

How to Deal With Know It Alls

By [The Editors](#)

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There's always that one person who seems to think they know just about everything.

You may have encountered one in a social setting, family gatherings, or at your workplace. While it might be best to avoid being in the same room with them, sometimes they're people you know personally.

Here are some helpful insights on how to deal with a "*know it all*," the next time you meet one.

[Table of Contents](#) [[show](#)]

L. Burke Files, CACM DDP



President, [Financial Examinations & Evaluations, Inc.](#)

The KIA is a by-product of the way we were taught when we were young. You are either right or wrong. The more fragile the ego, the more likely that person

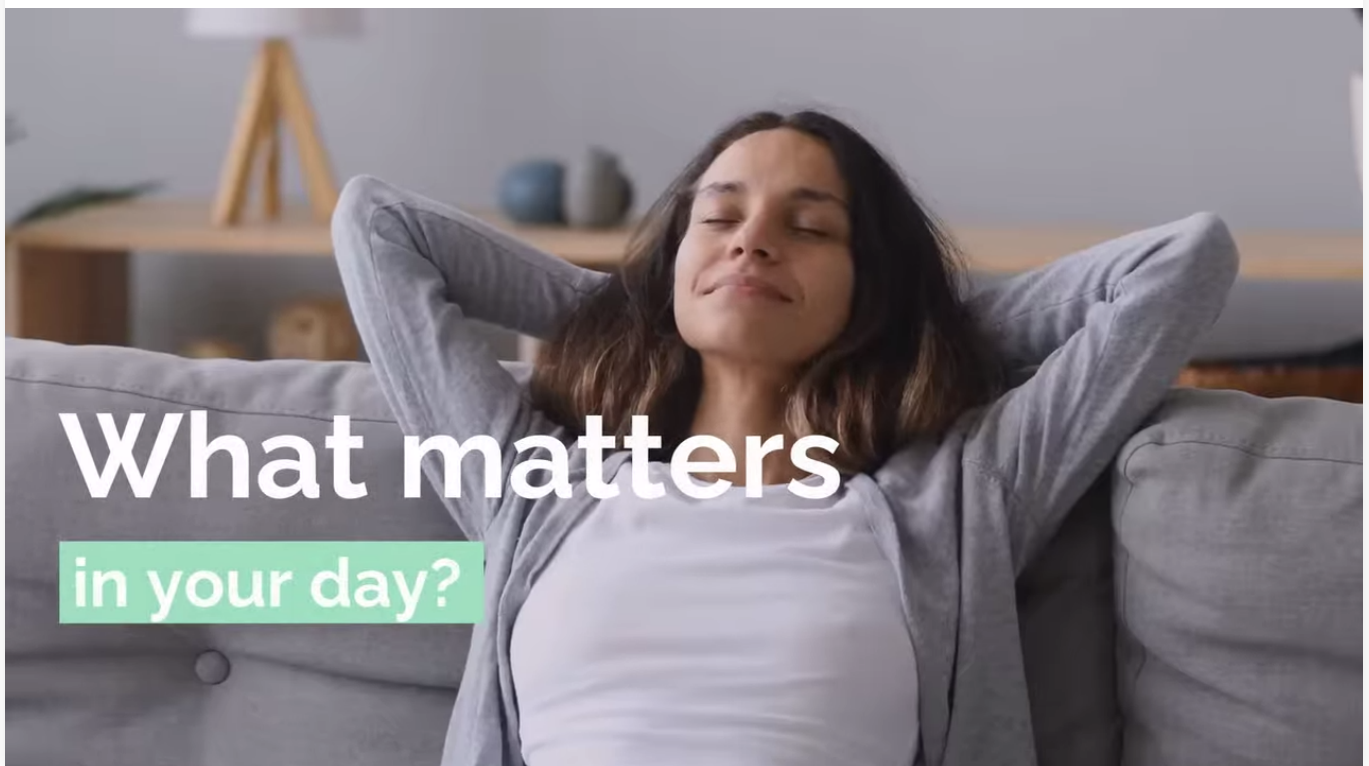
will never be wrong and will never be seen as wrong. This is the germ of the KIA.

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The KIA is a very destructive personality – very destructive.

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Even when confronted with contradictory evidence to their position – they hold fast to their position because to let go would have to mean – they were wrong. This behavior is a huge feeding machine for the conduction of cognitive dissonance.

