

# 5 SIGNS YOU'RE A MANSPLAINER

By Eleanor Beaton



**A** few months ago, a colleague connected me with a consultant he knew. Given the complementary nature of our work, my colleague thought we'd be a great collaborative match. The gentleman in question was brilliant, experienced, successful, funny... and proceeded to hijack the phone call into an un-asked for 30-minute monologue on all the things I could do to make my business more successful.

In short, the guy was a mansplainer. Do you know what that is? For comic effect, ask your wife, daughter or women you work with. Trust me: even if they aren't familiar with the term, they'll get the concept.

*Mansplaining* is a blend of the words *man* and *explaining*, to "explain something to someone, typically a man to a woman, in a manner regarded as condescending or patronizing." It refers to the widespread cultural phenomenon of men interrupting, "shooshing" and speaking down to women, and a woman's related reluctance to speak up.

It's a frequent occurrence: one study found that female doctors are twice as likely to be interrupted by their patients as their male counterparts. Another fun activity: google "mansplaining videos" for myriad examples of this phenomenon in action.

In the past, mansplaining was primarily a liability for women, who struggled to professionally assert themselves in environments where they were routinely interrupted or talked down to. But increasingly, the harmful effects of mansplaining are being experienced by both genders. As more and more bright, articulate women enter the workforce and reach positions of power, the tides are turning against hapless mansplainers.

Today, interrupting, inadvertent "shooshing" and condescension are unlikely to be looked over. Rather, mansplainers find themselves the recipients of eye-rolling, the butt of jokes, and the subjects of undermining and career-limiting workarounds.

The irony of course, is that mansplainers – such as the one I described at the top of this column – are typically so deeply engrossed in a one-way conversation that they *don't even realize they are mansplaining*. (Self-awareness is not their strong point). Mansplaining can wreak havoc on your career and your credibility with women. Here are five signs that you may be a mansplainer:

## 1. You have read this column on mansplaining and have not yet questioned whether you mansplain.

While some may refer to this as blithe self-confidence, the lack of self-questioning is likely also a front for a failure to listen and a failure to reflect – both of which form the backbone of what it is to mansplain.

**2. You automatically think you know more than women – especially younger women.** The next time you sit down at a meeting, pay close attention to the assumptions you make about the women at the table – especially the younger women. Do you automatically believe it's your place to guide/mentor/advise them? #theresyoursign

**3. You interrupt women – any woman – more than once per week.** If you do this, understand that while you may be the one speaking, no one is listening. We're busily engaged in eye rolling and plotting your replacement.

**4. The women in your world are not coming to you with ideas.** Because really, why bother? Listening to someone pick apart an idea and then proceed to present it as one's own is so time consuming. It's so much easier to work *around* a mansplainer.

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**5. You don't ask many open-ended questions.** And why is this? Potentially because you are so busy giving answers that you have forgotten to be open and curious.

After concluding my 30-minute listening session with the gentleman in question, I had made about a half-page of useful notes. I had some interesting ideas that I may or may not pursue. But the mansplainer? He left the discussion exhausted (from lecturing), in desperate need of a glass of water and most importantly, not an ounce wiser. Too bad he's the last to know.

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#### FEEDBACK

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