



The Dilbert Principle: A Cubicle's-Eye View of Bosses, Meetings, Management Fads & Other Workplace Afflictions

Scott Adams

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The creator of *Dilbert*, the fastest-growing comic strip in the nation (syndicated in nearly 1000 newspapers), takes a look at corporate America in all its glorious lunacy. Lavishly illustrated with *Dilbert* strips, these hilarious essays on incompetent bosses, management fads, bewildering technological changes and so much more, will make anyone who has ever worked in an office laugh out loud in recognition. The Dilbert Principle: The most ineffective workers will be systematically moved to the place where they can do the least damage -- management.

Since 1989, Scott Adams has been illustrating this principle each day, lampooning the corporate world through *Dilbert*, his enormously popular comic strip. In *Dilbert*, the potato-shaped, abuse-absorbing hero of the strip, Adams has given voice to the millions of Americans buffeted by the many adversities of the workplace.

Now he takes the next step, attacking corporate culture head-on in this lighthearted series of essays. Packed with more than 100 hilarious cartoons, these 25 chapters explore the zeitgeist of ever-changing management trends, overbearing egos, management incompetence, bottomless bureaucracies, petrifying performance reviews, three-hour meetings, the confusion of the information superhighway and more. With sharp eyes, and an even sharper wit, Adams exposes -- and skewers -- the bizarre absurdities of everyday corporate life. Readers will be convinced that he must be spying on their bosses, *The Dilbert Principle* rings so true!

The Dilbert Principle: A Cubicle's-Eye View of Bosses, Meetings, Management Fads & Other Workplace Afflictions Details

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Robert Christopher says

I listened to the book. The last chapter was good. The rest, not so much.

John says

Writing comedic prose is tough. Even professional comedians fail at it most of the time. And I would imagine that writing comic strips is even tougher, based on the fact that DILBERT, THE FAR SIDE and CALVIN AND HOBBS are the only good ones that immediately spring to mind. In THE DILBERT PRINCIPLE, Scott Adams succeeds admirably at both. Yes, the DILBERT comic strips are funnier than his prose--but not by so great a margin as you'd naturally expect. Adams obviously put a lot of thought into this book, and it shows. Of course, there are plenty of missteps. Jokes occasionally fall flat on their face. If you try to read the book within too short a time frame, the humor will start to feel tired and repetitive, especially since the book is way longer than it should be. But, if you can ration it out to yourself bit-by-bit, THE DILBERT PRINCIPLE should put a smile on your face with every page.

Riku Sayuj says

The Dilbert Principle: A Q & A

This is not really a review. It is more of a collection of notes I made from the book while I got some respite from laughing my head off or scratching my head at the thought that some of this sarcasm is slung at me too.

To those of you who are unfortunate enough to be 'bosses', I would suggest that you give this book a miss: You might end up in chronic depression.

To get into the nuances of the book, here is a Q&A with my notes from the book and a few Dilbert illustrations (again from the book) representing Scott Adams:

The book opens with an instant classic: *These days it seems like any idiot with a laptop computer can churn out a business book and make a few bucks. That's certainly what I'm hoping. It would be a real letdown if the trend changed before this masterpiece goes to print.*

The Dilbert Principle: A Q&A

Q: Why is Business So Absurd?

A: The Dilbert Principle

Q: And that is?

A: The basic concept of The Dilbert Principle is that the most ineffective workers are systematically moved to the place where they can do the least damage: management. This, Scott Adams says, has not proved to be the winning strategy that you might think. Then he spends the rest of the book detailing this out in hilarious fashion.

It seems as if we've turned nature's rules upside down. We systematically identify and promote the people who have the least skills. *The usual business rationalization for promoting idiots (the Dilbert Principle in a nutshell) is something along the lines of "Well, he can't write code, he can't design a network, and he doesn't have any sales skill. But he has very good hair..."*

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The fundamental way to ensure that business runs smoothly is **Humiliation**. There are many ways to achieve this and almost all aspects of business to ensure the hierarchy. Most of what follows deals with different ways to achieve this end result.

