

*Nick and Choose* { NICK ALTSCHULLER }

## DROPPING SCIENCE

Nick is tested by faith.



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**QUESTION 2.** When others are getting rattled, do you remain fairly composed? **YES:** 0 **MAYBE:** 0 **NO:** 0

The Church of Scientology of Boston offers free “scientometric” intelligence and personality tests. Before my appointment, three separate coworkers offered to come along as protection.

The facts are: Scientology is a faith created by a former science-fiction writer. Devout practitioners believe humans are haunted by the souls of dead space aliens. The church has been accused of fraud and abuse. Some loyalists have their children sign billion-year contracts of service. All of this tends to give people the creeps.

But John Travolta seems content, so at question 49, I was happy to answer: **Do you find it easy to be impartial?**

**Yes:** 0 **Maybe:** 0 **No:** 0

My objectivity was tested at the door, where I was greeted by a kid in a shirt and tie, apparently working as a receptionist—at 2:30 pm on a school day. He passed me off to another adolescent in cheap business attire who led me to a desk in an adjacent room.

Surrounded by coursework and materials for classes promising to teach me values, integrity and “a simple, powerful action that assists children to recover from physical injuries,” I penciled through the 200-question test. Alongside innocent, repetitive queries like “Do you smile much?” and “Do you laugh or smile quite readily?” were questions I found odd: “Do you consider the modern ‘prisons without bars’ system doomed to failure?” and “Are you in favor of color bar and class distinction?”

I answered honestly and turned in the form. In college, I took an aptitude test that claimed I was made to be a flight attendant. I’ve learned not to put much faith in paperwork.

**80. Do you accept criticism easily and without resentment?** **Yes:** 0 **Maybe:** 0 **No:** 0

Your personality is graphed along 10 points on a scale from -100 to 100. The second adolescent was pointing to the spot detailing my composure, where I’d scored a 20. “Your friends and family find you difficult to be around,” he said, reading from a script I couldn’t see. As a communicator, I scored a -82. Apparently, this also makes me tough to live with. My guide drew stick figures on the back of his page and penned over smiley faces to make frowns, illustrating

the effects of my character flaws. After each summary of my deficiencies, I was assured “we can help you with that.”

**174. Are you usually truthful with others?**

**Yes:** 0 **Maybe:** 0 **No:** 0

“Honestly, what were your first impressions when you came here today?” he asked.

“Honestly? I thought you looked really young.”

“I get that a lot,” he said before adding, “I’m 18,” without prompting. Then he brought over the E-meter.

Essentially a crude lie detector, the working premise behind the E-meter is that stressful thoughts possess mass. Holding two metal cylinders, you’re told a current is working through your body. A distressing thought is supposed to impede the current’s path through your mind and move the needle on the meter.

Concerned about receiving Scientology’s wrath and junk mail,

I was using a fake name. I had also lied about my profession. But for 10 minutes, I spoke openly with a kid I was sure was holding back truths of his own. He asked about my family, my friends, my love life, and each blip on the meter was treated as a clue toward clearing up my issues. On the topic of drugs, I told him I’d never taken anything considered hard.

“Hey, that used to be me,” said a boy who looked years away from shaving.

From there I took to playing with the tin cans in my hands, watching the needle bounce with each squeeze of my fingers.

**100. Are you logical and scientific in your thinking?** **Yes:** 0 **Maybe:** 0 **No:** 0

Before I left, a nervous young man gave me a 20-minute lecture on the connections between affinity, communication and reality. As he stumbled through a prepared script, it became apparent we both had a hard time grasping the principles, but I didn’t doubt his sincerity.

I’m not the first person to poke at Scientology. All I can say, from empirical evidence, is the atmosphere is disjointed. Treated as a potential convert, I felt like a shill, with the disciples of this self-help con game the unwitting marks.

**145. On subjects about which you are not an expert, are your own ideas of sufficient importance as to tell others?** **Yes:** 0 **Maybe:** 0 **No:** 0 \*\*\*

Send your stories and suggestions to [nick@improper.com](mailto:nick@improper.com).



*Impersonals*

## COPA FEEL

**I JUST CAN’T HIDE MY TRUE FEELINGS ANY LONGER:** When I saw the ad asking if someone wants to vent, I had to submit this for the world to see. I, Maria, love police officers and Massachusetts state troopers more than anything else in this entire world. I fully respect each of them and love every little thing—from their uniforms to their cars to the lights on top. I am proud to say it!

Maria

**Happy 35th birthday:**

All I ever wanted was to hold your hand as we walked down Comm. Ave. The perfect Saturday was hopping around Newbury, popping into Ted Baker and eating lunch at Met Back Bay. I ran a half marathon just to say I did it with you. You helped me find my first apartment in Boston. I fell in love with this town and with you, and I believed you when you said we’d live happily ever after. You took my whole heart and threw it away because you’re scared of growing up. I hope one day you figure it out, and I hope one day I can walk down these streets and be happy again. Even though you hurt me so much, I still wish I was holding your hand.

Bunny

**To the driver of MBTA Bus #455:**

I was at the stop exactly on time (1:15 pm), but you decided to leave a minute early. I caught you a few yards up, but you ignored me and wouldn’t open the door. I waited in the rain, hoping you’d have compassion and let me on. If your peripheral vision is so poor, you shouldn’t be a bus driver. Thanks to you, I missed the test I’d been studying for. *Failed student*

Unrequited crush? Bad hair? Need to vent?

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