I've learned a lot about llamas in this past week.

My seven year old had to put together his first major school project, which was presented yesterday. It involved months of research and putting together exhibits and a "product" associated with the theme, which my son elected to have as a game. A lot of this was completed at school, and a lot was to be done at home. The theme was the llama.

I now know llamas are gentile creatures, but they do display their anger in a number of ways. If you piss them off, they will hiss, spit, kick, or simply lie down and refuse to do anything for you. They'll put the effort in most of the time, and have a fantastic ability to do work. But don't piss them off, or it won't work well for you.

Outside of that, though, the hardest part of the project was to keep myself out of the project, and let the little guy do it his way. When we got to a hurdle, or an object that needed to be produced, my job was to ask leading questions, to coach, and to take 100% gospel direction from the kid. A lot of times, I thought I could produce a much better and more interesting product by simply doing it myself. But that's not the point, by a long shot. The point was to give the kid full control and let him live and die with the results he produced, and to have him learn along the way.

I went into the presentation and there was this one project that was…. perfect. I've worked with billion dollar companies that have graphics departments that didn't produce that quality of work. The text was in concise and articulate paragraphs, the organization was helpful and informative, and the display piece was a sparkling marvel of form and function. And unless this is the most precocious seven year old that has walked the earth in the past 2005 years, not a fucking bit of it was done by the kid.

No, my kid's project was delightfully messy, but still a remarkable quality product. And I was absolutely proud of him presenting it, and more of how he worked diligently throughout the months and made it his own. My ego was served by his accomplishment, and I guarantee I feel much better than Super Dad that produced his kid's project, because I got to work with my kid and see him learn and grow.

Ego is probably the most destructive force in the universe. My ego could have destroyed my relationship with my kid, and I didn't let that happen. What is the value of your ego anyway? Entire cultures are based on nurturing and protecting men's precious egos, and to what end? Sure, it is the hardest thing in the world to put aside your pride, but when you do, you receive massive rewards for it, especially when you're wrong and your ego wouldn't let you admit it.

Which brings us to professional athletes.

It is almost a joke how carefully coaches and managers these days need to coddle their herds of llamas so they don't hiss, spit, kick, or refuse to work. Don't coddle them enough, and they will get you fired, like LeBron James did to Mike Brown, like Dwight Howard tried to pull with Stan van Gundy, like Carmelo Anthony did to Mike D'Antoni, and, heck, even Demarcus Cousins can get a coach fired, right Paul Westphal? And it is all about the glory – Shaq insisted on going to LA so he could be a movie star/basketball player. LeBron insisted on the South Beach lifestyle (apropos to a douchebag like him). These guys care more about what happens off the court than what happens on it, which is why guys like Jeremy Lin and Lester Hudson who have had to work for everything their entire career are able to shine when they make it to the show. They take nothing for granted, appreciate just being there, play their role, and focus 100% on the court, because they're happy just to be on it.

Baseball has the same problems. First off is the role of the "closer". Manny Acta desperately clings to Chris Perez as his closer even though Perez clearly isn't the most effective reliever in his bullpen. And why not go on matchups, righties, lefties, lineup, vs. a set man as closer? The answer: ego. Everybody wants that job, and if everyone thinks they have the job, and don't get used as the closer, pouting ensues. If Acta uses Perez as a right-handed setup man, Perez may lose his freaking mind, and perform poorly as a result. So he's stuck with him as a closer. Pouting over a 'lack of respect" in the dugout, lineup, or contract has been seen to affect on-field performance dramatically. Why can't these guys just appreciate they are living the American dream, soak up the experience as they live it, and play for the good of the team? Ego.

Peyton Hillis is no longer a Brown because of his ego. Once the most loved athlete in Cleveland, he felt disrespected and shit all over this community and his team. Goodbye headcase. Braylon Edwards… if he performed to the level of his ego, he would have been the greatest receiver in the history of the game. He didn't, so we dumped him on the Jets for a gaggle of scrubs and some used jock straps. Holmgren et al seem content to run every headcase and malcontent out of town, building a team of solid characters without the obvious egos. And those guys, sadly, often suck.

