

Tips and tools for dealing with gender stereotypes and the behaviour they can generate

Develop some Smooth Comebacks

You will need to have some effective and acceptable responses ready to deploy when you encounter sexism and put-downs.

It's useful to practise them so you get the tone and timing right (saying something immediately can be effective with a peer who makes a sexist comment, but you might want to have the conversation in private when it's your boss).

If co-workers are making sexist comments, come back with: "Think about what you just said. Do you really believe that's OK?" Or, "Joking aside guys, how would you feel if that was said about your girlfriend, or your sister?"

If your boss continually asks you to get the coffee, you might want to say with a smile, "It's Mike's turn." Better still, agree with your peers there will be a rota, and have the next person who is due to get the coffee volunteer: "It's my turn."

And if it's someone very senior like the CEO you might want to make the comment privately or with a lighter note. Try something like: "I know you really care about the culture here and I just want to say I don't think that comment/joke really gives the right impression of who we are as a company."

By mentally rehearsing your responses you start to build the neural networks for a new behaviour. (The brain can't tell the difference between imagining something and doing it.) Practise your phrase, your tone of voice *and* how you will hold yourself, so that when the response is required it will come confidently.

Invest in understanding yourself

Our *personal* recommendation for a response to sexism is to be bold, be yourself and act from what you believe.

When someone is self-aware and purposeful in what they are doing, they are less likely to have an aggressive reaction. Authentic behaviour resonates even when it runs counter to the norm. So, invest in understanding yourself and what's important to you, where to draw a line, which challenges to fight and which to let go.

Learn to understand your own behaviour, the micro gestures and tone you use automatically, good and bad, and how you manage your emotions. (Many of us have taken years to understand this: start early and reap the benefits!)

A very practical approach, which is highly effective, is sharing what you know about yourself. This might sound ridiculously self-absorbed, but it's disarmingly successful. While it's often considered unacceptable to appear ambitious, consider how it sounds if a colleague says: "I enjoy giving

presentations," "I want to learn more about negotiating," or "I'm ready for more responsibility." Or even "I'm ambitious". Negativity comes from other people applying a label to you – rarely from being honest and transparent.