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12 RULES FOR LIFE

BY

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my notes

Without rules we quickly become slaves to our passions - and there's nothing freeing about that.

We are quick to aim low and worship qualities that are beneath us.

The psychological mystery of self-deception:

How can a person deceive himself and get away with it?

Be wary of ideology, no matter who is peddling it or to what end.

Ideologies are simple ideas, disguised as science or philosophy, that purport to explain the complexity of the world and offer remedies that will perfect it.

Adopt as much responsibility as possible for individual life, society and the world.

Tell the truth.

Repair what is in disrepair.

Break down and recreate what is old and outdated.

This is how we can and must reduce the suffering that poisons the world.

If a dominant lobster is badly defeated, its brain basically dissolves. Then it grows a new, subordinate's brain - one more appropriate to its new, lowly position.

Order is all the more "natural" the longer it has lasted.

Because "nature" is "what selects," the longer a feature has existed, the more time it has had to be selected - and to shape life.

The dominance hierarchy has been around for some half a billion years.

There is little more natural than culture.

When we are defeated, our posture droops. We face the ground. We feel threatened, hurt, anxious and weak.

The ancient part of your brain specialized for assessing dominance watches how you are treated by other people. On that evidence, it renders a determination of your value and assigns you a status. If you are judged by your peers as of little worth, the counter restricts serotonin availability. That makes you much more physically and psychologically reactive to circumstances.

When operating at the bottom, the ancient brain counter assumes that even the smallest unexpected impediment might produce an uncontrollable chain of negative events, which will have to be handled alone, as useful friends are rare at the bottom.

It will render you impulsive, so that, for example, you will jump at any short-term mating opportunities, or any possibilities of pleasure, no matter how sub-par.

If you have a high status, mechanics assume that your niche is secure, productive and safe, and that you are well buttressed with social support. It thinks the chance that something will damage you is low and can be safely discounted. Change might be opportunity, instead of disaster. The serotonin flows plentifully. This renders you confident and calm, standing tall and straight, and much less on constant alert. Because your position is secure, the future is likely to be good for you. It's worthwhile to think in the long term and plan for a better tomorrow. You don't need to grasp impulsively at whatever crumbs come your way, because you can realistically expect good things to remain available. You can delay gratification, without forgoing it forever. You can afford to be a reliable and thoughtful citizen.

Our anxiety systems are very practical. They assume that anything you run away from is dangerous. The proof of that is, of course, the fact you ran away.

People who refuse to muster self-protective territorial responses are laid open to exploitation as much as those who genuinely can't stand up for their own rights

Bureaucracies have petty authoritarians within them, generating unnecessary rules and procedures simply to express and cement power.

The willingness of the individual to stand up for him or herself protects everyone from the corruption of society.

There is very little difference between the capacity for mayhem and destruction, integrated, and strength of character.

Dare to be dangerous.

Those who start to have will probably get more.

These upwardly moving loops can occur in your own private, subjective space.

See the gold the dragon hoards, instead of shrinking in terror from the dragon.

The dividing line between order and chaos: That's where we are simultaneously stable enough, exploring enough, transforming enough, repairing enough, and cooperating enough.

To straddle that is to be balanced: to have one foot firmly planted in order and security, and the other in chaos, possibility, growth and adventure.

When life suddenly reveals itself as intense, gripping and meaningful; when time passes and you're so engrossed in what you're doing you

don't notice - it is there and then that you are located precisely on the border between order and chaos.

Place one foot in what you have mastered and understood, and the other in what you are currently exploring and mastering.

Chaos is the despair and horror you feel when you have been profoundly betrayed.

Chaos is where we are when we don't know where we are, and what we are doing when we don't know what we are doing. It is all those things and situations we neither know nor understand.

We all have a palpable sense of the chaos lurking under everything familiar. That's why we understand the strange, surreal stories of Pinocchio, and Sleeping Beauty, and The Lion King, and The Little Mermaid, and Beauty and the Beast, with their eternal landscapes of known and unknown, world and underworld.