Q: What is Business Communication?

A: Any business school professor will tell you that the objective of business communication is the clear transfer of information. That's why professors rarely succeed in business. The real objective of business communication is to advance your career. That objective is generally at odds with the notion of "clear transfer of information."

Some of the Common Uses of Business Communication is:

Q: What is a Mission Statement?

A: It is defined as "a long awkward sentence that demonstrates management's inability to think clearly." All good companies have one.

The formulation of Mission and Vision statement cannot proceed without learning **Jargon**.

Q: So what is "Jargon"?

A: Jargon Illustrated: For example, a manager would never say, "I used my fork to eat a potato." A manager would say, "I utilized a multitined tool to process a starch resource." The two sentences mean almost the same thing, but the second one is obviously from a smarter person.

Q: How useful is 'Team Work'?

A: Stephen King writes very scary books. Shakespeare wrote several excellent plays. Unfortunately, they worked alone.* If only they had worked together there's no telling how much better the results would have been. That's the theory behind "group writing," and it's hard to find fault with the logic.

The next part of the book covers what is called "**The Great Lies of Management**"

Q: What lies do management tell me?

A: All assurances are lies, especially if your manager says good things will happen to you:

Q: What is The Myth of the Industry Average Salary?

A: This lie is appreciated by the employees. Unfortunately only one company in each industry can have the best employees. And you might be suspicious about the fact that your company pays the lowest salaries.

[image error]

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Is it likely that the "best" employees would be drawn to your company despite the lower-than-average pay? Is it possible that there's a strange mental condition that makes some people brilliant at their jobs, yet unable to compare two salary numbers and determine which one is higher? Let's call these people "Occupational Savants." If they exist, what are the odds that they all decided to work at your company?

Q: Once shrewd communication and lies are not enough, where do we turn to get ahead in the business world?

A: Machiavellian methods!

Adams assures us that this chapter contains many surefire tips for gaining wealth and personal power at the expense of people who are studying how to be team players. Naturally I have withheld my most effective tips so that I can crush you later if it's absolutely necessary, or if it just looks like fun. But what you find here should still be enough to brush aside the kindhearted dolts that litter your path to success.

PROVIDE BAD ADVICE & SHADE THE TRUTH is pretty much the essence. But, for the sake of clarity, a few more tips:

Q: How to appear smart?

A: Don't waste your time actually reading the *Wall Street Journal*. Many people subscribe to it, but nobody actually reads it. It's easier just to say, "Hey, did you see that article in the *Journal* yesterday?" and see what happens. If the other person says yes, he's bluffing too, so you can both give a hearty laugh about the insights of the article and leave it at that. If the other person indicates he did not read the article, give a condescending look and mutter, "It figures" before changing the subject.

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Q: How to give 'constructive criticism'?

A: Don't make the mistake of criticizing your co-workers to their faces. That will tip your hand and invite retaliation. The only **constructive criticism** is the kind you do behind people's backs.

Q: Should I go for Form over Substance?

A: The earth is populated by shallow and ignorant people. That's why form will always be more important than substance. You can waste your time complaining about how that should not be the case in a perfect world, or you can snap out of it and follow my advice.

Q: How to Look Busy at work?

A: Never walk down the hall without a document in your hands. People with documents in their hands look like hardworking employees heading for important meetings. People with nothing in their hands look like they're heading for the cafeteria. People with the newspaper in their hands look like they're heading for the bathroom. Above all, make sure you carry loads of stuff home with you at night, thus generating the false impression that you work longer hours than you do.

Q: How to choose your projects?

A: The worth of any project is based on how it will sound on your resume. Don't get caught up in the propaganda about how important something is for the stockholders. The stockholders are people you'll never meet. And since most projects fail or turn into something you never intended, the only lasting impact of your work is the impact on your resume. Keep your priorities straight.