The theory of cognitive dissonance helps explain why people will sometimes go to great lengths to account for thoughts, words, and behaviors that seem to clash when one learns new information that challenges a deeply held belief, or acts in a way that seems to undercut one's self-image. This is also why HP acquired Autonomy despite their own auditors telling the HP board – the books are cooked. Despite evidence to the contrary, the KIA is full steam ahead. KIAs come in all forms between ignorant to genius.

So how do you deal with them?

As a superior, try and help them

As a superior, I can say try and help them, but I have never seen it work. Not in my own efforts as an employer, not in my efforts as a team member in complex asset recovery or due diligence investigations. Termination is the only consistently successful solution.

If you are peers, never confront them

The raw energy the KIA will put into making you wrong will exhaust your physical and mental energy. The only thing one can do is to quietly ask questions of the KIA's opinions or actions of both the KIA and those around the KIA. As the KIA will never be wrong and often speak with incredible confidence, only getting other team members to question the KIA's judgment and choices will insulate the team or company from all too predictable future failure of a KIA.

If the KIA is your superior – run

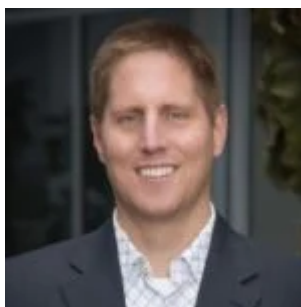
It's like being a steward on the Titanic. You can see the iceberg, and you can tell the KIA about the iceberg – who will ignore you because you are a stupid steward, so what do you know, and you will die along with the KIA.

The KIA will only come out of their idiocy if they fail, the failure was their fault, and they have their noses rubbed in it. Also, they will need a modicum of introspection and humility. You will know they have turned the corner when they say, *"I could have done better."* You know nothing has changed if they continue to blame the failure on everyone but them.

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Ryan Gottfredson, PhD



Mental Success Coach | Author, "*Success Mindsets: Your Keys To Unlocking Greater Success In Your Life, Work, & Leadership*"

Help them see that their assumption is not always valid

I think that the first step we need to take when dealing with a *"know-it-all"* is to seek to understand them. When we understand them, we put ourselves in a position to intentionally respond to them as opposed to our natural inclination, which is to instinctively react.

Thus, the question becomes: Why are people *"know-it-alls?"*

At a foundational level, it is because they believe that having *"all the answers"* will lead to a positive image, one of being *"the expert."* Something we can do to help them [become more emotional intelligence](#) is to help them see that their assumption of *"having all the answers will lead to a positive image"* is not always a valid assumption.

In fact, help them understand that there are two limitations to this assumption:

- Having all the answers does not always lead to a positive image (particularly if it leads somebody to be close-minded and less than humble)
- Believing one does not have all the answers generally leads to one developing a more positive image. This is because when we believe that we do not have all the answers, we seek to find the truth and think optimally. In the process of doing so, we invite the perspective and feedback of others. And, when we invite the perspective and feedback of others, they respect us more because we value them more.

In all, what I am suggesting is increasing our understanding and empathy toward *"know-it-alls,"* and working with them to bust their self-limiting assumptions which I provide many examples of in my book.

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Anne Corley Baum



President, **Vision Accomplished**

When dealing with Know It All, it's important to consider what is driving their need to demonstrate their knowledge. Know It Alls can, generally, be found to represent one of two categories:

- one that is arrogant and pretentious or
- one who lacks confidence

Listen carefully and do your best not to be offended by their attitude

When faced with someone who is arrogant and pretentious, someone who uses their 'Know IT All' behavior to talk down to you, listen carefully to what they are saying, and do your best not to be offended by their pompous attitude.

Keep in mind that this *'I'm Better Than You'* attitude did not develop because of you; it developed over many years in the environment in which the person was raised and lives.

Being a pretentious Know It All is a very narrow-minded place to exist, and it demonstrates their inflexibility and sheltered world. This is THEIR problem, not yours, so treat them respectfully, despite how they approach you, and as you listen to their perspective, work their view of the world and limitations into your conversation. This will help you steer the conversation to the business at hand without being offended or distracted by their arrogant behavior.

Listen to their perspective and reinforce their relevance and knowledge

The Know It All lacks self-confidence or is trying to be relevant and fit in presents a different challenge. The best way to manage someone of this nature is, again, to listen to their perspective (without being offended!) and to reinforce their relevance and knowledge. Often, when someone feels less threatened or intimidated by you, they will back off from their Know It All tendencies.

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Making someone feel good about themselves when they are in conversations with you is one of the best ways to build relationships and to deactivate a Know It All that lacks self-confidence.

