See through smooth talkers

New managers often regard the most talkative, confident employees as the most intelligent members of the team. That can be a faulty assumption.

It's easy to equate a smooth talker's poise with wisdom. Articulate people might sound impressive by using big words or fancy phrases such as, "Let me preface that remark by ...," or speaking foreign languages in a great accent. But that doesn't prove they're smarter, quicker or more creative than the quiet folks.

Here's how to spot slick employees who mask their limitations with bluster:

They love playing "I told you so." Overconfident or arrogant individuals will often wait for a problem to escalate—and then analyze what went wrong. Their favorite position is Monday-morning quarterback.

If you ask them to look ahead, they may hem and haw. But when looking back, they can dissect every step of a snafu and insist that their warnings were ignored.

They give speeches, not answers. Eloquent speakers can prove spellbinding. Ask them a simple question and they can expound for 10 minutes with facts, figures and anecdotes. Despite their entertainment value, they may skirt the answer.

Less charismatic speakers may give one-sentence answers in a monotone. But they may pack more clarity and insight.

They repeat themselves. Listen carefully to blustery speakers and you'll notice that they find new ways to say the same thing. They're masters of restatement.

Example: Ron indicates that one of your firm's key markets is drying up. You nod and move on. But he keeps bringing the conversation back to "market erosion" and "alarming demographic shifts."

They interrupt constantly. Beware of employees who dominate meetings by interjecting their comments and cutting off others.

Cut to the chase

When articulate speakers get revved up, they can be tough to pin down. It helps to ask them questions that call for yes, no or a specific answer. If they don't respond succinctly, ask your question again but in a slightly slower tempo. If that still doesn't work, say, "I need your answer to this question." Then repeat it.