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[image error]

Q: How to build a resume / praise myself?

A: Observe:

[image error]

[image error]

Q: What to do about Performance Reviews?

A: Keep this in mind: (1) Your manager is probably too lazy to write your Performance Review without your "input".

[image error]

[image error]

Q: How to get by in a workplace with minimum work?

A: Employee Strategies such as 'Telecommuting':

The office is designed for "work," not productivity. Work can be defined as "anything you'd rather not be doing." Productivity is a different matter. Telecommuting substitutes two hours of productivity for ten hours of work.

[image error]

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Now you can spend time at home, sitting around in your pajamas, listening to your stereo, and playing with your hand puppet. If you feel generous and slam out two hours of productivity, it's more than you would have done in the office, so you can feel good about it.

Q: Should I be a constant Learner?

A: Consider this hypothetical situation: You're having a conversation with Albert Einstein and he suddenly gets struck by lightning. This freak accident makes him instantly twice as smart. Could you tell the difference?

Once a person is smarter than you, it doesn't matter if he's one percent smarter or one thousand percent smarter. You can't tell the difference. Don't waste your time acquiring a bunch of knowledge that will do nothing to elevate your perceived value.

Q: How to get your way in Meetings?

A: **The Final Suggestion Maneuver:** Follow these simple steps"

1. Let everybody else make moronic suggestions.
2. Stay uninvolved while the participants shred each other's suggestions like crisp cabbage in a Cuisinart. Watch as they develop intense personal dislikes that will last their entire careers.
3. Toward the end of the allotted meeting time, when patience is thin and bladders are full, offer your suggestion. Describe it as a logical result of the good thoughts you've heard at the meeting, no matter how ridiculous that might be.

Now Scott spends some time to dole out specific advice to people in different business functions:

Marketing

Scott: I can speak with some authority on the subject of marketing because I once took a marketing class. Moreover, I have purchased many items.

The Hidden Secret of Marketing:

The most important market segment is known as the "Stupid Rich," so named because of their tendency to buy anything that's new regardless of the cost or usefulness. If you can sell enough units to the Stupid Rich, your production costs per unit will decrease. Then you can lower your prices and sell to the Stupid Poor—that's where the real volume is.

Q: Are Focus Groups useful?

A: Focus Groups are people who are selected on the basis of their inexplicable free time and their common love of free sandwiches. They are put in a room and led through a series of questions by a trained moderator. For many of these people it will be the first time they've ever been fed and listened to in the same day. This can cause some strange behavior. They will begin to complain vehemently about things that never

really bothered them before. Then they will suggest product features that they would never buy.

Q: What is the deal with these MANAGEMENT CONSULTANTS?

A: Consultants will hold a seemingly endless series of meetings to test various hypotheses and assumptions. These exercises are a vital step toward tricking managers into revealing the recommendation that is most likely to generate repeat consulting business.

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After the "correct" recommendation is discovered, it must be justified by a lengthy analysis. The consultants begin working like crazed beavers in a coffee lake. Reams of paper will disappear. You'll actually be able to hear the screams of old-growth forests dying as the consultants churn out page after page of backup charts and assumptions. The analysis will be cleverly designed to be as confusing as possible, thus discouraging any second- guessing by sniping staff members who are afraid of appearing dense.

Consultants will ultimately recommend that you do whatever you're *not* doing now. Centralize whatever is decentralized. Flatten whatever is vertical. Diversify whatever is concentrated and divest everything that is not "core" to the business. You'll hardly ever find a consultant who recommends that you keep everything the same and stop wasting money on consultants. And consultants will rarely deal with the root cause of your company's problems, since that's probably the person who hired them. Instead, they'll look for ways to improve the "strategy" and the "process."

Q: How to write a good BUSINESS PLAN?

A: First, assume that any positive trends will continue forever and any negative trends will turn around soon. Then run the numbers through a computer spreadsheet. The result is the future. (Later, if you turn out to be wrong, blame it on the global economy.)

