

■ 7 Ways to Work Smart with a Know-It-All

by Tom Terez

Perhaps you know Pat. He's that tower of pure brilliance who has a ready answer for everything. He knows how to halve turnover. He knows how to double productivity. He knows how to end world hunger and solve global warming and cure the common cold.

Most workplaces have their share of know-it-alls. They tend to be friendly and talkative, but their endless all-knowing pontifications can keep other people from weighing in with their own ideas. In the extreme, a dominating know-it-all can even keep a team from reaching the best course of action. What to do? Try this:

- Don't be too quick to dismiss their ideas. Even though their know-it-all ways can be grating, they just might have the knowledge or information you're seeking.
- When they're speaking, show respect for their know-how by being an active listener. Before moving the conversation to another question or topic, paraphrase what they've just said to show your understanding.
- Make sure you have an ample supply of data and facts when engaging them in conversation. Be up to speed. Guesswork, assumptions, estimates, and hunches won't be enough to hold the know-it-all's attention, let alone to convince them of anything.
- If you're seeking information from them, frame your question(s) carefully. Be specific about what you're asking. Otherwise, they might go off on tangents – intelligent tangents, but tangents nonetheless that are frustrating and counter-productive.

- If you're in a group setting with a know-it-all, and you want to get input from participants, go round robin, with each person being given an equal amount of "air time" to share their views.
- Avoid directly challenging a know-it-all's facts or interpretation of the facts. Instead, pose a question that can open their thinking. Example of what *not* to say: "Your data from last quarter can't be right." Better: "What are the sources of that data?" Better still: "What do you think we can do to make sure our quarterly data is accurate and relevant?"
- Don't question or criticize their credentials. Even though you might have good reason to do so – and it might feel good in the short term – they're likely to get angry, defensive, and even more difficult to work with in the long term.

NOTE: These action ideas are excerpted from the "Difficult Dozen Help Zone," a free online tool at BetterWorkplaceNow.com. The tool takes just a minute to use and gives you a free e-mailed report full of recommendations. Use it now – and get instant advice for dealing with Gossips, Whiners, Hotheads, Apathetics, and eight other challenging types. Go to <http://BetterWorkplaceNow.com/help/>

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