



#4) Don't believe what you believe

Sooner or later, we all face confrontive situations. Getting what you want out of them begins with *choosing* what you want.

Let's say a stranger behaves in an outrageously bigoted or stereotyped way toward you. You're a black guest waiting in a hotel lobby, for instance, and a white stranger walks up and asks you to help him with his bags. Or you're a female corporate manager awaiting a flight with your subordinate in an airport, and a stranger you're both talking to assumes that your male underling is your boss. Or you're gay and sitting with your partner in a public place, and a person leans over and says softly, "I hate the sin but I love and forgive the sinner."

What do you do? It depends on what you want to accomplish.

If you want to give the offender a stinging smack they won't soon forget for their stupid or wicked behavior, then you can reply: "How dare you assume that I work here because I'm black, you ignorant racist." "I am sick to death of empty suits like you who don't have the brains to think about a woman being in charge." "Get out of my face, you homophobic robot. You don't know anything about God." Sometimes a good verbal kick in the teeth, for what little good it might do, is the way to respond when you've simply had enough and you need for people to feel the painful consequences of their extreme actions.

If, on the other hand, your desired outcome is to undercut the person's bigoted thinking itself, however remote the odds, then you'll want to drop something more thoughtful on them that is harder for them to shake: "I don't work at this hotel. But explain to me why you think I do." "Actually, I'm his boss. If this were a client meeting you would have just lost our account." "I hope God will forgive *you* for your bigotry."

You have other choices as well: Ignore the person, give them the nuclear glare, write them an email, file a formal complaint. The thing to remember is that you are not an emotional slave to your reflexive reactions. You can choose how to respond according to the outcome you desire. You can ask yourself questions, in the moment, that reflect your personal and professional interests as well as the interests of the organization: What do you believe are the other person's intentions? What, if anything, is likeliest to change their behavior or attitude? What are the likely consequences of your possible responses? What response gives you

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the most power to correct the situation? How much are you willing to invest in this situation, this person, or this organization?

There is no universally right or wrong way to react when people say and do stupidly and hurtfully bigoted things. There is only your own calculus of how to achieve the greatest possible good. You can exert some control over what happens – within the limits of chance and circumstance – if you know what you want.