DEALING WITH IRRATIONAL THINKING

Nothing can reduce your happiness faster than an argument with an irrational co-worker. You can't win irrational people over to your side by your superior reasoning abilities. And you can't talk them into getting inside abandoned refrigerators and closing the door to see if the light goes out. There simply aren't that many abandoned refrigerators. If you use the refrigerator in the break room, everyone will start whining about how there's no room for yogurt. Until there are more refrigerators, or less yogurt, you will find yourself in frustrating discussions that can have no good endings.

Trying to win an argument with an irrational person is like trying to teach a cat to snorkel by providing written instructions. No matter how clear your instructions, it won't work. Your best strategy is to reduce the time you spend in that sort of situation.

I have developed a solution to this problem. It is based on the fact that irrational people are easily persuaded by anything that has been published. It doesn't matter who published it, or what the context is, or how inaccurate it is. Once something is published, it's as persuasive as anything else that's ever been published. So I figure that what you need is a publication that supports all of your arguments no matter what they are. This is that publication.

I have collected the most common arguments made by irrational people into a handy reference guide and titled it "You Are Wrong Because." Circle the irrational arguments that apply to your situation and give a copy to the person who is bugging you. Look smug, as though this were conclusive evidence of your rightness. A rational person might point out that just because something is written down doesn't make it so. But since you're not giving the list to anyone with that much insight, it doesn't really matter. What matters is that you will feel as though you brought closure to a potentially frustrating situation.

You Are Wrong Because:

For your convenience, I have circled the brain malfunction(s) that most closely resemble(s) the one(s) you recently made on the topic of (fill in topic):

- ❑ **AMAZINGLY BAD ANALOGY** Example: You can train a dog to fetch a stick. Therefore, you can train a potato to dance.
- ❑ **FAULTY CAUSE AND EFFECT** Example: On the basis of my observations, wearing huge pants makes you fat.
- ❑ **I AM THE WORLD** Example: I don't listen to country music. Therefore, country music is not popular.
- ❑ **IGNORING EVERYTHING SCIENCE KNOWS ABOUT THE BRAIN** Example: People choose to be obese/gay/alcoholic because they prefer the lifestyle.
- ❑ **THE FEW ARE THE SAME AS THE WHOLE** Example: Some Elbonians are animal rights activists. Some Elbonians wear fur coats. Therefore, Elbonians are hypocrites.
- ❑ **GENERALIZING FROM SELF** Example: I'm a liar. Therefore, I don't believe what you're saying.
- ❑ **ARGUMENT BY BIZARRE DEFINITION** Example: He's not a criminal. He just does things that are against the law.
- ❑ **TOTAL LOGICAL DISCONNECT** Example: I enjoy pasta because my house is made of bricks.
- ❑ **JUDGING THINGS WITHOUT COMPARISON TO ALTERNATIVES** Example: I don't

invest in U.S. Treasury bills. There's too much risk.

- ❑ **ANYTHING YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND IS EASY TO DO** ExampIe: If you have the right tools, how hard could it be to generate nuclear fission at home?
- ❑ **IGNORANCE OF STATISTICS** Example: I'm putting ALL of my money on the lottery this week because the jackpot is so big.
- ❑ **IGNORING THE DOWNSIDE RISK** Example: I know that bungee jumping could kill me, but it's three seconds of great fun!
- ❑ **SUBSTITUTING FAMOUS QUOTES FOR COMMON SENSE** Example: Remember, "All things come to those who wait." So don't bother looking for a lob.
- ❑ **IRRELEVANT COMPARISONS** Example: A hundred dollars is a good price for a toaster, compared to buying a Ferrari.
- ❑ **CIRCULAR REASONING** Example: I'm correct because I'm smarter than you. And I must be smarter than you because I'm correct.
- ❑ **INCOMPLETENESS AS PROOF OF DEFECT** Example: Your theory of gravity doesn't address the question of why there are no unicorns, so it must be wrong.
- ❑ **IGNORING THE ADVICE OF EXPERTS WITHOUT A GOOD REASON** Example: Sure, the experts think you shouldn't ride a bicycle into the eye of a hurricane, but I have my own theory.
- ❑ **FOLLOWING THE ADVICE OF KNOWN IDIOTS** Example: Uncle Billy says pork makes you smarter. That's good enough for me!
- ❑ **REACHING BIZARRE CONCLUSIONS WITHOUT ANY INFORMATION** Example: The car won't start. I'm certain the spark plugs have been stolen by rogue clowns.
- ❑ **FAULTY PATTERN RECOGNITION** Example: His last six wives were murdered mysteriously. I hope to be wife number seven.
- ❑ **FAILURE TO RECOGNIZE WHAT'S IMPORTANT** Example: My house is on fire! Quick, call the post office and tell them to hold my mail!
- ❑ **UNCLEAR ON THE CONCEPT OF SUNK COSTS** Example: We've spent millions developing a water-powered pogo stick. We can't stop investing now or it will all be wasted.
- ❑ **OVERAPPLICATION OF OCCAM'S RAZOR (WHICH SAYS THE SIMPLEST EXPLANATION IS USUALLY RIGHT)** Example: The simplest explanation for the moon landings is that they were hoaxes.
- ❑ **IGNORING ALL ANECDOTAL EVIDENCE** Example: I always get hives immediately after eating strawberries. But without a scientifically controlled experiment, it's not reliable data. So I continue to eat strawberries every day, since I can't tell if they cause hives.
- ❑ **INABILITY TO UNDERSTAND THAT SOME THINGS HAVE MULTIPLE CAUSES** Example: The Beatles were popular for one reason only: They were good singers.
- ❑ **JUDGING THE WHOLE BY ONE OF ITS CHARACTERISTICS** Example: The sun causes sunburns. Therefore, the planet would be better off without the sun.
- ❑ **BLINDING FLASHES OF THE OBVIOUS** Example: If everyone had more money, we could eliminate poverty.
- ❑ **BLAMING THE TOOL** Example: I bought an encyclopedia but I'm still stupid. This encyclopedia must be defective.
- ❑ **HALLUCINATIONS OF REALITY** Example: I got my facts from a talking tree.
- ❑ **TAKING THINGS TO THEIR ILLOGICAL CONCLUSION** ExampIe: If you let your barber cut your hair, the next thing you know he'll be lopping off your limbs!
- ❑ **FAILURE TO UNDERSTAND WHY RULES DON'T HAVE EXCEPTIONS** Example: It should be legal to shoplift, as long as you don't take enough to hurt the company's earnings.
- ❑ **PROOF BY LACK OF EVIDENCE** Example: I've never seen you drunk, so you must be one of those Amish people.

From: The Joy of Work: Dilbert's Guide to Finding Happiness at the Expense of Your Co-workers. By Scott Adams

Here is an interactive version that you're supposed to be able to send to someone