

Irrationally yours
Dan Ariely

Light, enjoyable reading, but with rich anecdotes that you will remember and share

Dan Ariely is a best-selling author and widely known speaker. Everything he does is entertaining and informative. Stress, however, the former.

This is advice from an astute student of human nature, a modern "Dear Abby." It is a collection of short essays, more than 60 of them in a book that takes only a couple of hours to read. Each of them is in response to a question, usually posed in the form of a letter from a reader.

The material is taken from the "Ask Ariely" column of the Wall Street Journal. Here is a typical question to kick off an essay:

Dear Dan, Why do young people on dates go to loud, crowded places? The noise in these places must prevent the potential couple from talking to each other and it virtually eliminates any possibility that they will get to know each other. So what's the point AMANDA

His answer is succinct and witty. (1) lots of people don't have much to say in the first place, and noise masks the problem (2) it forces people to sit close together, be more intimate, and (3) whispering in somebody's ear may get them aroused.

The answer is common sense. So is a lot of life. Ariely's talent is in expressing it well, in just a few words, usually in a witty way.

Ariely's advice is often quite traditional, for this secular age. He takes marriage seriously. He writes touchingly about his own marriage and family, and offers the opinion that yes, marriage is different than mere cohabitation. He and his co-author fully appreciate the secular times in which we live, and yet see value in that which transcends the purely pragmatic.

One of the delights of this book is the cartoons. It is liberally illustrated by a guy named William Haefeli, whose work usually appears in the New Yorker. The cartoons are funny and to the point. Ariely is a well-enough established figure that he can draw on contacts to get this kind of thing done.

In summary, this is light reading, a pleasure, but nonetheless rich enough that you will come away enlightened in a few ways, and equally important, with a handful of anecdotes to illustrate points you want to make in conversation or writing.

On Escalation of Commitments

On the Art and Joy of Saying No

On Netflix Dissatisfaction

On Dieting

On Forgotten and Forgiven Loans

On Marriage and Economic Models

On Social Networks and Social Norms

On Kopi Luwak Coffee

On Wedding Ring Woes

On Social Violations and Tattle-Telling

On Variety as a Memory Enhancement

On the Benefits of a Crowded Space

On Hiring a Good (and Free) Advisor

On the Garlic Effect

On Giving to the Poor

On Grandparents and Agendas

On Outsmarting Bathroom Goers

On Gossip as a Social Coordination Me...

On Friends with Benefits

On Ruminating While Running

On the Joy of Getting Things Done

On the Art of Multitasking

On Calling Home

On Toasts and the Ideal Superstition

On Pickup Lines and Compliments

On the Illusion of Labor

On Misery and Shared Humanity

On Flashy Cars

On Dressing Down

On Exploring the Unknown

On Trying Out Relationships

On Divorce and Good Decisions

On Investing in Financial Advisors

On Justice and Sharing Food with Squir...

On Social Life and the Internet

On Expectations in Dating and Hiring

On Learning to Be Better Decision Make...

On the Power of Expectations

On Communicating Safety

On the Perfect Gift

On Eating Lessons and Kids

On Useful Complaining

On Prices and Bidding Frenzy

On Transmission of Stress, and Caring ...

On Luck as a Multiple-Stage Number G...

On Socks and the Psychology of the Su...

On Tithing

On Midlife Clichés

On Cheaters and Alibis

On Breakfast Regrets

On Nighttime Activities

On Playing Parents

On Joint Accounts

On the Bordeaux Battlefield

On Traffic Jam Altruism

On Idle Waiting

On Forcing Decisions with Coins

On Trashy Norms

On Making Smoking Feel Dangerous

On Adventures as Investments

On the Quality and Not the Quantity of I...

On "Helping" People Retire

On the Morality of Correcting Mistakes

On Who We Are and Who We Want to

On the Value of Splitting Checks

On Staplers and Quarters

On Taking Time for Exercise

On Memory

On Books and Audiobooks

On Souls and Pascal's Wager

On Showing Off the Price

On Topics and Teachers

On (the Lack of) Self-Control

On Three Building Blocks of a Balancing...

On Wasting Time Deciding

On Buffet ROI

On Asking the Right Questions

On Doughnuts and the Locus of Free Will

On the Most Optimistic Day of the Year

On Emotional Investing in the Stock Ma...

On Commuting and Adaptation

On Riding Your Dryer to Tucson

On Promotions and the Illusion of Progr...

On Distance from Emotion and Caring

On Predicting Happiness

New Questions and Advice

On the Curse of Knowledge

On Bad Sex

On Mice and Markets

On Letting Loose

On Shrinking and Honesty

On High Heels

On Rules as a Way to Overcome Negati...

On Taxes and Mitzvahs

On Bull Service

On Loss Aversion and Sports Acknowledgments