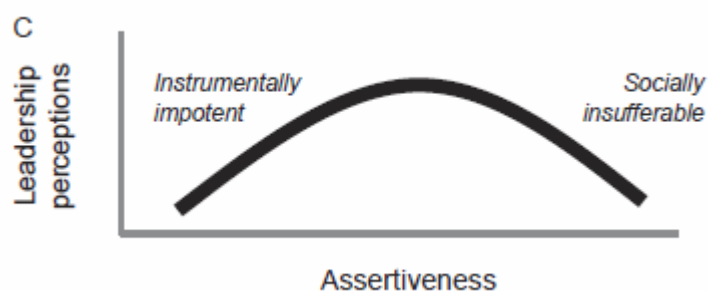


# Skillfully Resolving Paradox

EUGENE ERIC KIM | NOVEMBER 16, 2011

One of my favorite blogs is [PsyBlog](#), which posts juicy tidbits about the latest research in psychology. As useful as I generally find it, I couldn't help but laugh at a [recent post](#) entitled, "Can you get things done without making people hate you?"

It cited research that found that assertiveness was necessary to get things done, but higher levels of it had diminishing returns. In other words, if you weren't assertive enough, no one would pay attention to you. If you were too assertive, people would be annoyed by you. The research recommended moderate levels of assertiveness as being most effective, and it included this very helpful framework:



Duh, right?! On the one hand, this is why people sometimes scoff at researchers, because they seem to spend a lot of time validating common sense. On the other hand, common sense is sometimes wrong, as behavioral economics has demonstrated time and time again. And the reality is, we all probably know plenty of folks who don't get that a little moderation can be a good thing.

Much of skillful means is about finding balance. The notion of moderation is easier to get, although it's not usually easy to practice. What's harder to understand is how to balance concepts that seem to be at odds.

Gideon Rosenblatt provides a great example of this in his [video blog](#) on balancing task and relationship, where he cites Ragini Michaels's [paradox management framework](#):

The key is not to try to do both at once, but to find a dynamic balance, a cycle of moving from one state to another and back again. In his book, *Power and Love*, Adam Kahane compares this dynamic balance to walking. If we froze mid-step, we'd fall over. It's the movement between different states that gives us that balance.