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Feminist

January 12, 2022

Everything Is Perfect Until You Speak Up...But That Is No Reason To Stop!

I am not one to make generalisations, but male arrogance has been normalized by society. Here is how you can tackle it with ease.



Nivedita Ramesh



I woke up to the damp smell of unhealthy mould, with my 3-year-old daughter by my side. My groggy eyes widened with shock when I spotted a repulsive greenish-brown patch at the corner of our bedroom ceiling, exposed by peeled plaster. This was the second time in as many years that the plumbing in the bathroom of the flat above ours had broken down and dirty water had sifted through the layers of their flooring to dampen our ceiling. This time it was presumed to enter our lungs as well. Last year it took the persistent efforts of my husband and me to get the owner of that flat to even take a look at the leakage. Thereafter, daily calls for nearly a month finally got the repair started. There was major reluctance to take any action then, and as was evident from the lack of response to my message to the owner three days ago, there seemed to be no sense of urgency this time either.

I was doing so much to ensure my child's health and safety, only to be greeted with wet plaster and ceiling mould in our very own home

I was enraged. I was doing so much to ensure my child's health and safety, only to be greeted with wet plaster and ceiling mould in our very own home. I posted the screenshot of what Google says about the ill health effects of living with an unhealthy mould in the WhatsApp group with all the residents.

I tagged the errant owner and the estate manager, asking for updates. I was stunned at the nature of the calls and messages to what I thought was just another way to getting work done:

1. The owner replied to me in a private message, asking me to remove my post. There was nothing about taking action, or asking for details of the leakage
2. My family, including my husband and my mother, urged me to comply because "we cannot risk antagonising him, otherwise he won't do the work." I replied that being nice for so long hadn't worked, and how long was I supposed to expose my child's growing lungs to mouldy air?

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hours...and the manager yelled at me

Five months later, things came to a head in a different problem: a hotel booking I had made last year for a holiday that timed with the lockdown hadn't been cancelled in spite of repeated emails and calls. The reservations, manager claimed that the team had changed since 2020 and that she wasn't aware of my booking. More emails followed, with promises to "check and get back". It was nearing twenty months of waiting.

One day I called her up and demanded, in my coldest voice, for a refund. She directed me to her manager, a man who got so enraged when I demanded my money back in 24 hours, that he yelled at me, saying that I was rude at our very first call (well he wasn't the long lost love of my life, for me to croon to him) and that he would sue me for threatening him. Threatening with what, a deadline? Suffice it to say, that everything I said was lost in his self-righteous tirade.

I am not the one to make generalizations but the two situations that I encountered, shows male arrogance, so here is what all I did to tackle it

I am not one to make generalisations; I know that there are good apples in every basket. But these two examples shine with male entitlement and arrogance. Through both experiences, I have learnt that the male ego is as bloated and over-indulged as a gassy stomach. It is also as fragile as an eggshell, because one word, or rather, even a smidgen of aggression or confrontation, particularly from a woman, is enough to shatter it. I doubt that either of them can yell at my husband similarly and get away with it. But they both seem to think that it is perfectly alright to be outrageously rude to me.

These issues got resolved, in a fashion, without my husband or any other male having to become a brave knight. Do you know why? Because I wore armour and rode out into battle. Here's all that I did.

Create a concise and consistent narrative

I thought through and wrote down a short, tweet-length message of my problem and the required resolution. Then I responded to every Whatsapp ping and call with the same thing. I was also studiously polite and courteous in all interactions. I did not raise my voice when they yelled at me or were rude on the phone. I simply repeated what I wanted, over and over again – in emails, in messages and on calls. This not only made them feel that they had brought a Howitzer to a writing contest; it also unnerved them enough to be at a loss for excuses after the first few. I kept asking the owner, as he listed all the problems with his staff, so when will you repair it? When the manager of the hotel sputtered that he would sue me, I responded with, "Ok, but what about my money?"
I wasn't calm or collected after any of these exchanges. I was so terrified, my hands shook. I cried a few times too. But my point was made and I lived to see another day.

