



OPINION

THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

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Nerds according to Dilbert

If you want to encourage your children toward a career in computers, don't let them read Dilbert.

I'm a parent of two teenagers and a pre-teen. I want them to love computers because that's where the jobs are.

But my kids don't want to be engineers or programmers ("da-a-a-ad"), because "techies are nerds." My first job, then, is to find out what a nerd is.

After carefully searching the scientific literature, I have found that Dilbert knows best.

Here are Dilbert's Principles of Nerdhood, using engineers as the prototype.

Early identification personality test

The following personality test tells you if you have the personality to be an engineering nerd:

You walk into a room and notice that a picture is hanging crooked. You would...

A. Straighten it.

B. Ignore it.

C. Buy a CAD system and spend the next six months designing a solar-powered, self-adjusting picture frame while often stating aloud your belief that the inventor of the nail was a total moron.

Normal people put B, a few put A, engineering nerds put C. You get extra credit if you said, "It depends," in the margin.

Social Skills

Engineers are different when it comes to social interaction.

Normal people are searching for the following:

- Stimulating and thought-provoking conversation.
- Important social contacts.
- A feeling of connectedness with other humans.

Engineers, on the hand, want to:

- Get it over with as soon as possible.
- Avoid getting invited anywhere.
- Demonstrate mental superiority and mastery of all subjects.

Gadgets

To the engineer, all matter in the universe can be placed into one of two categories: (1) things that need to be fixed; and (2) things that will need to be fixed after you've had a few minutes to play with them.

Engineers like to solve problems. If there are no problems readily available, they will create problems.

Normal people don't understand this concept. They believe that if it ain't broke, don't fix it. Engineers believe that if ain't broke, it doesn't have enough features.

No engineer looks at a television remote control without wondering what it would take to turn it into a stun gun. To the engineer, the world is a toy box full of sub-optimized and feature-poor toys.



Psychology in the '90s

with DR. ARNOLD RINCOVER

Fashion and appearance

Clothes are the lowest priority for an engineer, assuming the basic threshold for temperature and decency have been satisfied. If no appendages are freezing or sticking together, the objective of clothing has been met. Anything else is a waste.

Love of Star Trek

Engineers love Star Trek since the engineers on the starship Enterprise are portrayed as heroes, occasionally evening have sex with aliens. This is much more glamorous than the real life of an engineer, which consists of hiding from the universe and having sex without the participation of other life forms.

Dating and social life

Dating is not easy for engineers. A normal person will employ various indirect and duplicitous methods to create a false impression of attractiveness. Engineers are incapable of placing appearance above function.

Fortunately, engineers have an ace in the hole. They are widely recognized as superior marriage material: intelligent, dependable, employed, honest, handy around the house and virgin. It is of great comfort to a potential mate knowing their children would have high-paying jobs long before losing their virginity.

Male engineers reach their peak of sexual attractiveness later than normal men, becoming irresistible, erotic dynamos in their mid-thirties to late forties. Here are examples of sexually irresistible men in technical professions:

- Bill Gates
- MacGyver
- Etcetera

Honesty

Engineers are always honest in matters of technology and human relationships. That's why it's a good idea to keep engineers away from customers, romantic interests and other people who can't handle the truth.

Ego

Two things are important to engineers:

- How smart they are.
- How many cool devices they own.

Nothing is more threatening than suggesting that someone else has more technical skill.



How about Milton Coydogs?

Be vewwy vewwy qwiet. We're hunting wabbits. Actually, it's coydogs we're hunting for, but it doesn't work with the Elmer Fudd voice.

Nobody that comes in contact with coydogs likes them. All you have to do is read *The Champion* to know that. And nobody, as far as I know, has a pet coydog or has nursed a coydog with a broken leg back to health.

That doesn't mean we still can't be fascinated by them. Nobody who meets up with a lion is likely to like them, either, but that doesn't stop people from making movies about them.

I think coydogs are fairly unique to this area. For my sports fantasy teams on the Internet I always use the name, 'Milton Coydogs'. People ask me what a coydog is all the time, thinking perhaps it's just a sly old regular dog.

I did a search on the Internet under coydogs and came up with a measly 29 web sites or articles that mentioned them. For lions, there are 483,569. Geez, moose have 44,344 places that you can find out about them.

The articles showed that not much is known about the coydog. One, in fact, said, "there is little evidence that coyotes cross with dogs, but coyotes do cross with wolves."

Another contradicted that, saying you can have coydogs and wolfdogs, but that you couldn't have coywolves.

A New Hampshire site said that they had coydogs in their state and that they were a particularly scary type of predator because they had no fear of humans. That worried me some, but in the same article they suggested that "sliding off snow-covered roads is no fun," so it might have been written by an eight-year-old.

I don't even know anybody that has seen a coydog. They're fierce, menacing, and mysterious — that we know.

I'm getting off track here, but I wish the Milton Merchants would change their name to the Milton Coydogs. The Merchants are the most boring team nickname perhaps in the history of sports. Put a scary looking coydog on some hats and t-shirts and they'd sell like crazy.

Anyway, I wanted to see a coydog for myself, so I went looking and listening for them.

I knew how to go about this because I've watched enough nature TV programs. I like those shows until one animal starts snacking on another, then I turn it back to *The Simpsons*.

People in TV nature shows always wear khaki, but I don't have anything like that so I put on dark shorts and a dark t-shirt. I thought about a camera and perhaps an Uzi for protection, but since I didn't have a loaded one of either, I took nothing.



On the Loose

with MURRY TOWNSEND

I tried to enlist my kids as assistants, but they said that it was stupid. Or I was stupid. Or both.

I made my youngest daughter and her friend go besides. Why? Because I said, of course. Besides, I was too scared to go on my own.

We slunk out of the house late at night, being vewwy vewwy qwiet.

We drove slowly through town. Slowly, because that adds to the dramatic effect. Once outside the main part of town, we headed for the escarpment. Then the radio had to be turned off, despite a lot of grumbling.

We made our way to the top of the escarpment and after finding a secluded area I stopped at the side of the road and turned off the car. Just listen, I told the girls.

They looked at me hopefully. To the radio?

No!

We didn't hear a thing. Then my daughter got out of the car and did her shtick where it looks like she's running in the headlights of a car, but then runs backwards slamming into the car as if it had hit her. Funny.

So, we moved along the escarpment and stopped again. Nothing.

Further along. Nothing.

It was kind of spooky, though, and kind of fun. And the girls were finally getting into it, yelping out the window like coydogs probably would.

We stopped six or seven times while making a circuit of the Milton escarpment. Last stop.

Silence. Then the girls yelped out the window again, telling me to make sure that I never told anyone that they did that. Your secret is safe with me, I told them.

This time, however, there was an answer!

Coydogs? Well, no, it was just one dog, but it sounded like a big one and it sounded like it was getting closer. I started up the car quickly and away we went.

No coydogs that night, but I could feel them out there. Watching. Listening. Waiting. Laughing.