

HOW TO WORK WITH KNOW-IT-ALLS



Summary: *If you've ever had a job, you've likely worked with someone who thinks they know everything. Here's how you can work with someone like this on a daily basis.*

This type of person will speak with great authority about subjects which they have very little knowledge. They may quote newspaper articles, bragging their knowledge without giving credit to their sources. These people are not simply con-artists – they very often believe that they know what they're talking about.

In order to begin coping with any behavior, we must understand it. The motivation behind the phony know-it-all is normally the overwhelming desire to be admired or respected by others. Most often, these people are curious and alert to information – filling in gaps when the details become sketchy.

Know-it-alls tend to be very curious people. Add this to the desire to be respected and you often will find them to be individuals with an interesting bank of knowledge of the world. They read newspapers, listen carefully to the rumor mill and gather information for their use wherever they can. This only becomes a problem when the know-it-all tries to expand these bits of knowledge beyond the point that the facts support.

Your actions in coping with the phony know-it-all person will likely depend on their position in your organization. If the individual is simply a coworker, most people feel only a slight irritation or impatience. Because this type of person isn't extremely difficult to get along with, most co-workers simply tolerate a few speeches and ignore them. However, if the individual holds an influential position, you may be forced to take some sort of action.

Having a supervisor who is a know-it-all type can be especially challenging. You must find a way to make sure that their unworkable ideas will be suppressed without making them out to be a fool. Although it may be tempting to simply confront them as a phony, remember that you must continue to have a working relationship. Rather, begin by stating the facts of the situation as merely another alternative plan to the one presented by the know-it-all. For example, you might say, "Well, actually, we can also look at this client situation with the long term implications in mind. They may be more apt to be with us in a few years if we try this approach..."

When offering this alternative plan, be careful to give the know-it-all a way out. For example, after presenting your plan you might add, "I think that you may have been thinking about how ABC Company operated a couple of years back. Since then, it appears that their management has changed the way they do things." This will give them the opportunity to maintain the fact that they were right, but they were thinking of another situation. Resist the temptation to push to prove that you are right. This will only serve to undermine this person's need for acceptance.