Build a community

I have made a few friends in our apartment, and I was heartened to receive vocal support when I bumped into some of them downstairs, the same day of my 'extremely provocative message about leakage', as my husband called it. Another older lady, also suffering from damp ceilings and peeling plaster, commiserated with me on the phone. She thanked me for reopening the conversation of a long-pending repair for many of the flats in the building. When I told her about the owner's demand to remove my post, she reacted with anger and incredulity, "What! How can he do that? He has to shut up and do the work. No more excuses. You don't delete it." This sentiment was echoed by a few others through the course of the day. Their encouragement pushed away regret at my starkly worded message and strengthened my resolve to stand my ground.
The following morning, workers came to scrape the peeling plaster from our ceiling so that it wouldn't fall on our heads while we walked about, or litter the floor. A week later the source of the water leakage in the flat upstairs was identified and plugged.

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Use social media

When the manager of the hotel ran out of steam, he hung up. But my money remained stuck. So I took to social media. I was careful with my wording – I mentioned how disappointed I was that a top-rated hotel was giving me a harrowing time with my refund. I said I was sad I could never experience their fantastic hospitality. Sounding angry and entitled hardens hearts. I wanted to melt them instead. I requested current travellers at the hotel to speak to the manager on my behalf. Today, perception is everything, and social media is everything else. I was

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please delete my reviews?

Stay strong

It's impossible to go through day after day feeling buoyant and hopeful when rejection and dismissiveness pounce on you at every turn. Waiting for a response from the concerned parties, only to be refused or denied yet again, can be draining too.

At times like these, when I feel boxed into a corner and criticised by family and friends for doing what I know is right, I think of my daughter. She has been, among many other things, my motivation to break the chain of intergenerational trauma inflicted on women in my family. I also want to show her that speaking up is not wrong and that feeling sad, angry or dejected when things go awry isn't wrong either. I want to show her that women are stronger than they look and that mental toughness can do what physical strength cannot. I want her to be proud of India, the land of her birth and the country she belongs to. Most importantly, I don't want her to lose hope.

The resolution

Emboldened by my message, a couple of other owners in our apartment posted their grievances too. In retaliation, the Association President removed messaging permissions for everyone except the Committee members. If this isn't punctured male pride, I don't know what is. We simply created other groups to discuss our issues and resolve them, instead.

We have multiple forums for our voices today, including this one. Let's use it. Let's speak up, ask for help, and demand answers. And know this: if you are fighting for something, you are not alone.

Image Source: Pexels/Andrea Piacquadio

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About the Author

Nivedita Ramesh

I asked so many questions that I stopped getting answers. Then I started writing. **read more...**

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Pop Culture

July 8, 2022

10 Knockout Moments In Koffee With Karan Season 7 Episode 1... Do You Agree?

Koffee With Karan Season 7 Episode 1 was Ranveer Singh all the way! A crackling episode that has all fans sit up and take notice.

Tina Sequeira

For me, the 'Koffee With Karan' was getting insufferably predictable, boring, and even borderline mean in the last few seasons. There were a few exceptional guests on the show though like Twinkle Khanna and Nargis Fakhri, who lend some originality and wit on it.

So, I had zero expectations when the latest season was out last night. In fact, I was prepared for the worst.

I mean, it's Alia Bhatt in the introductory episode, who is intolerable to watch offscreen with her gross immaturity, and lack of intellect on the whole. I don't mind her emoting on-screen, though. She's an excellent actress, no doubt.

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Books

July 11, 2022

And I Realised How I've Fallen For Gender Stereotypes Despite Huge Support For My Career

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Anusha Singh

When I began **reading Anita Bhogle's book** *Equal, yet Different*, for the first half an hour, I felt, "Ah! I know all this....hmmm...all too familiar...old wine in a new bottle" – only to be delightfully proven wrong.

Am I glad I relented and kept turning one page after another?

Authored by **Anita Bhogle**, Partner Prosearch Consultants, Founder BizPundits, and Co-author of the bestseller **The Winning Way** with her celebrity cricket commentator husband Harsha Bhogle, I found *Equal, Yet Different* to be a cut above the rest for a big reason:

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When we See Equal, we Share The Load #ShareTheLoad

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