Paradise = pairidaeza in old Iranian or Avestan, which means walled or protected enclosure or garden.

Old stories contain nothing superfluous. Anything accidental - anything that does not serve the plot - has long been forgotten in the telling.

Heaven is something you must build.

Immortality is something you must earn.

Treat yourself as if you were someone you are responsible for helping.

People are better at filling and properly administering prescription medication to their pets than to themselves.

People often don't really believe that they deserve the best care. Instead of narcissistically inflating their own importance, they don't value themselves.

It is not virtuous to be victimized by a bully, even if that bully is oneself.

If I am someone's friend, family member, or lover, then I am morally obliged to bargain as hard on my own behalf as they are on theirs. If I fail to do so, I will end up a slave, and the other person a tyrant.

It is much better for any relationship when both partners are strong.

There is little difference between standing up and speaking for yourself, and standing up and speaking for someone else.

You do not simply belong to yourself. You are not simply your own possession to torture and mistreat.

Your mistreatment of yourself can have catastrophic consequences for others.

Enough people look beyond themselves that we have central heat and running water.

It is only the constant attention of careful people that keeps it working so unbelievably well.

Some people degenerate into the hell of resentment, but most refuse to do so.

You have to articulate your own principles, so that you can defend yourself against others' taking inappropriate advantage of you.

You must keep the promises you make to yourself, and reward yourself, so that you can trust and motivate yourself.

Define who you are. Refine your personality.

When you move cities/countries, there are new possibilities. People, including you, can't hem you in with their old notions. You get shaken out of your ruts. You can make new, better ruts, with people aiming at better things.

Cities provide anonymity.

People create their worlds with the tools they have directly at hand.

Not everyone who is failing is a victim.

Not everyone at the bottom wishes to rise.

Distinguish between someone truly wanting and needing help, and someone who is merely exploiting a willing helper.

The person who tries and fails, and is forgiven, and then tries again and fails, and is forgiven, is also too often the person who wants everyone to believe in the authenticity of all that trying.

A boss moves a problematic person into the midst of a stellar team, hoping to improve him by example. What happens? The entire team degenerates.

Place a delinquent teen among comparatively civilized peers. The delinquency spreads, not the stability.

Down is a lot easier than up.

Are you enabling a delusion?

Is it possible that your contempt would be more helpful than your pity?

If you buy the story that everything terrible just happened on its own, with no personal responsibility on the part of the victim, you deny that person all agency in the past (and, by implication, in the present and future, as well).

In this manner, you strip him or her of all power.

It is far more likely that a given individual has just decided to reject the path upward, because of its difficulty.

Failure is easy to understand.

In the same manner, fear, hatred, addiction, promiscuity, betrayal and deception.

It's easier not to shoulder a burden.

It's easier not to think, and not to do, and not to care.

It's easier to put off until tomorrow what needs to be done today.

To fail, you merely have to cultivate a few bad habits. You just have to bide your time.

Loyalty must be negotiated.

Associate with people whose lives would be improved if they saw your life improve.

People who support your upward aim will not tolerate your cynicism and destructiveness. They will instead encourage you when you do good for yourself and others and punish you carefully when you do not.

When you dare aspire upward, you reveal the inadequacy of the present and the promise of the future.

Then you disturb others, in the depths of their souls, where they understand that their cynicism and immobility are unjustifiable.

It's easier for people to be good at something in small, rural communities.

Local heroes have the opportunity to enjoy the serotonin-fuelled confidence of the victor.

People born in small towns are statistically overrepresented among the eminent.

People are not equal in ability or outcome, and never will be.

A very small number of people produce very much of everything.

If the cards are always stacked against you, perhaps the game you are playing is somehow rigged - perhaps by you.

A cliché of nihilism: "In a million years, who's going to know the difference?"

