In its first edition of the new year the weekly magazine *U.S. News & World Report* offered its readers “50 Ways to Improve Your Life in 2005.” There were many useful tips among the 50, but one that was missing was a reminder to “maintain your sense of humor.”

This may be a difficult charge given industry downsizing and recent events in the news, but modern headlines have been grim for decades. One could argue that a sense of humor becomes more important, not less, in difficult times. But more on that in the book review to follow.

First, to set the stage, it is worth highlighting from *U.S. News* a few of the suggestions for improving ourselves during this new year. These included “grow a plant,” “clear your closets,” and “volunteer,” as well as, perhaps more seriously, “use your grey matter,” “fix your finances,” and “get married.” And of course, the predictable “quit smoking,” and “exercise a little.”

A few of the suggestions, taken out of context, sound borderline funny: “Move to Bismark,” “consider cantaloupe” and “freeze your credit cards [in a block of ice],” have a humorous ring, as might “become a birder,” “wear the right shoe size,” and “floss your teeth.”

But there was no specific reference to the importance of humor in our daily lives—including our hours spent in the workplace.

Enter *The Joy of Work: Dilbert’s Guide to Finding Happiness at the Expense of Your Co-workers*. Over the past 15 years Scott Adams has written or compiled nearly two dozen books based on the cubicle-dwelling, technology-loving, socially artless cartoon character, Dilbert. *The Joy of Work* is not a new book, but its continued timeliness is demonstrated by the fact that it can still be found on the shelves of discerning airport bookstores.

Although this book contains over a hundred Dilbert comic strips, it is more than just a compilation of previously published cartoons. Rather, the strips included serve to illustrate a series of short essays and fan e-mail, organized under chapter headings such as “Managing Your Boss,” “Surviving Meetings,” and “Managing Your Co-Workers.”
In the latter chapter Adams lists 32 ways for dealing with irrational co-workers. Examples of such brain malfunctions include *ignoring the downside risk, substituting famous quotes for common sense, following the advice of known idiots, failure to recognize what’s important* (“My house is on fire, call the post office and tell them to hold my mail!”), and *blaming the tool* (“I bought an encyclopedia but I’m still stupid. This encyclopedia must be defective”).

Although Adams composes witty essays on the work place with his tongue firmly in cheek, his prose, like his comics, frequently contains nuggets of perceptive insight into the human condition. For example, Adams shares his method for being able to determine when people are lying about their guilt. To the question “did you kill your neighbor” innocent people will respond to the charge (“No”), while guilty people will attack the evidence (“There’s no evidence of that” or “Did someone say I did?”).

Of course, no description can do justice to the humor and insight of the Dilbert strips themselves, whether three panel, four panel, or single frame. (1) Dilbert to Boss: “Now that job security is a thing of the past, I’ve noticed that my company loyalty has vanished too.” (2) Dilbert: “And when you made my bonus primarily dependent on the blunders of senior management, my motivation fluttered away like a lonely sparrow.” (3) Boss: “So your point is?” Dilbert: No point. I just didn’t have any reason to be working.”


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