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Bangkitkan Generasi Anak Bangsa Yang Berseru: Aku Paham dan Bisa!

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From Drunken Lemurs to Hypnosis: Dilbert's® Take on the Workplace

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Scott Adams

Scott Adams is creator of *Dilbert*, one of the most successful syndicated comic strips in history. Before he became a world-renowned cartoonist, Adams majored in economics, picked up an MBA, worked at a bank and a phone company and countless other day jobs while creating the *Dilbert* comic strip mornings, evenings and weekends. *Dilbert* was Adams' first attempt at a comic strip, and the satire of the modern white-collar worker started publishing in 1989. *Dilbert* grew fast in popularity and inspired four original best-selling books, a Web site that was the first syndicated comic strip to go online and to make a profit in 1995, a top-rated blog, lectures that have been among the most highly-compensated, and food ventures that are among the most popular. Today, *Dilbert* is enjoyed daily by hundreds of millions of people, across 2,000 newspapers in 65 countries.

Mindjet: What— in your opinion— is wrong with the workplace today?

Scott Adams: Anytime you put two-three people in a room, one of them will try to micromanage the other two, one will be lazy and wish he wasn't there, and basically when you put those personalities in one place, you get exactly what we got. And it seems worse in the workplace because you're less willing to forgive people who are not related to you, though they're not any more dysfunctional than your immediate family.

MJ: You receive so much input from those “stuck in the trenches”... is there hope for any of us?

SA: Sure; as you can tell from this conversation it's easy to become a syndicated cartoonist and get out that cubicle! But seriously, there's never been a better environment for running your own business from home -

I'm here in my home office and looking out my window at one of my neighbors who also works from home, is on his cell phone standing outside his house in his pajamas and his little red bathrobe on. It's almost lunchtime, and half the people in my neighborhood are working at home and running their own kind of business, so yes, there are lots of reasons to be optimistic.

MJ: What do you think it takes to make a good workplace?

SA: I own two restaurants locally, so in addition to my cartooning duties I'm in the workplace a lot. It almost doesn't matter what one's doing at the moment that makes them happy, it's what they imagine will happen next, and it's whether their life is on a trajectory toward improving, or on a trajectory toward not improving. Those are the two things that matter. At my restaurant for example I've got a young chef who knows that he's got the chance of a lifetime because he's 21 years old but he's so talented we made him head chef recently; he's growing and learning and life is ahead of him so he's happy. I also have a bartender/manager who recently finished a degree in interior design so she's got her life ahead of her, and they're all happy because what makes them happy is their notion of what they'll become, not what they are. Those people who don't have that working for them— who don't have a plan for the rest of their life— they're not happy. And yet every one of them is performing the same function. There's only so much you can do; you don't want to torture your workers and micromanage them and do all the obvious stuff, but beyond that it has a lot to do with what they think life will become.

MJ: Any chance of getting rid of those “drunken lemurs*?”

SA: Right now the drunken lemurs are still in charge. As long as cruelty is indistinguishable from leadership there will always be drunken lemurs in charge. You have to have a certain amount of sadism in order to be a leader because if you gave everyone everything what they wanted, then they'd all be selfish and they would get what they wanted, and the company would go out of business and ultimately they would not get what they wanted. So you have to get people to do things they don't want to do naturally, which is the definition of leadership but also the definition of evil.

MJ: What are the signs of a bad meeting?

SA: I heard recently that somebody was using a pair of office scissors to clip their fingernails in a meeting. I don't think it was so much that they needed to clip their fingernails, as they needed to somehow find a purpose. So if you look around and anyone's performing personal hygiene using office implements, that's a sign of a bad meeting. Another one is when anybody's picking apart a Styrofoam cup. It's alright if they're just pulling off the top edges— that's just a nervous energy— but once they get past the little round part at the bottom, it's time to call the fight. My biggest problem is laughing too hard; I suffer from this problem where stupidity looks like humor to me. I've had to excuse myself from meetings because tears were running down my cheeks.

MJ: How do you manage to be so productive? With so much of your life dedicated to your work (restaurant, comic strip, website/blog and more)?

SA: I don't get that much sleep, so I usually start work at five or six in the morning and I get a lot of work done early in the day before people can start bugging you. But beyond that I have a high tolerance for imperfection which I believe informs all of my work. My secret is when you do something about 80 percent right and that's not enough for it to work completely, then you probably shouldn't have been doing that in the first place. Or, you're in the wrong industry. If you're an aerospace engineer, you probably have to have a little higher tolerance. But if you're drawing a comic or writing a blog or commenting on a license product or giving a speech, the stuff I do, if that 80 percent is of any usefulness at all, then that ought to be enough.

MJ: Do you ever find any time to relax?

SA: I got married a year and a half ago and it's my wife's mission to teach me how to enjoy my leisure time;

it's an ongoing project.

MJ: What are you most proud of?

SA: Getting my MBA. Because it was the highest level of academic study [I've achieved]. Those were the toughest years of my life, and that business knowledge is what made Dilbert successful because I run it like a business and not like an artistic enterprise - which is a key factor in everything that worked after that.

MJ: Why'd you become a Certified Hypnotist?

SA: Originally I thought it would help me get an edge in my dating life, and I was also interested because my mother gave birth to my sister while under hypnosis without any painkillers; she was basically awake and remembers the whole thing but didn't suffer. It's not the most common experience, and most people can't be hypnotized that well so I thought, this is a mild form of superpower and wouldn't it be nice to control this mild form of superpower? I use the techniques I learned in hypnosis school in my comics all the time; a lot of things you learn in hypnosis are close to marketing and advertising in the general way you influence anybody about anything. For example, the reason my characters don't have last names, and the boss doesn't even have a first name, and you don't know name of the company Dilbert works for, or the town he works in, or the model of automobile he drives, or even his ethnicity really, is a hypnosis technique. People can more readily read themselves into a situation if you leave out the details. So I give them enough that they can relate to it—he's the guy with the bad boss, but beyond that I don't say, and his name's "Warchevsky" because then they say, hey I'm not Polish!

MJ: The drunken lemurs story has been picked up by Good Morning America, Fox News, and is all over the blogs... anything you haven't told the media that you can share with us?

SA: What people don't realize is that I have a little trick for making a comic about people without those people (who are my friends or coworkers or business partners) realizing it's them I'm making fun of. The only change [to the situation] I make is the gender of the one doing the activity. If a woman is the original idiot and you change the gender, and then they'd say, hey I'm not that guy! I've been doing that for years; nobody's ever gotten it yet.

* Drunken lemurs is a reference that Adams made in regard to "bad management" in a comic strip that led to the firing of an employee who posted it on his office bulletin board.

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