It is never a good idea to be constrained by reality when you craft your assumptions for the business case. Reality is very unpopular and it is not fun to read.

Q: What are 'Engineers'?

Scott: "For the record, I'm not an engineer by training. But I spent ten years working with engineers and programmers in a variety of jobs. I learned their customs and mannerisms by observing them, much the way Jane Goodall learned about the great apes, but without the hassle of grooming."

[image error]

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Q: Why are most projects 'impossible' for them?

A: The risk/reward calculation for engineers looks something like this:

RISK: Public humiliation and the death of thousands of innocent people

REWARD: A certificate of appreciation in a handsome plastic frame

Being practical people, engineers evaluate this balance of risks and rewards and decide that risk is not a good thing. The best way to avoid risk is by advising that any activity is technically impossible for reasons that are far too complicated to explain. If that approach is not sufficient to halt a project, then the engineer will fall back to a second line of defense: "It's technically possible but it will cost too much." The quickest way to make a project uneconomical is by doubling the resources needed and using the cover story that you need to prevent failures.

Personal Anecdote on the MAGIC of DOWNSIZING

When the downsizing began it didn't hurt much. Instead of five non-value-added people we had four, then three, then eventually only me. I let everybody know that I was "doing the work of five people." I got no sympathy because everybody was "doing the work of five people" if you believed what you heard.

Eventually I left the job. For the past thirteen years, zero people have been doing the work of five people but there were no complaints. This was a fairly clear indication that downsizing had a future.

Q: So after criticizing the current way of doing things left right and center, does Scott Adams have a better alternative or is the whole book just one wild RANT?

A: Turns out that he does!

He calls it:

THE OA5 COMPANY

Short for "Out At 5" - An OA5 company isn't willing to settle for less productivity from the employees, just less time. The underlying assumptions for OA5 are:

- Happy employees are more productive and creative than unhappy ones.
- There's a limit to how much happiness you can get while you're at work. Big gains in happiness can only be made by spending more time away from work.
- The average person is only mentally productive a few hours a day no matter how many hours are "worked."
- People know how to compress their activities to fit a reduced time. Doing so increases both their energy and their interest. The payoff is direct and personal—they go home early.

Q: So what makes such an environment tick?

A: A company *can't* do much to stimulate happiness and creativity, but it can do a lot to kill them. The trick for the company is to stay out of the way. When companies try to encourage creativity it's like a bear dancing with an ant. Sooner or later the ant will realize it's a bad idea, although the bear might not.

Q: Do these little things matter?

A: Collectively all the little things create an environment that supports curiosity and learning. Imagine a job where after, you've screwed up your boss says "What did you learn?" instead of "What the hell were you thinking?". Be efficient in the little things. For example, rather than have some Byzantine process for doling out office supplies, add \$25 a month to each employees paycheck as a "supply stipend" and let employees buy whatever they need from their local store. If they spend less, they keep the difference.

Q: Any last statements?

A: "Creativity is allowing yourself to make mistakes. Art is knowing which ones to keep."

If you are not improving the product or interacting with customers you are worthless.

Q: Where can I learn more?

A: The good thing about dolts is that they can be easily duped. I'll address that issue in more detail in the sequel to this book, titled *Hey, Why'd I Buy Another One of These Books?*

Peter Timson says

Brilliant and still so apt. A must read even if it is just to broaden one's education/view on life. A business classic really, even taken up by the BBC's "In Business" programme.

Ed says

This is the second time I've read this book. The first time, I went through it very fast. This time I savored its wisdom.

Anyone who has ever worked in a corporation will relate to both the essays and the unforgettable cartoons. I particularly enjoy Dogbert, the heartless H.R. manager. Having worked in H.R. for a number of years, I have stories similar to Adams' comic strips.

The hypocrisy of a great percentage of managers is illuminated in the chapter on "Great Lies of Management". I'm sure most managers want to believe the things he mentions but unfortunately they don't want to act accordingly, especially when the pressure is on.

