them how to stand up themselves?

- Linda Kelsey reveals how a women's self-help book she read in the '80s is back
- UK-based writer says Anne's Dickinson's 1982 book introduced assertiveness
- 40 years on, she argues, Anne's message has been lost and we need it back

By [LINDA KELSEY FOR THE DAILY MAIL](#)

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Of all the hundreds of self-help books that piled up on my desk when I worked on Cosmopolitan magazine in the 1970s and 1980s, only two can I recall with absolute clarity. So many were (as now) more padding than profundity.

The first is Susan Jeffers' renowned *Feel The Fear And Do It Anyway*. The second is Anne Dickson's *A Woman In Your Own Right: Assertiveness And You*, published in 1982, which introduced women to the notion of being 'assertive', both in and out of the workplace. A concept which even today many still grapple with, but back then was ground-breaking.

This book spoke to me because I often tripped myself up, veering between speaking up too forcefully and not speaking up at all. I'd go so far as to say that in some ways the book helped me to become editor of Cosmo three years later.





Linda Kelsey (pictured) reveals how Anne's Dickson's 1980's book A Woman In Your Own Right is being republished

While I knew I was good at my job, as the deputy editor it hadn't occurred to me I could succeed my confident, outgoing female boss. But I had a copy of Anne's book at home and would rehearse scenarios in my head to help me come across better.



The book went on to be a huge success and even featured in an episode of EastEnders. Incredibly it hasn't been out of print for 40 years.

This week it was re-issued in time for International Women's Day. There's no doubt we've made giant strides towards equality over the decades, but in some ways this advice is even more pertinent today.

Not necessarily because modern women are timid wallflowers but because many of us seem to get the wrong end of the stick when it comes to assertiveness.

Today's screechy young women run counter to Anne's tenets of assertiveness, which are about going for what you want without leaving anyone else humiliated or belittled.

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Back in the 1980s, most women lived in terror of being labelled domineering, bitchy or ball-breaking. In no small measure because that's what we were called when we asked for what we wanted — whether a pay rise or suggesting our husbands might do some housework.

After several years of feeling put down by my own domineering partner, and suffering in silence, I went to the extreme of walking out.

Anne helped me understand that asserting myself was an alternative to bombast or slipping into passivity — and would get better results. And even if I didn't get exactly what I wanted, at least I felt I'd made my point effectively.

At Cosmo we signed Anne Dickson up to lead assertiveness training courses, which we offered through the magazine. On dozens of Saturdays over several years, 50 readers at a time were taught through roleplay how to deal with situations they found tricky. From mean bosses, to saying no, to demanding friends and stating preferences in the bedroom.

There's a world of difference between that assertiveness and the me-centric self-promotion common in today's workplace, which takes little account of colleagues and often fails to foster co-operation. The subtlety and inclusiveness of Anne's message seem to have been lost. That's why 40 years on, her book is needed more than ever.

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by Baroness Ros Altmann, former Pensions Minister