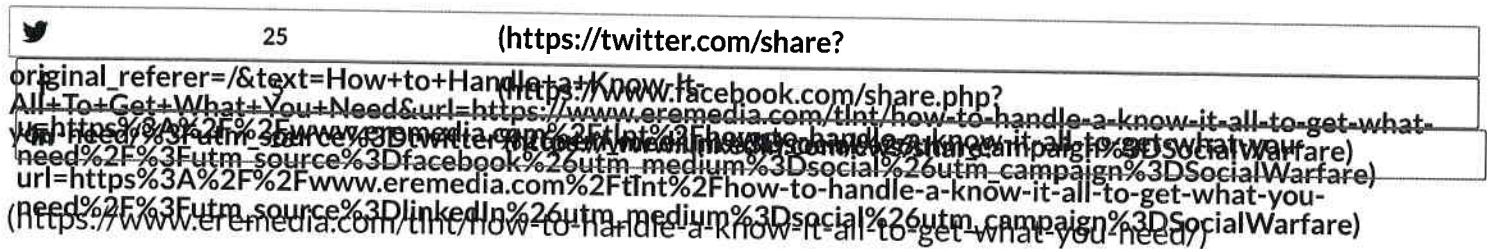




How To Handle A Know-It-All To Get What You Need



Know-it-alls walk the halls at every level — from the basement to the executive floor. It's not their title or expertise that's the problem. Most everyone welcomes helpful information or experience when solving a problem or seeking innovative ideas. The know-it-all label comes from a person's communication style and attitude — that is, the manner in which their expertise winds its way into the discussion.

Know-it-all nastiness feels like a brick wall when you bump into it: "That's impossible." "Can't be done." "Doesn't work that way." "Let me be perfectly clear...." "I've been involved with these cases for more than three decades. The *only* way this will work is to"

So the first step in communicating with a Know-It-All is to assess whether you're dealing with a real expert or a wanna-be. If you're dealing with a pseudo-expert, then note what they have to say and go your own way.

But when dealing with a real expert who also happens to have a know-it-all attitude, you often face a dilemma — or several:

- You may need their expertise.
- They may be your boss.
- As your team member, their consensus on your project may be necessary before you can move forward.
- As your team member, they may have the power to sabotage your project.

So here are a few techniques to communicate with a Know-It-All when you need to depend on their expertise:

Use questions rather than statements.

The Know-It-All's resolve stiffens when challenged. You'll get much further by acknowledging their superior expertise on a topic and posing a question than by making a direct statement that challenges something they've said:

Tyler, I know you've spent years on installing products like this for large clients, and I hear what you're saying about typical implementations taking at least six months. I'm wondering if you've ever seen an installation done in a shorter time frame? Say, when the client had experienced staff working alongside the contractor?

Notice that you're still allowing the Know-It-All to be the final decision maker/expert with his or her answer to your question.

Give a face-saving reason to change their mind.

If you intend to get a Know-It-All to change her mind, let her save face by offering a good reason: "You may not have seen the latest report that came out earlier today, but in light of that data, I'm thinking that we should do X."

Or: "I don't know if you were in the meeting and heard what MaryAnn said about the new restraints on our budget? So it may be a good idea to change our approach to ..."

With such a lead-in, the Know-It-All can easily respond with, "Well, in that case, sure. I wasn't aware that ...," keeping her ego still intact.

Lead them to argue "The Other Side."

On occasion, your expertise can be so limited on a technical topic that you can't challenge a Know-It-All, yet you do need to know what alternative opinions and approaches exist. A good way to air more than one expert opinion – even when you yourself are not an expert – is to get the Know-It-All to present both sides of an argument.

For example:

You may ask an attorney, "Sarah, is our organization libel for damages in this situation?"

Attorney Sarah: "No, definitely not. The customer had been told twice not to enter that area of the warehouse. Also we had a danger sign posted."

You: "That's good to know because I'm certainly not an attorney. And it sounds reasonable to me. But one more question: Would all attorneys agree with you on that? What's the attorney for the customer going to say? He'll likely have a different opinion."

Attorney Sarah: "Well, that attorney will probably argue that we should have...."

And then Sarah will go on to give you the opposing legal opinion on the situation.

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This technique works whether you're talking about engineering, piloting, or selling: "So the Model 1242 is far superior in your opinion? Then why do others prefer the Model 4642?" The sales agent will then tell you the key selling features of the competitive model: "Well, some customers like the other model because it allows them to do X, but I really don't think that's a big benefit to you because ..."

Works well with the Know-It-All when you need all expert opinions on the table.

Allow time for reflection.

Sometimes, it's best to pose a question or different approach in writing and suggest that the Know-It-All come back to you *later* after considering the new idea. Why later in writing? Allowing time for reflection gives the person time to come up with a face-saving reason for changing his or her mind.

After all, you don't care *why* they change their mind—just as long as they give you their best thinking with minimal drama.

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