This book is a a lot of fun to read, except when it hurts, mainly when my own failings as a manager are made the object of Adams' satire.

Jan-Maat says

There are two kinds of people in the world, those who believe that the world of business is rational and those who have experience of it.

Or as Scott Adams puts it in the first chapter of this loose collection of comic strips and emails from people

about their jobs "No matter how absurd I try to make the comic strip I can't stay ahead of what people are experiencing in their own workplaces."

The downside of this book is that the emails would be funnier if they weren't true.

Nandakishore Varma says

I have worked in Engineering Consultancy organisations since 1993. Now I will let Dilbert speak for me.

And finally, with apologies to the memory of Dian Fossey.

Swati says

Funny exaggeration of the corporate life. I liked the chapter about Marketing. One thing is clear, the author really hates cubicles.

Stacy says

funny

Tom Schulte says

I pulled this off the shelf thinking it was merely a compendium of *Dilbert* cartoons. It is a much more involved exegesis of the The Dilbert Principle in action and the apathy and rage when "companies tend to systematically promote their least competent employees to management (generally middle management), to limit the amount of damage they are capable of doing." Bolstered by anonymized emails from the field, it is at times as saddening and painful as it is funny. This stuff is all too true. Unfortunately, many of the strips are reproduced too small to be easily read.

The Serendipity Aegis ~ ?Misericordia? ?????? ✨❤️ says

Horribly too true! The folly of offices! Can't finish it, though!

Lora says

Dilbert was a favorite of my late husband, and I read this book in small portions over the course of a year. It brought me back to my days in the work force, for example United Way campaigns, downsizing and leaders that compare employees making mistakes with doctors dropping babies on their heads (employees at the insurance company I worked for actually got a memo from upper management on that!).

The book includes both cartoons, text and real-life anecdotes that readers sent Scott Adams. Adams is just as good at writing as drawing comics. In fact, I marked more of his text than his cartoons. He makes funny comments, for example "a project that went down harder than a drunken ninety year-old woman with a broken hip [and you're sitting in a meeting getting your face rubbed] in the fiscal entrails." He also makes sensible observations and has a common-sense approach to business that more people should listen to.

Rick says

Comic strip artist, Scott Adams, took his strip to another level by introducing some of his strips to a 336 page book that also has in it Adams' various sarcastic and tongue-in-cheek observations about the white collar work force and corporate America. The "another level" I mentioned is not necessarily a good level as many of the author's jokes fall flat and even the cartoons are a little on the lame side of the laugh-o-meter. The reader also has to remember the book is a bit antiquated and probably was a little funnier back when it came out in 1996...especially with regards to the mentioned technology. What you have here is a book that tries to be funny, but which often leaves you with some rather painfully, boring "groaners." I'm not giving it two stars because "I liked it," but because there are about a dozen worthy pages out of the 336 that are a little funny and/or which make you think the author had a valuable, humorous insight while writing about middle and upper management types.

Shadowdenizen says

I never appreciated Dilbert until I actually got a "cubicle" job...

Doc Opp says

From about 2002-2007, I believe the Daily Show gave the most hard hitting and reliable news on TV. The reason was because the mainstream media was afraid to go against the zeitgeist of the patriotic anti-terror hawkish government policies. The Daily Show, being a humor show, could say whatever the heck it felt like safe behind the armor of freedom of expression and comedy. So, John Stewart poked holes in ridiculous policy, and was one of the few places with reasonable analysis of global affairs.

The Dilbert Principle is similarly unconstrained. Through the lens of comedy it is able to explore the inane nature of corporate America, to give one of the most incisive and insightful critiques of corporations I have read recently. (No, I don't think of Chomsky or Nader as particularly insightful). Despite the fact that its a humor book, its probably the most useful analysis of how to create productive corporate culture that I've come across. It also had me laughing out loud frequently, which is a nice bonus.

