



CIRCULAR LEADERSHIP MASTERMIND TOPIC HOW TO DEAL WITH SEXIST / BIASED COMMUNICATION

When responding to people who say and do sexist and biased things we want to deal with it in a way that best serves our ambitions, purpose and values. It means that we rise above them and their “poor” behaviour and take the “high road”.

This requires us to be empowered but unfortunately when women are forthright and assertive we run the risk of being perceived negatively by both men and women. So It’s prudent to blend our approach and temper our Queen/Warrior with a bit of Lover to soften their sometimes sharp edges. We may feel a strong emotion around these topics but wherever possible don’t speak whilst in the grip of that emotion as it gives them reason to dismiss us with the trope of women are “crazy / volatile”.

What this looks like is having a warm measured tone, calm energy, good volume, open body language and - if it is aligned and authentic - a natural smile.

By doing this we are not pandering to them, we are being strategic; knowing this is the best way to get our point across in a clever way that has the best chance of affecting change without damaging our reputation.

Here are some suggested responses to specific situations:

A. MANSPLAINING

Let the other person speak for a few sentences – long enough so that it’s clear that they’re trying to mansplain something you already know; then interrupt them and say:-

“Can I pause you there for a moment Barry, I understand how “x” works so I’ll save you some time explaining that; what I do need clarity on is “y”; could you enlighten me on that?”

B. INAPPROPRIATE INTERRUPTIONS

Immediately cut across the person to reclaim control and say:-

“David, I haven’t finished what I was saying, let me do that and then the floor is yours, the point I was going to make is....”

If they are very senior you could be more cautious and in a neutral tone say:-

“David, would you mind if I finished my point? I believe it will be helpful for this discussion”

If they do it repeatedly say:-

“David, you have interrupted me at least [3] times in this conversation which isn’t helpful for this discussion so I’d ask that you let me finish my point before sharing your reflections”



C. STEALING IDEAS

As soon as the person has finished speaking quickly cut in (before anyone else does) and say:-

"Exactly, I'm so glad that you agree with the idea I shared earlier Matt - who else agrees that this is a good idea?" "Let's build on this, how can we develop this further?"

D. CONDESCENDING CONCERN

You want to move the focus away from you, confirm your resourcefulness and if relevant redirect it to the real issue along the lines of the following:-

[they say "poor you" about a knock back you've experienced] *"Ah that's kind of you but there's no need for concern, it's just a blip, I've got a handle on things"*

[they say: are you sure you can handle this/aren't you worried about what will go wrong] *"You seem concerned about me which I appreciate, however I think you are more cautious about this than me; I'm comfortable with this approach and have a contingency planned..."*

[they say: such a shame you didn't get the promotion] *"it is and it isn't, I've learned a huge amount through this process and I've built stronger relationships with key decision makers – all of that sets me up in good stead for the future" OR "It is but the bigger shame is that men are being promoted twice as much as women at my level and we all need to take a look at why that might be"*

[they say: Sorry to hear to received bad feedback from a client] *"that's kind of you to say but I'm grateful for it because it showed me how we can all serve this client better than we have been"*

E. ANGRY OUTBURSTS

The best way to handle someone who is angry is to remain calm and attempt to de-escalate things so that they can calm down and converse with in you a reasonable manner so that you can have a fruitful outcome from the conversation. Once again you do this to realise your objective and to be a role model for your values.

Follow this structure for your conversation:-

1. name what you observe as their emotional state and invite them to share - *"I see that you're angry, what specifically is upsetting you?"* so that you can understand what's actually going on for them. If they give you a short response follow up with *"tell me more about that"*
2. listen intently to their response without jumping in or cutting across them
3. respond with genuine empathy - which does NOT mean you agree with them, it merely means you acknowledge their perspective - *"I can understand how you might"*



see it that way...and that it feels [name their emotion/state using the same word as them] to you " This makes them feel understood by you and starts to diffuse their anger and starts to pull you out of a combative dynamic

4. explain in a factual way why you took your approach or your perspective ***"I choose to do that because / I see it this way..."*** If it's relevant you can share how it makes you feel ***"I feel anxious about what your suggesting because..."*** (sharing your feelings is important because they can't argue against them whereas they can challenge your opinions/beliefs)
5. invite them to collaborate on finding a way forward together ***"It's clear that we have got different perspectives on this and it's also important that we are able to work together, so shall we explore how where we have some common ground and find a way forward together?"***

Avoid using "but" during this conversation which negates what they have said.

Where these difficult conversations are a pattern with a particular person it's worth finding ways cultivate that relationship so as to minimise their occurrence. You might arrive early to the meeting to have a genuine rapport chat with them or call them up or take them for a call to have general friendly business chat. When there is a personal bond it makes it harder for them to rage at you.

F. UNINTENTIONAL BIAS

When someone is well meaning but inadvertently says something offensive or inappropriate, rather than staying silent on it say:-

"Can I offer some feedback? When we say things like that, it can land like "x" even when we don't mean it to. So my suggestion is to refer to "y" OR let's look at some other ways to communicate that".

Be a good ally to other women who are in these situations – when you see it happening to another woman; step in and say something because she may not have the confidence to do so for herself. You can name what's going on along the lines of the above suggestions and hand the power back to that women.

You can also speak to male allies to enlist their support to address these issues when they happen.