

WEEKEND POST

NATIONAL POST
SATURDAY,
JULY 4, 2009



nationalpost.com

Read more about
our Summer
Publishing
Schedule on our
Editor's Blog

STYLE

PATRIOTIC DESIGNERS

First ladies should
wear American,
says Canadian.
Page WP3

FOOD

WHEN LIFE GAVE THEM LEMONS ...

Our Shelf Life
team juiced and
rated them.
Page WP6

I like the colour orange.

NO, YOU DON'T!

Let's talk about me again!

OK, but only if we can do it my way ...

ENOUGH ALREADY!

How to get annoying people out from under your skin, *WP5*

You really ought to read this.

What's that supposed to mean?

ILLUSTRATIONS BY REBECCA YANOVSKAYA

THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE THIS



CELEBRATE SUMMER IN ONTARIO

With so many festivals and events, it's a great time to round up the kids and explore the province. Check out the great value online including our Family Fun Calendar and start planning your summer fun.

UPCOMING EVENTS

August 7 - 9
Festival of Friends,
Hamilton

August 18 - 20
Movies Under the Stars,
Kenora

August 21 - 23
Folk Festival,
Ottawa

Enter online for a chance to win the
Family Fun in the Sun Contest

ontariotravel.net/family

ONTARIO
Yours to discover

life



The latest health news will likely remind you to eat sensibly, exercise and floss regularly, but you never know: Doctors could be endorsing the all-nacho diet as you read this. Find out at nationalpost.com/life



ILLUSTRATIONS BY REBECCA YANOVSKAYA

By REBECCA FIELD JAGER

Meet Dick. Dick is not his real name but it's what a lot of people call him. That's because, although he's a good guy in many ways, Dick has a highly annoying personality trait. He's an Arguer. No matter what anyone says, he turns it into a big debate.

Dick's wife can't take it any more. She's tired of him wrecking dinner parties and holiday get-togethers. She's had it up to here with his relentless pick-pick-picking.

When she wanted hardwood in the kitchen, he said the salesman was lying — it would buckle when wet. When she turned right on a red light, he said just because you could, didn't mean you had to. When she said she liked the colour orange, he said no she didn't.

Over the years, she's tried to tell him the truth and gently explained that his behaviour is alienating their friends. She has less gently explained that if he doesn't change, she's going to kill him.

But he doesn't get it. He argues the point.

According to David Drenfeld, 41, a psychologist with practices in Ajax and Toronto, rarely do people with annoying personality traits recognize their flaw.

"People tend to think they are who they are, that it is simply part of their make-up. They're the last to know their behaviour adversely affects everyone else."

Hence, the world is full of irritating souls. Among them, the One-Uppers who always have a bigger boat, a better story. The Control Freaks, my-way-or-the-highway folks. The Narcissists. Look at me! Let's talk about me! Everyone is inferior to me!

Alas, the list goes on.

But, while we all have some annoying quirks, why do some people's bad traits almost define their personality? How do they get that way? Does a Blurter — someone who says the first thing that pops into her head regardless of how inappropriate it is — carry an obnoxious gene? Can a Wendy Whiner spring from the womb? No, says Drenfeld, people aren't

born that way.

"Such traits are the result of one's upbringing and development, of all life's experiences but especially those which took place during childhood and adolescence."

Which doesn't mean we can go blaming it on Mom and Dad. On the contrary, youngsters of great parents can be affected by experiences with teachers, friends and other family members.

For example, Dick may have been teased a lot as a kid. From this experience he might have formed the perception that people think he's stupid. This perception likely caused him pain. To avoid feeling that pain in the future, he may have developed a defense mechanism: arguing.

"Someone who constantly picks an argument has to convince others of their point of view," explains Drenfeld. "They are afraid they will be perceived as unintelligent, misinformed or incorrect if others don't agree. When they can get someone to take their point of view it's a victory. They have avoided the painful emotion associated with people perceiving them negatively."

A One-Upper could be combating a negative childhood experience such as the hurt of being ignored. Perhaps he or she was an overlooked middle child.

"This person has a need to feel special or important. They are uncomfortable if the attention focuses away from them, if they are not centre stage. To ward off the awful emotion associated with being ignored, they'll do anything to stay in the limelight."

Not all annoying personality traits are defense mechanisms. Some are learned behaviours. A Control Freak could be reacting to a painfully chaotic childhood, or, he or she may have been raised by controlling parents and is simply imitating that behaviour. Similarly, a Blurter may have come from a family where everyone was straightforward and honest with each other and hurt feelings took a backseat.

Keith Haartman, 46, a Toronto-based psychoanalyst, agrees that annoying personality traits stem from childhood experiences but he believes

HOW TO HANDLE AN ANNOYING FRIEND

- Try a little more tolerance. The person isn't consciously trying to be difficult.
- If you can't put up, speak up.
- Be specific, as in "Your behaviour has this impact on me, others and your life."
- Suggest professional counselling. Depending on the approach, some people can learn to control their behaviour in relatively few sessions.
- If there is no change, take a break from the relationship — but only as a last resort.

repression plays a key role. "If something is too painful to bear, you repress it. But if you repress it instead of resolving the issue, you

are doomed to repeat it," he warns.

To his way of thinking, a One-Upper may have grown up with a competitive sibling and has never dealt with the negative feelings this evoked. As an adult, this person is stuck in the endless cycle of re-enacting that relationship with everyone he or she meets.

"Underneath these annoying patterns is a lot of pain," says Haartman. "The patterns become an ingrained part of one's character. That's why people says things like, 'There goes Harry again with his one-upmanship. That is so Harry.'"

But as a friend, should you tell Harry that his behaviour drives you crazy?

That depends on the situation, Haartman says. Things to ask yourself include: Are there other aspects of his personality that absorb this one flaw? Is the trait so severe it's jeopardizing his career or relationships? Is Harry able to hear criticism? Is he flexible and open enough that you might have a shot at getting through?

Don't get your hopes up.

"Often it takes a big event such as a spouse leaving or losing a job to jar them," says Drenfeld. "They have to recognize they have a problem and the link between their relationship problems and their behaviour. They have to say, 'Now I understand why I don't get included. Now I understand why my staff keeps quitting on me.' They should seek treatment if their quirk is interfering with their happiness or function."

But what if they're nowhere near that point of self-awareness? What if you just can't take it anymore?

Say something. "Be assertive," advises Drenfeld. "Tell the person the impact his behaviour has on you and others. But say it in a gentle and supportive way." Even then, expect retaliation.

"Don't tell me how to behave," Dick the Arguer told his long-suffering wife. "What are you, a Control Freak?"

Weekend Post

DON'T MISS THE EXCITEMENT OF OUR ONLINE AUCTION ROMANCECOLLECTION.COM