The only down side is that it goes on a bit long, and some of the topics it lambasts in the latter sections I'm not familiar with, so it wasn't all that interesting (e.g. ISO-9000). The AO5 model that Adams puts forth in the final chapter is a very interesting proposal, and I can't help but wonder if its actually the basis for the google corporate culture.

Long story short: anybody thinking of starting a business ought to read this. Its got good advice and comics. What is there not to like?

Nicholas Nash says

I read this book when I first started working. I've been cynical since and try to see through all the workplace madness right away. This book is incredibly funny and, I must say, every bit true. If you're slogging away in a cubicle, don't feel bad. This book will make you feel better. Know that you are not alone!

Felicia says

"When companies try to encourage creativity it's like a bear dancing with an ant. Sooner or later the ant will realize it's a bad idea, although the bear may not."

As usual, Scott Adams is spot on about business life. It's bizarre that this book is almost 20 years old and the same old management fads, catch phrases and general b.s. are still in play today. It's amazing that any businesses manage to be successful.

???? ?? ?????? says

Pretty hilarious! i couldn't erase the smile on my face during reading such a hilarious book.. even sometimes i burst into laughter and people around me was wandering whether i'm crazy or something!

the book contains the management deficiencies that scott has experienced himself during his career as an employee in big companies.

even though it may seem exaggerated sometimes for some people but for people working in the engineering field it'll definitely be their "day-to-day" routine! so if you're an engineer you'll totally be able to relate to every word in the book!

even scott himself said he's astonished that in his comics he created very weird characters doing very absurd things (i.e. cat in the chair of the HR manager torturing people in hell and trolls in accounting living like the evil witch in The Wizard of Oz!) but people don't notice that absurdity instead their attention gets drawn to the situations itself and they ACTUALLY relate to them!

The funniest chapter ever was the fourteenth chapter, the one talking about engineers. I never laughed from a book in my entire life as much as i laughed from that chapter! the stereotyping of the geeky nerdy engineer is very hilarious nevertheless true! well actually i don't know if that should have made me laugh or cry! but it made me laugh whatsoever!

one of the funniest books i've ever read written by one of the funniest people on the planet who created the funniest cartoon character ever!

Totally recommended for a good laugh!

Rob says

I got into the Dilbert comics sometime during high school. I was working part-time in the head office of a construction company, alphabetizing invoices and de-stapling paperwork. Gimp stuff. "Office bitch" type stuff. The hours and pay were good though and my boss looked almost exactly like the Dilbert Boss -- but *with* a mustache and *without* being an idiot. Just the same, everyday's three panel strip clearly illustrated some incident that had recently occurred.

This book was given to me somewhere during that time period and was then consumed in asynchronous chunks, usually while on the toilet. In my mind, it remains a philosophical gem that (for better or worse) illuminates and updates all of the same points that Machiavelli was making hundreds of years ago. But Adams includes pictures.

What this book is: an excellent companion piece to *Microserfs* by Douglas Coupland.

What this book is not: a collection of comic strips *a la* Calvin and Hobbes or The Far Side Gallery etc.

Mary JL says

I really enjoyed this book. It is non-fiction, although Scott Adams uses some of his comic strips to make a point.

He points out all the pointless, timewasting bureaucratic hassles that affects most large businesses--and many small ones.

For those who have ever worked in any office, the problems Adams focusses on are all too familiar.

Ever had a big company "slogan"? It's like a high school pep rally. You see the slogan in e-mails, on wall posters, they pass out T-shirts or mugs with the new slogan and so on. And it is usually wasted because three to six months later, they decide on something new and all the tshirts and mugs and posters get thrown out. Wasteful--but many big companies ARE wasteful.

At my last job, we never got written up--we got "counseled". Jargon, lack of communication and treating the vast majority of workers as just numbers is an all too common practice in many--thankfully, not all--industries.

Want a take on American business that you WON'T get from the Chamber of Commerce? Try this.
