

# **Explainers Anonymous**

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Explainers Anonymous is a non- profit organization whose purpose is to help people addicted to explaining everything. My name is Phil. I started it.

It began in 1997 a few months after I retired. I woke one morning and said to myself, "I now have no work, no place to go, no future source of earned income, no people telling other people about me. The phone doesn't ring and too many of my e-mails are ads. I diet until 6 o'clock and then eat like a pig. I go to the health club, work out and lose no weight. I have lists swarming over my desk, full of grand schemes but the truth is that almost nothing is actually going on. My big accomplishment of the day so far was to take a shower. I don't have the energy to take all of my pills so I only take those that are supposed to keep me from dying. A lot of people don't like me. My relationship with my brother, mother and my brother's kids is unpleasant. I feel like there is something wrong with me. I'm depressed. I don't trust myself to act on my intentions. I am in a "make money" trap and need to get outside, to stop working for money, or I don't know what. I don't want to talk to anyone because I will depress them, and me even more. I am 59 years old and wandering around looking for my life purpose. As Gary Larsen said, "Before Robin Hood found his true destiny, he would rob from the rich and give to the porcupines. " That's me. I've lost my grip. I have no power over this."

I went into my office and looked out at the mountain. It struck me that dogs don't explain anything. Maybe that's why they seem so happy.

I have to go to the post office to pick up a package. That's what life is about today. The day is no longer about anything else. Maybe, I should play with my kids or go for a walk but I can't because I have to go to the post office to pick up a package. The explanation has magically become the context for every thing else that happens. It seems innocent, except that I have so many explanations that my box is full, nothing is possible. There is no me anymore. There is only post office, car wash, business plan, clients and weather. I watch the Weather Channel and

am dictated by Barbie Doll expectations of rain or not. My mother won't travel because she is too tired. She doesn't see her kids and grandkids and great grandkids because she is too tired. Her explanation for not travelling keeps her from the life she could otherwise have. At my company no one ever felt affirmed because sales targets were so high we never reached them. We always disappointed bosses and financial analysts and each other. We were depressed and had no joy at work because we were constantly explaining why we failed. Even what I just said is an explanation and I'll own up to it at my next Ex Anon meeting.

Explaining, like taking a drink, need not be not a problem. Telling a story to entertain or teach is wonderful. It's when I have to do it that the cycle of addiction begins. I immediately become a victim of the explanation. "I have to tell you why Rob is such a bad person." "We got divorced because she was always working, put her friends in front of me, thought she could make me happy by buying me sweaters, and got us to have a child when I didn't want one." Explainers Anonymous is for people who can't help explaining why they are dedicated victims of circumstance. Sometimes, explanations are really useful such as in telling the doctor why your hand is bleeding. Sometimes they are useful as long as everyone understands it's an explanation, and only one out of a hundred thousand possibilities. Sometimes, they are useful as warnings, such as in "look both ways before crossing the street because you might get killed."

What's worse is that everyday I wake up into a sea of explanations. On weekends, I turn on the television and find myself in channels of religious explanations about how the world was created, who God is, what he wants from us and how I better be good or else. Some religious people blow themselves up as acts of terrorism explaining that they can get into heaven faster. Others say that there is no God and all we have is ourselves and have intelligent explanations for that. Being addicted to explanations myself, I want to believe one of them but there are so many I get confused and keep finding holes in what they say.

Then, there are Democrats and the Republicans. I listen to Rush Limbaugh, the talk show host, whenever I can. I'm fascinated by the way the man thinks. He is very intelligent, has an explanation for everything and it's always the same explanation. Conservative people and plans

are good and the Liberal people and plans are bad. Rush can find something wrong in the way Hillary Clinton feeds her cat. The Democrats are no better. All their explanations are aimed at proving that they are okay and Republicans are not. Do they think I'm stupid? Every body has clay feet but their explanations always make the speaker right and their adversaries wrong. I wish they would all find something else to talk about. It all comes with an ulterior motive which is to sell something or to get or maintain power.

Investment companies are everywhere stimulating urges to fear or greed blaring out from stock market reports of fast made riches or how to avoid quick losses from plunging markets. Mostly, you can't believe the explanations of anyone who is selling something. It's not evil. It's just marketing talk. They are only telling me the good part. It is hype aimed at justifying their point of view and business interest. Plus, while explanations about why things happen or don't in the market are usually spoken with conviction, they are often wrong and the same reason is sometimes given as to why things get better or worse. It's the same with any advertising, public relations, women talking about men, men talking about women, and new age religions holding hands in circles desperately seeking salvation by other means. My list is endless.

What they all have in common is the addiction to explanation. Often, maybe always, they began with a genuine experience of something profound or useful, from a sacred experience to an investment strategy that worked. Then, always, they explained it and it became their "truth." Other people who want to believe joined up and a certain arrogance began to color the explanation. Vaclav Havel, the great Czech politician and writer said that every great idea in history has gone wrong when people became arrogant about it. Still, once in a while a saint comes along who isn't arrogant at all and by their example proves the worth of the cause. This could be some nice lady who lost 150 pounds using their explanation or someone making tons of money or someone who God talks to in the middle of the night while taking dictation. The need for Explainers Anonymous is intense and growing stronger. We now have five television sets in the house.