Such is professional sport these days. What is the cure? There is no cure. It has been like this since the days of assholes like Ty Cobb. People thought they were greater than the game, and often were proven right. Our culture enables it, creates stars, builds egos, and demands these guys are turned into idols. We the fans create the monsters, and the marketing departments, hype machines, and Nike aren't about to change any of that. We see the excellently crafted project and laud the father that created it, ignoring the fact he ran roughshod over his kid to do such. It's the simple inconvenient truth of sport: superstars are assholes, and because we love what they produce, we wouldn't have it any other way.

Anyway, off to the questions.

In a recent column, you noted that after showering, it does not matter what you dry first since all is clean. When does, as you say, the 'business district' of your body get dirty? Is it like a car getting driven off the lot? Is it dirty as soon as you exit the bathroom?
-Wondering in Warrensville Heights

This is a very good question, because when you emerge from the shower your crotch is Ivory fresh, but by the end of the day it is somewhere between Parmesan cheese and low tide. Where exactly does it cross the line?

A lot of this depends on your definition of "dirty", and some of this depends on how, um, *dirty* you are. We'll need to completely exclude that last bit from the equation because there are some weird people out there who would put that line places it really shouldn't go. If you don't believe me, one day (at home, or on that jerk you hate at work's computer) take any word you can think of, append the term "porn" to it, and google it. You'll find a site dedicated to that (do not look at the pictures, please, you won't be able to unsee it). So you tell me where the line is.

Way too arbitrary.

Like It or not, your junk is a petri dish, and your body is the incubator. A safe rule would be that as soon as you put on underwear, your fruits and vegetables have crossed the line from fresh to funky (note that if you don't wear underwear, you're nasty, and this whole topic is not of interest to you regardless). That's the Weinermobile equivalent of being "driven off the lot. Your britches form a sort of biodome for your business district, so even though they promote hygiene, they also bring on the funk like Rick James with an eight ball of coke in his system.

If you want to stay fresh, stay naked. And stay off the clown porn sites while your naked.

On the subject of hangover remedies, I used to love the product, "Chaser Plus". Unfortunately, it is no longer available. Do you know why? Did it ever actually work, or was it just the placebo effect (which is fine with me but if true is probably no longer effective for me) –Cliché Guy

Chaser Plus is no longer available to you because you don't know how to google things and shop online, and you don't look very hard for things when you're shopping. This is likely due to the fact that you don't plan ahead, and instead try to find something in the vitamin section of Rite Aid when you've got a massive hangover. It's hard enough to find what you need in a vitamin section when you are of clear mind, and when your brain feels just slightly better than Kennedy's did outside the book depository in Dallas, you may as well be a monkey trying to solve a Rubik's cube. Here, let me help .

It could also be our Puritanical society forcing products like this behind the register or out of the promotional cycle, having to live in sin with unsavories like the Penthouses and Marlboros. Let's completely deny that people get drunk, like ostriches hiding from danger. If we discourage the promotion of hangover remedies, people will stop drinking! Because people always think shit through when the booze starts flowing. It works that way. There's a legalize it rant here somewhere, but I won't bore you with saying that every week.

Regardless of all of that, hangover remedies do actually work. When you go on a solid bender, you do some serious damage to your body
. All kinds of toxic crap is produced, and you're massively dehydrated on top of it all. A hangover

is akin to running a marathon and then having a mix of various toxic chemicals injected directly into your veins.

There are herbal and homeopathic remedies, most notably Vitamin B. There is real science to this, and I do believe the fine people at Chaser Plus applied this to their product and created a miracle drug. Seriously, the common cold, cancer, malaria – how often do people get those things? Hangovers, you solve that, you're doing real good in this world. Chaser Plus, you're people are heroes.

I know you secretly love math as much as you secretly love Folgers Crystals, so do me a favor, figure out the odds of receiving the same 6 auto pick lottery numbers on back to back days? -If you really want something in life you have to work for it.

