

# Stand up to put downs

with

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## Have you been shocked into silence by a nasty remark, only to think of a perfect retort three hours later?

Some people only feel good when they're putting you down. Their negative, critical energy can be hard to live with. But there are steps you can take to manage these people. Here are four tips I give participants in Dealing with Difficult People training courses.

### 1. Resist the urge to taunt back

Yes, it's tempting to respond to taunting with a smart remark. Unfortunately, this will make the situation worse. Put downs reflect the attacker's insecurity. Your smart comment will make the attacker even more insecure – and more likely to persist in their poor behaviour. Acknowledge the emotion behind the put down by saying “You sound [angry] right now.”

### 2. Don't 'catch' the insult

If a slime-covered ball was thrown to you, would you catch it? Or would you let it drop to the floor? Insults are the same – you can choose not to catch them. Imagine the speaker's words dropping harmlessly to the floor. Choose to leave each word behind at the end of the conversation. This will prevent you revisiting the put-down later in the day.

### 3. Label the behaviour

Many people ignore put downs, because they don't know how to react. Don't be one of these people who tacitly agree to being insulted. Instead, look straight at your attacker and ask, “Is that a put down?” This response will shock the attacker into silence. It will also make them think twice about goading you again.

### 4. Make a consequence assertion

Consequence assertions are a form of 'I Statement.' You can use them to set limits on the behaviour you'll tolerate. Make your consequence assertion in three parts:

- I notice...
- I feel...
- If you continue, I will...

For example “I notice you sound negative when you comment on my project plan. That makes me feel put down. If you make any more comments like this, I will finish the conversation.” Remember to make this statement in a neutral tone of voice. You need to sound calm and assertive, rather than threatening.

**Book one of our conflict resolution trainers to run a course for your team.**

**Contact us now.**

## What to say to Smart Alocs

by **Eleanor Shakiba**

Director, Think Learn Succeed

**Are you tired of being the butt of a Smart Alec’s attacks? Here are four simple steps for responding assertively.**

**Put these steps into action and you’ll find that the Smart Alec stops targeting you.**

### **Ask for specifics**

If you respond to an insult by asking for specifics, you sound confident and calm. You also make the Smart Alec responsible for backing up their remarks. Use precision questions to challenge generalisations (such as ‘you always’ or ‘you’re so’). Precision questions usually start with ‘what’ or ‘how.’ They also probe for details, using words like ‘specifically’ or ‘precisely.’ For example:

- What, exactly, have you seen me do that looks so silly to you?
- Precisely how did you reach that conclusion?
- What specific event are you basing that comment on?

### **Make it their problem**

If you defend yourself, you’re acting as though the Smart Alec’s words are true. Turn the tables by refusing to fight back. Look them in the eye and say ‘I’m sorry you think that’ or ‘That’s an interesting perspective.’ Both these responses suggest the problem lies with the attacker, rather than you.

### **Thank them**

A polite ‘thank you’ is the last thing a Smart Aleck expects. It also disappoints them, since their smart remark was intended to upset you. Use your ‘thank you’ strategically by saying:

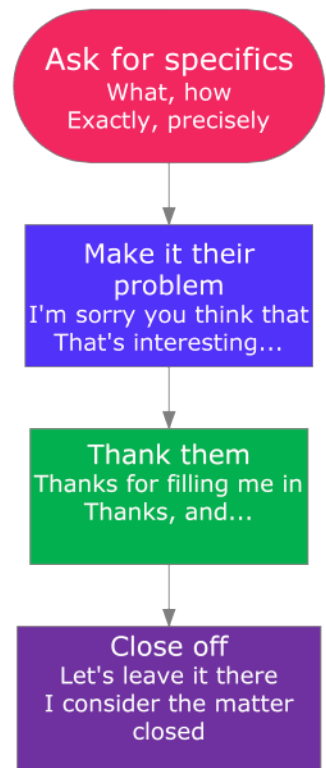
- Thanks for filling me in on how you feel
- Thank you for making your thoughts so clear
- I’ve heard your feedback, thanks, and decided to continue doing things my way

### **Close off**

Make it clear that you are finishing the conversation. Use an assertive conversation closer such as:

- Let’s leave the discussion there
- I consider this matter closed
- I’d rather talk about something else

**Need advice on what to say? Ask Eleanor now. Send your question and we’ll answer it in a future newsletter.**



# Handle customers who insult you

Real Life Success Story

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**Jessica was dealing with an enraged customer. He was shouting abuse and demanding to see Jessica’s manager. The manager was not in the store.**

If you work in customer service, this scenario is probably familiar. Some customers use ‘shaming’ tactics to get what they want. They’ll shout, hurl insults or call you names. These bullying behaviours are aimed at forcing you into a ‘submissive’ stance.

In this type of situation, it can be hard to maintain your personal power. That’s why I was impressed by Jessica. She handled her customer calmly and without responding to his baiting behaviour. After the customer left the store, I asked Jessica how she’d managed to do this. She described three principles that help her maintain personal power. You can use these when dealing with angry customers by phone or face to face.

## 1. Find the *real* issue

Jessica explained that she sees anger as an expression of ‘caring’ about an issue. For example, her customer started shouting when he found out his printing wasn’t ready for collection. But careful listening drew out a deeper reason for the customer’s anger. He was driving a shared car, which was due for return in 30 minutes. The delay in printing would result in a fine for returning the car late.

## 2. Acknowledge their concern

The customer calmed down as soon as Jessica acknowledged his ‘real’ issue. She did this by saying “I understand you need to get the car back on time.” This is an example of an empathic statement. Empathising with the customer’s situation helped Jessica stay in control of the conversation.

## 3. Deal with the key issue quickly

Jessica picked up that the customer was agitated about *time*. So she dealt promptly with his concern. She did this by saying “I’ll have the copying couriered to you in an hour so you won’t have to wait and you’ll still get your documents today.” The customer stopped shouting at this point.

## 4. Give them control

Rage is often an expression of feeling powerless. Jessica’s next tactic helped her customer feel more powerful. She asked him to *choose* the best address to send his package to. Her careful use of language created an illusion that the customer was in control. Actually, Jessica now had full control of the situation.

The scene ended with the customer apologising for his behaviour and thanking Jessica.

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# What's New

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## New Courses for Your Team:

### Working in Teams

Learn how to create a positive team dynamic. Discover how diverse personality types can work together collaboratively. Master team problem solving tools and find out how to move beyond disagreements. Use the MBTI personality instrument to explore ways of working together.

**Read course outline.**

## News from Eleanor Shakiba

Enrol in a course with Eleanor next month:

12, 19, 26 November:

**Building Confidence and Motivation with NLP** at [CCE, Sydney](#)

## New Resources for You

### Tough Conversation Planner

Need to have a difficult conversation? Make sure you prepare beforehand. This month's free conversation planner will help you create a strategy for success.

**Download now.**

## About Think Learn Succeed

We teach people to create, relate and communicate. If you need team training, we can create a customised session. If you want individual coaching, we'll deliver it by phone or face to face.

**Contact us now to find out how we can help.**