

Five Ways To...

Deal with a know-it-all Employee



The office often sees a precocious lot running around with a know-it-all attitude. They interrupt when the boss speaks to add their inputs and take the non-hierarchical structure in companies literally. Also, the race to the top makes them believe that by taking charge, and being more vocal, they are under the spotlight. But little do they realise that this could throw them off track. No doubt these employees are an asset since they mostly make for an enthusiastic lot, but the boss has a tough job in trying to rein them in without making their exit easier. Devina Sengupta speaks to some bosses who have a few tricks up their sleeve to show such employees their place.

Hold up The Mirror

For every one out of 10 times the employee gets it right, the other nine times he would have been off the mark. It is important to hold up a mirror to the 'I-know-it-all' employee, especially when he gloats about how he is sure his way is the right one. "Nobody knows it all and this is often done to get a positive comment on his performance. More chips piled on would get the message across," says Ronesh Puri, MD of Delhi-based search firm Executive Access.

Get To The Bottom

There are those who believe that the boss gets irritated due to ego clashes. "But the key is not to show an outward irritation, which might work against you," says Hari Rajagopalan, DGM of a real estate firm in Bangalore. He once had to deal with a junior employee who refused to work on putting up fliers because he thought he was meant for larger responsibilities. He used the excuse that putting up fliers will not attract customers whereas surveys showed it worked. Rajagopalan found out the reason behind the reluctance, and assigned more than one person on the job so that the employee did not feel singled out.

Say It Out Loud

"Nothing hits home as powerfully as a few good slip-ups," said Saundarya, founder member of Flexi Career in Chennai. "Allow him/her to realise practically that experience, which comes with age, cannot be replaced by brash bookish knowledge," she said. The early start of the one-upmanship game is because of the need to rise up the ladder.

Take Them Aside

Staffing firm Mafoi-Randstad's CEO often takes the mid-level managers for client meetings and has noticed that they show they are more aware of the industry than the client, which is in poor taste. "Sensitivity is missing at times. Instead of snubbing them in front of others, a private meeting should be the forum to explain," says E Balaji, the CEO. It's best to first list the positives and then get to the negatives and do a SWOT analysis so the errant employee will realise areas that require improvement.

Let Colleagues Step In

There are bosses who list out to the employees that such behaviour will not be accepted. "Water is its own leveller, and no one can say that he knows better than those who have been in the industry for a longer time," says Ajith Issac of Ikya consultants. Experts also say that a prod or two from team mates can help to tone down such behaviour.