Seriously, what the hell is in the crystals in Folger's Crystals? You dehydrate a delicious cup of coffee into a brown dust, you get brown dust. No crystals. Some marketing genius, likely on his way home from the Executive Den one night, thought "what can make a bland unattractive and unremarkable product exciting? Sparkly crystals!" And the idea was born. I have no idea what is in those crystals, but it wasn't in the beans when the llamas carried them over the Andes mountains, that's for sure. And it frightens me, like clowns, and clown porn.

Okay, so to the lottery. The odds of getting two tickets exactly the same are exactly identical to the odds of winning the lottery. I tested a number of theories as to how they could be slightly different, and they all failed. Computer randomization is not really random. Some programs use the microfractional second elements of the timestamp to generate "randomness", and there was a chance that if you had the exact same day and got to the machine at the exact same time the next day you had a chance of getting the exact same numbers. That failed. There is no system in place in the number generator to produce unique numbers, conversely, that would work against the best interests of the lottery. The algorithm they use in the machines is sufficiently random so that there is no abnormal distribution, and the drawing is sufficiently random so that there is no abnormal distribution, and as such the chances of getting two identical tickets is exactly the same as winning.

Is it stupid to play the lottery? Mathematically, sure, but not every problem can be solved by math. If that was the case, we certainly wouldn't have gone through the trouble and effort to run our 7 year olds through that project, or educate them at all, because most of them aren't going to amount to crap. Mathematically, most of them won't need to do an articulate research project

or presentation ever again, no, most will go to work in a mostly fluorescent environment, do some menial task from 8 to 5, and then come home and get hammered to forget the mundane horror that is their life, just like most of us do every day.

I used to mentor kids, and I remember that when a class of sixth graders came to our office, we asked them what they wanted to be when they grew up. Baseball players, football players, astronauts… all had some wonderful lofty dreams. Not a single “alcoholic living on government assistance” or “prostitute” or “inmate” in the lot, although odds are that one of those kids by now has adopted one or more of these futures. Did we dissuade them from the improbable dream of becoming a professional athlete, even though they had absolutely no chance of ever being such? Nope, because that dream, that hope, that is the heart of every childhood fantasy. It makes them happy, it fuels their games and imagination, and makes their lives fun. And we continue to encourage them, and help them grow, because a lot of them will be great members of society, and a few of them will indeed be the next cleanup hitter for the Indians, President, or inventor of the flying car. Plus, it is fun watching them learn and grow, and to dream along with them.

So what happens when we as adults realize we’re condemned to work 8 to 5 in a cubicle the rest of our lives? For the most part, we have no dreams and no hope - our lot is cast. Sure, we may create the next Facebook, but we’d have better odds of winning the lottery. Which is exactly why we should play it. ARE we going to win? Nope. But for the four days we have the ticket on our refrigerator, we can hope and dream of a better life. You buy one ticket every week, you have that hope with you throughout your life. Is a lifetime of being able to dream big worth $52 a year? You bet. What the heck else are you getting for $52 that lasts you all year anyway?

And somebody eventually wins. You never know…

I am on blood pressure medicine. The generic costs $8 for a month. Name brand $120. Same strength. My Doctor says there is no difference. I have heard there "is" on the street. Should I buy the name brand which has the really cool commercials on TV or save the money and brown bag it? -pod

Let me get this straight. Your doctor has given you advice on something, but you seek a second opinion from an admittedly borderline alcoholic smarmy writer on a sports fan site?

Makes as much sense as anything I guess.

Brands always try to make the argument about quality. Fact is, the FDA regulates the pharmaceutical industry so tightly that you have a better chance of winning the lottery than getting a generic drug with a reduced efficacy vs. the name brand. This isn't a hangover cure, this is blood pressure medicine. Whereas a hangover feels like it can kill you, high blood pressure actually could. And the FDA takes that seriously.

