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## HR INSIGHTS

# The Trick in Dealing With Annoying Workplace Know-It-Alls

by  [Dianna Boisher](#) on Apr 14, 2014, 11:10 AM | [1 Comment](#)

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You may have met these people.

They sit in the stands at sporting events and tell the rest of the fans what they did or didn't just see on the field. These clients know more about how your business back office should operate than the boss. These Know-It-Alls serve on committees and keep members deadlocked on decisions for days.



[Know-It-Alls](#) take on a tone of authority to let those around them understand that they have the final, absolute, full truth.

Some [Know-It-Alls](#) convey their intelligence and discount yours by smiling condescendingly, shuffling papers, or changing the subject after you speak. Others are less subtle; they simply tell you in no uncertain terms that they know more than you do about the topic at hand.

Sometimes Know-It-Alls really do know it all. Others pretend.

If you're like me, you'd probably prefer to walk away from these people. But in situations where you must communicate to complete a project, consider a few techniques that work well to relieve the pressure on Know-It-Alls to "prove themselves":

## Real Know-It-Alls

- **Respect and use their knowledge.** Despite the Know-It-All's obnoxious communication style, his or her expertise can be beneficial. Use it to your advantage in solving a problem.
- **Lead them to examine their opinions by asking reflective questions.** You'll rarely get very far by trying to tell a Know-It-All anything. But often, you can make headway in getting them to re-examine their position letting them have the final say: "*What if we tried X — would that work?*" "*If the supplier did Y before they shipped, do you think our lab could handle the processing at that point?*"
- **Ask them to “argue the other side.”** Sometimes you don't know enough about a technical situation to pose alternatives. In that case, use the Know-It-All's expertise to air other positions on an issue. Example: "*Sara, would ALL attorneys agree with your conclusion — are there others ways to look at this situation?*" Most likely, Sara will have to respond that not ALL attorneys will agree with her viewpoint. Then you have other viewpoints on the table for discussion.
- **Allow Know-It-Alls opportunity to save face** when changing their opinion or accepting new ideas. Suggest an "alternative" approach and ask them to "think it over." This delay gives them time to think over the "challenge," accept it, and come back to you with an explanation about why your approach is now "reasonable."

## Pseudo Know-It-Alls

- **Use the broken-record technique.** Simply repeat your position, decision, or plans in different ways.
- **Verify the “facts.”** ("*Thanks. I'll check that out.*")
- **Acknowledge their comments, and then move ahead with your decision or plans.** ("*Thank you for the input.*" "*That's one way to look at it.*" "*Many people feel that way.*")

Although you won't know it all when dealing with these less-than-pleasant people, these communication tips can make the interaction a little less stressful than hearing their lecture.

This was originally published on Dianna Booher's [Booher Banter blog](#).

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