Matthew Turner



Founder, **Boston Turner Group**

I work with many companies on growth strategies and company alignment, and one of the biggest issues we come across is dealing with know-it-alls.

Perhaps my focus in technology growth companies has increased my exposure to know-it-alls — tech gurus, new tech founders, true visionaries, and others in a tech startup need both a high level of self-confidence and subject matter mastery.

When I come across a know-it-all, I quickly run the following flowchart in my mind to determine how I should proceed:

Start with me:

Do I have a blind spot this person is pointing out, and I'm reacting emotionally by thinking they are a know-it-all when in fact, I should be listening and absorbing their advice?

Why are they acting like a know-it-all?

Typically know-it-alls are either insecure or they have difficulty dealing with ambiguity (they are more right/wrong, black/white in their thinking) and prefer to quickly make conclusions to create order in their world. Then I respond differently depending on the type of person I'm working with:

With insecure people: listen and probe

I work on the relationship. Insecure people often take comments as criticism and become even more defensive, but open questions allow a less threatening way of exploring options. I'll ask them to provide alternate solutions or explanations to open the conversation up without making it seem like I'm criticizing them or ignoring their input.

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For example, I might ask, *"That's a great solution, but what if we can't find the budget for it, what would you suggest in its place?"* Or, *"That's a terrific point. What do you think Bob and Mary might say about it?"*

With people who are more closed off: make it clear that you will be seeking input from others

With people who are more closed off and dislike ambiguity, I thank them for their input and make it clear that I will be seeking a lot of input from others on the team as well.

For example, the know-it-all might say something like, *"Everyone knows that the XYZ web platform is the least secure in the marketplace."* I might respond with, *"Thanks, I hadn't heard that yet. Of course, security is only one of the factors in the decision, so I'll be asking Bob about usability and Mary about a cost/benefit analysis."*

Danforth Fleak



Consultant and Host, **Value-Ability Podcast**

The financial services industry is chock full of know-it-alls. I would conservatively say that 80% of successful financial advisors fall into one version or another of this category. This is not surprising, really – the attributes which lead to success in the financial services field have a pretty big cross over with the attributes of a KIA:

- unwavering self-confidence,
- the ability to shake off rejection, and
- a refusal to give up no matter how slim the odds, to name a few.

Especially when I was a product wholesaler, I had to learn the ability quickly to get control of a conversation and move it toward what I needed to discuss

(typically, that would be the product I was representing or some other related topic).

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For those who may not understand what a product wholesaler does in the financial services realm, the job is similar to what a pharmaceutical rep does in that industry: you travel from office to office, speaking with financial advisors and teaching them about/convincing them to use the product you represent. As such, we generally were afforded an hour of the financial advisor's time, and the art of the job was to balance the "*small talk*" portion of the meeting, during which you would build/maintain the relationship with the advisor, with the "*business*" portion, where you would try to get the advisor to agree to use your product.

The "*small talk*" portion of these meetings can go wildly off the rails if you are not careful, especially if a KIA gets going on a topic like politics or some other pet peeve. There are times I can recall when I was sitting there, smiling and nodding while in my head all I could think was, "*Is this guy for real? This is completely crazy!*" Without going into detail, I've heard financial advisors wax philosophic about ideas that would make alien conspiracy theories seem tame.

Now, of course, this put me in a very difficult position. I couldn't say what I was thinking without severely offending the speaker. And the one thing I learned early on about a KIA is that under no circumstances can you engage him on any of the topics he is ranting about, especially to debate about the topic. Any attempts to engage only add fuel to the fire, and before you know it, you will look at your watch and realize the KIA has been grandstanding and pontificating for the first 40 minutes of your meeting.

Immediately jump into the topic you came to discuss

No, there is only one surefire way I have found to handle a KIA in this one-on-one type of situation. Once he has made his primary point and before he has a chance to begin to elaborate (and if you don't step in, believe me, he will elaborate), I would say, "Wow! That's really interesting! I've never thought of that before." And then IMMEDIATELY jump into the topic I came to discuss.

Virtually every KIA realizes at this point that you have:

- Listened to what he had to say, and
- Realized and agreed that he is brilliant and 100% correct. Because you have conceded these two points, he is willing to let you move on to another topic.

The art of this answer comes in that you haven't really agreed or disagreed, but it is structured in such a way that the KIA infers this. You could, and probably do, mean "*interesting*" in a way that actually means "totally and completely bonkers", but to the KIA, it will read like agreement. And then claiming that "*I've never thought of that before*" will read as if you are bowing to his superior wisdom when in reality, you haven't thought of it because it likely just isn't that great of an idea.