Membership in Explainers Anonymous is free. We only have meetings if someone asks. There is no e mail address, no fax and no phone. All you need to do is admit you are hopelessly attached to your own and others explanations and want to get free. People all over the world are joining up. Many see this as important as when fish crawled up onto land and began a new cycle of evolution, the information age, to the beginnings of a post explanatory world.

Still, people ask me, “What’s the price of my addiction to explaining Why worry about it? So what if my explanations stop me from having to think? Cognitive Autonomy is an illusion anyway, isn’t it? Constant explaining drains my own and other peoples’ energy....so what?” Mark Twain himself, said that there is nothing so boring as a well reasoned presentation. So what if my explanations have a life of their own? Who cares if my future will be like my past because my explanations insist on it? So what if broken relationships usually come from explanations? So what that children grow up in contradiction with their own experience because their teachers are sure their method is based on right explanations. So what that poverty persists and the environment is in danger from competing explanations?” Is there anything outside of explanation, or is this our fate? When I say, “I love you” to my wife and children I’m not explaining. If I say I couldn’t bring myself to vote for either of the leading presidential I’m not explaining. If I say I’m late and don’t tell you why, what am I explaining? Think of how quiet it would get. Think of people with cell phones in public places struggling for what to say.

Jinny Ditzler, in her marvelous book, “Your Best Year Yet,” talks about the power of self limiting beliefs. Self limiting beliefs are explanations you make to yourself that explain your failures. Groups do it. Communities do it. Companies do it and Nations do it. In her book, she presents a powerful way to go beyond such beliefs and I recommend it to anyone sincerely wanting to open the door to a new future.. Explainers Anonymous in the meantime, will take you a long way towards eliminating unnecessary explanations. And as with all addictions, there is a 12 step course to follow.

1. Admit to someone significant in your life that you are hopelessly addicted to explanations and have no power over it: Surrender. Explanations have got you, you don't have them. The act of admitting this, hard as it may be, is the first step to a life of freedom and choice.
2. Never characterize yourself: Never tell others or explain to them the kind of person you are. Make promises. Make requests. Tell stories. Share your experience. Create possibilities and declare yourself; but never tell them what kind of a person you are. Only someone who is avoiding or hiding something will do that. Everyone can sense it. Self characterization keeps you from getting the support you want.
3. Listen Generously: Listen with deep appreciation for the feelings and concerns of others. Otherwise, your pre existing explanations will color everything you hear. You will be listening mainly to yourself and not learn much.
4. Go beyond self limiting explanations: If you don't know what your self limiting explanations are, you will never go beyond them. What are they? Do you want to go beyond them? Create futures you want? Read Jinny Ditzler's book.
5. Make declarative statements: Proclaim what you are for or against with all of your conviction, on your own authority, without necessity for explanation. Examples are, " These states are and of a right ought to be free. I am for my children. I am for my country, I am for equal opportunity, I am for equal justice. I am for universal healthcare. I am for quality education before corporate profit." You don't have to explain yourself to say what you are for, in all honesty, without need to explain.
6. Speak from the heart: Explanations come from your head, not your heart. Your head is too often concerned with looking good, justifying itself, avoiding domination and being right. Your heart will usually take you to the experienced truth of the matter and build a constructive bridge across which good works and profitable enterprise can march.

7. Pay attention to your confusion, not your explanations: When I pay attention to my confusion, I always get new ideas, new possibilities and new relationships. When I pay attention to my explanations, not much new ever happens. The explanations become the limits of my horizon.
8. Make a courageous inventory of everyone you have hurt with your explanations: Such a long list it will be and getting longer every day; and all the while the others are busy with their own lists. But the truth about this will help set you free.
9. Be conscious of your own and others explanations: You will soon begin to see that explanations are almost all you can find. Start noticing where there is not an explanation but something else. Does it have more power? Why did John Kennedy's asking the nation, "ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country," have such power and resonance? Maybe the answer is that he just meant what he said and left out or minimized the explanation. Explaining something is not the same as standing for something, meaning it. Somebody said that Ghandi could speak credibly for hours without notes because what he thought, felt and said was always the same.
10. Make direct amends to such people wherever possible except where it would injure them or others: Apologize, Forgive yourself and others. Tell them the truth about what you have seen. Put the past in the past and create the opportunity for a future.
11. Tell the truth about your experience: When in doubt, simply share your feelings and experience of a situation. This will protect you and others from your opinions and judgments.
12. Carry this message to others and practice these principles: Having experienced the benefit of a life with less explanation, carry the message to others. Remember, that the addiction is universal and a lot of people like it. It's like chocolate. Some of the most financially successful people and companies in the world make their money by explaining to others. You will not be received graciously all the time. This is missionary work.

And as I said, there are no meetings.

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