

Stop the bragging!

with

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Working with a braggart can be annoying. Here’s how to manage their irritating behaviour and stay sane.

Braggarts talk too much about themselves. They exaggerate talents, show off possessions and build small achievements into heroic feats. So how do you handle them? Here are five steps I share with participants in communication skills training courses.

1. Remember that big talk means small self esteem

Bragging is an attempt to cover up poor self image. Chronic braggers may be suffering from Narcissistic Personality Disorder. This is a psychological problem which results in grandiose behaviour. The narcissist needs constant attention in order to feel ‘whole.’ Underneath their self-important façade, the narcissist suffers chronic feelings of shame or humiliation.

2. Switch off envy

Braggarts thrive on envy. It feeds their need to feel superior. If you seem jealous of their achievements, the bragging will continue. Remind yourself that the braggart is exaggerating and that you have nothing to be jealous of.

3. Avoid criticism

Narcissists are abnormally sensitive to criticism. You’ll trigger a rage reaction if you respond to bragging with censure or dismissal. Acknowledge what has been said, without agreeing. For example, say “You sound very proud about that.”

4. Ask about their intent

This is a gentle, non-judgmental way to challenge boasting. Ask “why are you telling me this?” or “What’s the purpose of this story?” This usually stops the bragging and prompts the braggart to reflect on their behaviour.

5. Reinforce social norms

Gently remind the braggart that communication is a give and take process. Point out how much airtime they’ve taken during your conversation. Request that they listen to you for a while. Keep your words and voice tone calm, so you don’t trigger a rage reaction.

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What to say to a braggart

by **Eleanor Shakiba**

Director, Think Learn Succeed

Need to give feedback to a braggart? Here are five steps for framing your message.

Summarise their story

People brag because they have a need for attention and recognition. Start your feedback message by meeting that need. This ensures that the braggart will listen.

Braggart: The boss couldn't survive if it wasn't for me. All her reports are really written by me. And I deal with all the difficult clients, because the boss has no idea how to handle them.

You: It sounds like you spend a lot of time drafting reports and handling client complaints on behalf of your boss.

Acknowledge their feelings

Empathising with the braggart's emotions helps lessen their need to repeat their story. It also opens them up to your feedback message.

Braggart: Yes. The office would fall apart if I left. Not that anyone recognises that...

You: You must feel very proud about the contribution you make.

Create a feedback frame

Where possible, ask permission before giving feedback. This vastly increases the likelihood that your message will get through. Aim to get the braggart's agreement before delivering feedback. For example, say "I'd like to give you some feedback on how your story comes across. Is that okay?"

Describe your feelings

Spell out how the bragging impacts on you. Be careful to avoid judgmental language. Focus, instead, on expressing your feelings honestly. For example, say "When we talk, I feel like most of the conversation focuses on you and your achievements. This makes me feel left out of the conversation."

Suggest new behaviours

Remember that the braggart may not know how to behave appropriately. Help them out by giving them specific information. And make sure you end on a positive note.

"In future, I'd like to focus on your achievements for half of our time together. And I'd also like you to listen to me for half of the time. I'm sure that when we do this, we'll both feel satisfied with how the conversation goes."

Need advice on what to say? [Ask Eleanor](#) now. Send your question and we'll answer it in a future newsletter.

Handle people who steal your ideas

Real Life Success Story

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Stephanie’s colleague was constantly taking the credit for Stephanie’s work. He’d just presented her project plan to senior management – with his name on it.

Stephanie worked for a marketing agency based in Sydney. She came to Think Learn Succeed for assertiveness coaching. During her sessions, Stephanie learned four tactics for managing idea theft. You can use the same steps to handle idea thieves in your workplace.

1. Go public

Present your ideas to groups rather than one-on-one. This makes it more likely that you will be acknowledged as the idea generator. It also helps to put your name on all documents that you produce.

2. Focus on action

Generating ideas is easy. Putting them into action is more difficult. Focus on implementing ideas, rather than worrying about whom gets credit for them. This way, you’ll stand out as someone who gets results. You’ll also promote your professionalism and leadership potential.

3. Promote your successes

Get in first to prevent idea theft. Give regular updates to your boss, using verbal reports or written summaries. Match your update style to your boss’ preferred communication mode. If he or she likes email, use electronic communication. If your boss is more of a talker, arrange a regular meeting time and update them verbally.

4. Set up a blog

This is a great way to spotlight your thinking. It also creates a record of your ideas and when you generated them. Accept that once you put ideas online, others will copy them. See this as a compliment. Remember that no-one can copy your experience, talents or creativity.

Finally, it’s worth remembering a quote from the inventor Howard Aiken. “Don’t worry about people stealing your ideas. If your ideas are any good, you’ll have to ram them down people’s throats.”

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What's New

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New Courses for Your Team:

Negotiation Skills

Develop skills to influence your colleagues and managers, persuade others to take ideas on board, resolve conflict and negotiate agreements.

Read course outline.

News from Eleanor Shakiba

Enrol in a course with Eleanor next month:

10 October: **Mesmerise Your Audience** at [CCWT, Sydney](#)

31 October: **Dealing with Difficult People** at [CCE, Sydney](#)

New Resources for You

Handling Braggarts Podcast

If you live or work with someone who brags, this new podcast will come in handy. *Handling Braggarts* sets you up to handle boasting without becoming irritated.

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.