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Dr. Hans Watson



Psychiatrist, **University Elite PLLC**

Most people will benefit from minimizing their interaction with this type of individual

Before we discuss how to deal with a “know it all,” we have to understand why they do it. People who are emotionally fragile generally have such a poor opinion of themselves that they unconsciously fear that others will see their flaws and form a negative opinion that is consistent with their own. So their unconscious defense is to become a know it all or one upper.

This results in people not wanting to talk with them on any level other than superficial. This prevents them from allowing anyone to get too close. Keep in mind, know it all's desperately want to connect, but they just can't stop

themselves from saying things that are off-putting or offensive (that is the unconscious part).

As counterintuitive as it might seem, letting a “know it all” have the last word is the easiest way to deal with them. You aren’t going to convince them that they are wrong (remember it is unconscious). Instead, most people will benefit from letting it go and minimizing their interaction with this type of individual.

For the wonderful and patient people, getting along with a know it all involves many times of keeping quiet, even when they know it all is wrong. Then the person must find ways to help the know it all feel valued.

Once this is established, the person can then share with the know it all, the times that they are hurt by the know it all’s actions. Only after this period can someone help the know it all feel safe enough to abandon this maladaptive coping mechanism and [build real self-esteem](#).

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Rajandeep Kaur



Social Media Director, TeacherOn

During our careers, we all come across at least one know-it-all colleague or boss. Working with them is not very easy and pleasant. They think they know everything, have faced all types of situations, so they have the answer to all the questions and solutions to all the problems.

You'll see them doing all the talk in all of the significant discussions, refusing to listen to other probabilities, and depriving all co-workers of the opportunity to give their view. However, following a few tips, you can deal with them efficiently:

Put your ego aside

Try to listen to them and understand the reason for their behavior. Often, people are just covering up their low-confidence by being a know-it-all.

Ask probing questions

Whenever during a conversation, they try to become the one with most of the information, ask probing questions. Ask them where they got that information from, ask about the resources. Possibly, they don't have any such shreds of evidence to prove themselves, and they may refrain from being the only speaker in the future.

Ignore their nagging attitude

If possible, ignore their nagging attitude by excusing yourself for something meaningful, and they'll understand that you are not interested in their *'help.'*

If you are a boss and an employee is behaving this way, you should set an example by yourself being the one who has no idea on some issues, and this is very natural, no one can know everything. In a staff meeting, you can encourage the culture of not knowing something and learning from co-workers.

If you find the person otherwise good at heart and are befriended with him, you can certainly give him constructive feedback by showing his positive sides and the negativity of this attitude towards his growth and on the work environment. It is very risky, so do it very carefully as this can hurt the ego of the other person.

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In case your boss is the one who has this attitude, you can try enduring his behavior. Because, if he would have been able to get constructive feedback, or would have listened to others; he would probably not have been carrying this attitude at all.

Manny Hernandez



CEO and Co-Founder, [Wealth Growth Wisdom](#)

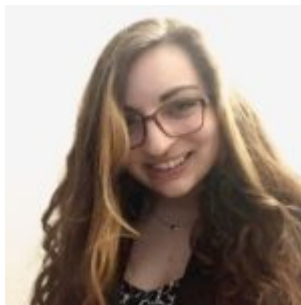
The best way to deal with a know-it-all is to respond in non-threatening ways

You can start off by appreciating them for their advice. Regardless of how aggravating things might get, simply thanking them for their advice will make them more open to agree with your point or and see things from your point of view.

It is very important not to allow any form of threat to be deduced from your response because that may just encourage them to argue their point further. You can respond without inciting them by speaking from your own experience. This works because they can't outrightly deny what you've heard or what you think even if they don't agree with it.

This way, you can slow them down a bit, then end the conversation by agreeing to disagree.

Anastasia Iliou



Marketing Manager, **Rain**

There are two kinds of know-it-alls:

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- **Those who actually know a lot**, and feel the need to force their knowledge on everyone they come across to make themselves look good
- **Those who don't know much at all**, and feel the need to compensate for it by pretending they know everything.

In either case, the professional, mature response is to smile, nod, and go about your day – unless you are a friend of this know-it-all and feel comfortable enough to say, *"Interesting, thanks for telling me that, but I have to admit you're coming across as a bit of a know-it-all."*



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