

# Talking to Crazy

Tags: [#human-relations](#) [#difficult-conversation](#)

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## Dialogue

Let's talk about the word you including in the title: "crazy".

Years ago, someone gave you advice on how to react if a dog sinks its teeth into your hand.

This exact same rule applies to talking to irrational people. If you treat them as if they're nuts and you're not, they'll bite down deeper on their crazy thinking. But if you lean into their crazy, you'll radically change the dynamic.

What is it that about a know-it-all that typically makes them irrational?

Where does it come from?

They don't say, "People think I'm a jerk, and I need to change my behavior." Instead, they say, "People dislike me because they're stupid and incompetent." This convinces the know-it-alls that they need to double down on quashing the spirits of their victims.

Most people react to know-it-alls by becoming defensive or sullen. Why doesn't that work?

Example: they're playing a game of tag. They can tag others (by demeaning or belittling) but it's hard for others them to tag back.

1. Identify where they are smart.
2. Lead with that.
3. Describe how their actions are self-defeating, but in a way that reinforces their strength.

What have you changed your mind on?

## Reserve

We all go into irrational sometimes.

Steps of cycle:

1. Recognize that the person you're dealing with isn't able to think rationally in the current situation.
2. Identify the person's modus operandi—the specific way he acts out.
3. Realize that the behavior isn't about you.
4. Talk with the irrational person, leaning into his crazy by entering his world calmly and with intention.
5. Show the person that you are an ally rather than a threat by listening calmly and empathetically as he vents.
6. Help guide the person to a saner way of thinking when he is calm.

## Quotes

*Highlight [4]:* Now, a word about the word crazy: I know it sounds inflammatory and totally un-PC. But when I use this word, I don't mean mentally ill (although mental illness—which I'll address separately in Section 5—certainly causes crazy behavior). And I don't use the word crazy to stigmatize one group of people either. That's because all of us, at some points in time, are crazy. What I mean by crazy is irrational. There are four ways in which the people you deal with can be irrational: w They can't see the world clearly. w They say or think things that make no sense. w They make decisions and take actions that aren't in their best interest. w They become downright impossible when you try to guide them back to the side of reason.

*Highlight [5]:* Years ago, someone gave me the following advice about how to react if a dog sinks its teeth into your hand: If you give in to your instincts and try to pull your hand out, the dog will stick its teeth in deeper. But if you counterintuitively push your hand deeper into the dog's mouth, the dog will release it. Why? Because, in order to do what it wants to do next—swallow—it has to release its jaw. And that's when you can pull your hand out. This exact same rule applies to talking to irrational people. If you treat them as if they're nuts and you're not, they'll bite down deeper on their crazy thinking. But if you lean into their crazy, you'll radically change the dynamic.

*Highlight [20]:* The techniques I describe in this book work beautifully with this kind of temporary crazy, as I'll demonstrate. However, I'm going to devote much of my attention to discussing how to handle the people who are truly trapped in crazy. These are the people who are defined by their type of irrationality—the people we describe with words like drama queen, manipulator, know-it-all, bully, iceberg, jerk, victim, martyr, or needy whiner. And they're the ones I'd like to tell you a little more about right now. Albert Einstein once said, "The most important decision you will ever make is whether you live in a safe or a dangerous world." Unfortunately, chronically irrational people made the wrong decision somewhere along the line. While people whose three brains align in a healthy, flexible, agile, and resilient way can move through life confidently, people trapped in triunal rigidity never see the world as a safe place where they can step bravely into the unknown each day.

*Highlight [132]:* FEW PEOPLE annoy us more than know-it-alls. I'm not talking here about subject-matter experts who aren't arrogant but simply love to share what they know. I'm talking about the know-it-alls who offend you by rubbing their supposed superiority in your face. But are these people's actions crazy? Yes—because they constantly sabotage themselves, and the know-it-alls who really are smart are wasting their own potential.

*Highlight [133]:* Why do know-it-alls like Chet act the way they do? Because early in life they learn that being snide or sarcastic gets them what they want (in the short term). By offending others, they push their victims back on their heels, and by the time those victims bounce back, the know-it-alls are off to their next targets. However, know-it-alls aren't completely oblivious to the longterm effects of their actions. On some level, they sense that people don't like them. That's because deep down, they know they wouldn't like people who talked down to them. Unfortunately, because they're irrational, know-it-alls don't act on this information in a smart way. They don't say, "People think I'm a jerk, and I need to change my behavior." Instead, they say, "People dislike me because they're stupid and incompetent." This convinces the know-it-alls that they need to double down on quashing the spirits of their victims. It was probably the actions of a know-it-all that gave rise to the expression "add insult to injury," because that's exactly what these people do.

*Highlight [133]:* What's the best way to handle know-it-alls? Most people react by becoming defensive or sullen. But that just makes know-it-alls nastier by reinforcing their idea that people are stupid, causing them to feel even more contemptuous. Therefore, no matter how crazy it sounds, you'll want to do just the opposite. Your best strategy is to lean fully into these people's reality—which is that as geniuses, they're entitled to more respect than they get.

*Highlight [134]:* As I talked, Chet's bewilderment disarmed him. No sarcasm, no condescension. Just bewilderment. And then I said, "That's the good news. Now for the bad news: When you're as bright as you are, you have a responsibility not to distract people from your amazing gift. But that's what you do. Just when people are on the verge of buying into what you're saying, you hit them with sarcasm or condescension and they 'buy out.' You're leaving results on the table that your brilliance deserves, and that's foolish. This is dishonoring your God-given gift. And it means that God should have given it to someone else. In order to deserve a gift like this, you need to use it wisely." Next, to add the icing to the cake, I said, "If you turned the people who want to kill you into people who would want to kill for you, the kind of results you could get would absolutely blow your mind—not to mention advance your career and turbocharge the company's future."

*Highlight [135]:* In general, the game that know-it-alls like to play is tag. Only their version is: I can tag you (by demeaning or belittling you) but you can't tag me (because my confidence in my own brilliance is unshakable). And you can't win at this game, so don't play it. Instead, try doing something the know-it-all won't expect:

Agree that this person is incredibly smart. Flatter him for being so bright. Use words like wise, insightful, intelligent, genius, brilliant. And then, deliver your message: "People would really appreciate your brilliance if you didn't incite them to want to sabotage you." When you do this, your words will be in complete alignment with the person's high self-image, and that will make your medicine easier to accept. Now, if you're thoroughly fed up with a know-it-all, it may set your teeth on edge to deliver this kind of flattery. But the key here is to keep your mind on your ultimate goal: getting the person to behave better. And if flattery is what it takes, it's more than worth a cringe or two.

*Highlight [135]:* There are some true geniuses who bully their entire organizations. Flattery won't work with these people because they're narcissists (which I discussed in Chapter 4). So don't try this approach with someone who has an extremely high IQ but lacks the social and emotional intelligence to act appropriately in normal business situations.

## References