"The street" is filled with people with giant egos that like to sound smart, and make up a bunch of shit to bolster that claim. It's kind of like Moneyball – you could say Sabermetrics were the cause of the A's success in the late 90s, or you could say they got lucky on a few quality young pitchers who happened to kick ass. Deftly picking 6-13-18-35-46-49 because those numbers are underrepresented in the lottery, and subsequently retiring off that analysis when it hits, would be skill, right? Or your success could just be a giant stroke of luck with a thin candy shell of puffery and bullshit around it. Any claim could be sold as fact, but the fact remains the science says the drugs are the same.

Buy the generic, and spend the other $112 on lottery tickets.

As an aside, if you want to get off the meds entirely, you can do it with 16 minutes a day of exercise. Engage in a Tabada routine – workout in four four-minute stretches where you do 20 seconds of absolutely destroying yourself, rest 10 seconds, and repeat 8 times. Sound easy? Think again. Do things that use your whole body – burpees, box jumps, stairs, rows… whatever, just bust your ass for 20 seconds and then rest for 10. It's a great way to improve your overall cardiovascular health.

Having seen Max Perlich make an appearance on Justified this year got me wondering. Why hasn't his career turned out like some other great character actors. Back in the late 80's - early 90's, from Drugstore Cowboy to Beautiful Girls, I would have bet that his career would turn out similar to Vincent Schiavelli or Brion James...maybe even Harry Dean Stanton, although I have my doubts that he could ever achieve that level of cool. So what happened? My theory, unscientific as it may be, is simply that he has an inescapable "schmuck-face" that narrowed the scope of the roles offered to him and he was simply unable to transcend. –motherscratcher

Cleveland native Max Perlich is indeed a fascinating character actor. Having done over 100 films and/or TV series as simply a character actor, you can hardly say he hasn't been successful. He posses a unique persona that maps only to a specific type of character, kind of like Steve Buscemi without the joie de vivre.

Perlich is one of those guys that is always good when on camera, and will always get parts. He's also a guy that can't overexpose himself because he is so distinctive in his looks and mannerisms. Overdo it on the Perlich and his career becomes defined by the year in which he overexposed himself, and from which he subsequently never worked again.

I think he's the type of guy that will age wonderfully and who will find a great career for himself as an older gentleman. Whereas his look and character is too quirky for a mainstream career, as an older gentleman he will be universally loved and adopted. Think Abe Vigoda, Betty White, or George Burns.

Please tell me why Titanic (the movie) sucks so much. –hikohadon

You hate *Titanic* because you have testicles.

Full disclosure: I've never sat through that entire movie. Here's what I know about it. A rich spoiled bitch is engaged to a successful man, proceeds to take a wonderful luxury vacation with him where she whines about what a dick he is, trollops around with some sleazy cabin boy, and then throws a million dollars or so into the ocean. What's not to love?

Seriously, *Titanic* is every woman's fantasy and every man's nightmare. Your girl complains about everything, and instead of being thankful for all the wonderful things in her life, and the wonderful life of luxury you share together, she instead bitches about everything. She could be carrying a tray at Hooters to survive, instead she's in the lap of luxury suffering from New Jersey housewife ennui, and it is your fault. You work hard to provide for your family, and then you take her on vacation where she winds up boning the cabin boy. Oh, and you die.

These are the problems you never imagined having before you picked those winning numbers, yet, here you are. Somehow, her ego has transcended reality, and the life she craved, she no longer wants, wanting now something else. Dwight Howard could have been satisfied with his lot in life as a dominant player on a championship caliber team, but he decided to steer the S.S. Magic straight into an iceberg to appease his ego. Yet in *Titanic*, James Cameron somehow directs three hours of banal tripe in which Dwight Howard is the hero. Poppycock.

You are right to hate this movie as it represents everything wrong in society. Greed, ego, refusal to be happy, lust, poor seamanship… all are on full display being presented as admirable traits. This movie doesn't sit well with you because you have a conscience, because you have a gut feeling what is wrong with the world today, and you know this overlong and overproduced clod of elephant dung glorifies it all.

Awesome visual effects, and now 3-D, can fix the underlying social poison inherent in the film. I'd much rather watch three hours of clown porn than *Titanic*.

Please email questions to lars.hancock@yahoo.com , or DM them to me in the forae to LarsHancock.