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How To Handle A Know-It-All Without Losing Your Cool



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By Dianna Booher

“Every time I end a conversation with Chad I feel like I’ve just walked away from a boxing match.”

That comment from a good client of ours confirmed the action I already knew I needed to take: Chad, one of our account executives, needed to move on to a new employer—where his know-it-all, combative communication style could be more useful.

Some Know-It-Alls really do have superior expertise. Most don’t. But even the pseudo-experts assume the tone and manner of true experts. So in either case, their tone of superiority and ego dictate that you approach them in a similar manner.

When you run into their brick wall, I-know-what-I-know attitude, try one of the following approaches to get your message across:

Aim For A Dialogue, Not A Presentation

If anyone ever had a basic built-in resistance to a formal presentation, Know-It-Alls do. They consider themselves far too bright to sit and listen to someone do what they consider a canned presentation, complete with a planned Q&A period at the end. So steer clear of a “formal” presentation. Instead, aim for a fresh dialogue or conversation to present your idea, proposal, product, or service.

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Do Your Homework; Never Wing It

Do some extra research—above what you'd ordinarily do for prospective clients about typical ideas you might put forth for consideration. Make sure you understand their industry and related business issues. Know-It-Alls like to spend their time haggling about the “footnotes” of an idea or proposed plan of action. That's their way of vetting your credibility altogether.

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Open the Door With New Data, Information, Or Ideas

Smart people get that way most often by reading and listening. Experts can chew on intriguing tidbits of information or ideas for hours. So be the conduit for news—about recent survey results, newly published conclusions on an industry issue, or a potential solution in the news about a technical puzzle to be solved.

Then once you gain their attention, you can move into a discussion about your own idea or opinion that you'd like to move forward.

Respect Their Expertise Rather Than Compete

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their goodwill—by matching wits. Instead, without diminishing your own expertise, allow Know-It-Alls to share their know-how and the spotlight. Acknowledge any experiences they put on display.

Prime The Pump With Questions

Know-It-Alls love to talk. Move a conversation along with questions for Know-It-Alls to reveal information or resources that you need—but may not be able to access readily. Ask them how an idea (or product or service) like yours might help someone in their job or industry. What benefits can they see? Would everyone in a position like theirs agree with them? Why? Why not? What might their position on the issue be?

What challenges can they foresee in implementation? How much money and time do they estimate the current problem you're trying to solve is costing the organization? What's the fastest way to "sell this idea" to others on the team? What would they recommend to "get others on board"?

Know-It-Alls have great faith in their own data. So let them talk and sell themselves on what you're advocating! You might be surprised how often a Know-It-All will take up your cause and become your sponsor rather than your saboteur!

Never Contradict; Offer an "Alternative"

Know-It-Alls do not like to lose face by being wrong. Never directly refute what they're saying with comments like, "I don't see how that's going to work because blah, blah, blah." Or: "From what I read, other firms that have tried that approach have failed."

When you recommend a plan of action, choose your words carefully. Give

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--“*Another viewpoint* on that issue would be to make this a two-phase installation.”

--“Here’s *another way to look at* the value of this proposed contract. We could consider the ...”

--“You’ve certainly outlined a sensible solution. An *alternative plan*—I’ll call it Plan Two—would be to allow the client to”

Give Them An Idea To Modify And Claim

Know-It-Alls resist the thought of acting on other people’s ideas. You’ll get a better reception if you treat them as consultants. That is, give them raw data or a “rough idea” that “might fit” their situation. “Toss out” a suggestion and ask their “help” in “formulating a plan of action” that “might have some value” for them. You get the idea about how critical your wording is to Know-It-Alls.

Sit back and watch the Know-It-All tweak your idea and then take full credit for it. If whoever takes credit is of less concern than a positive outcome, then this approach can work for you.

Know-It-Alls may never become your best friend. But neither should you consider them your enemy. They can certainly become useful if you understand how to approach them.

*Dianna Booher is the bestselling author of 49 books, including **Communicate Like a Leader**. She helps organizations communicate clearly. Follow at BooherResearch.com and [@DiannaBooher](https://twitter.com/DiannaBooher).*

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