The proper response to that statement is not, "Well, then, everything is meaningless."

It's, "Any idiot can choose a frame of time within which nothing matters."

Standards of better or worse are not illusory or unnecessary.

If you hadn't decided that what you are doing right now was better than the alternatives, you wouldn't be doing it.

The idea of a value-free choice is a contradiction in terms.

Value judgments are a precondition for action.

Furthermore, every activity, once chosen, comes with its own internal standards of accomplishment.

If something can be done at all, it can be done better or worse.

Winning at everything might only mean that you're not doing anything new or difficult.

You might be winning but you're not growing, and growing might be the most important form of winning.

Before you can articulate your own standards of value, you must see yourself as a stranger - and then you must get to know yourself.

Dare to be truthful.

Dare to articulate yourself, and express what would really justify your life.

If you allowed your dark and unspoken desires to manifest themselves - if you were even willing to consider them - you might discover that they were not so dark, given the light of day.

You might discover, instead, that you were just afraid and, so, pretending to be moral.

Are you so sure that your partner would be unhappy if more of you rose to the surface?

Consult your resentment. It's a revelatory emotion.

Resentment always means one of two things.

Either the resentful person is immature, in which case he or she should shut up, quit whining, and get on with it.

Or is being taken advantage of (or allowing yourself to be taken advantage of).

What are you inclined to lie about, assuming that the truth might be intolerable?

What do you fake?

We are always and simultaneously at point "a" (which is less desirable than it could be), moving towards point "b" (which we deem better).

We live within a framework that defines the present as eternally lacking and the future as eternally better.

If we did not see things this way, we would not act at all.

Happiness is found in the journey uphill, and not in the fleeting sense of satisfaction awaiting at the next peak.

What you aim at determines what you see.

To deal with the overwhelming complexity of the world, you ignore it, while you concentrate minutely on your private concerns.

You're blind to everything else.

Perhaps what you really need is right in front of your eyes, but you cannot see it because of what you are currently aiming for.

The world revealed whatever goodness it contains in precise proportion to your desire for the best.

You cannot aim yourself at anything if you are completely undisciplined and untutored.

You only see what you aim at.

You can only find out what you actually believe by watching how you act.

"What is it that is bothering me?"

"Is that something I could fix?"

"Would I actually be willing to fix it?"

If you find that the answer is "no," to any or all of the questions, then look elsewhere. Aim lower.

Search until you find something that bothers you, that you could fix, that you would fix, and then fix it. That might be enough for the day.

It's not for the best that all human corruption is uncritically laid at society's feet.

That conclusion merely displaces the problem, back in time. It explains nothing, and solves no problems.

If society is corrupt, but not the individuals within it, then where did the corruption originate? How is it propagated?

It's a one-sided, deeply ideological theory.

Each person's private trouble cannot be solved by a social revolution, because revolutions are destabilizing and dangerous.

We have learned to live together and organize our complex societies slowly and incrementally, over vast stretches of time, and we do not understand with sufficient exactitude why what we are doing works.

Thus, altering our ways of social being carelessly in the name of some ideological shibboleth (diversity springs to mind) is likely to produce far more trouble than good, given the suffering that even small revolutions generally produce.

The adolescent ethos of the 1960s, a decade whose excesses led to the inability to distinguish between the chaos of immaturity and responsible freedom.

Children, like other human beings, are not only good, they cannot simply be left to their own devices, untouched by society, and bloom into perfection.

Even dogs must be socialized if they are to become acceptable members of the pack - and children are much more complex than dogs.

This means that they are much more likely to go complexly astray if they are not trained, disciplined and properly encouraged.

Parents are the arbiters of society.

They teach children how to behave so that other people will be able to interact meaningfully and productively with them.

It is an act of responsibility to discipline a child.

People often get basic psychological questions backwards.

Why do people suffer from anxiety? That's not a mystery.

How is that people can ever be calm? There's the mystery.

Violence is the default. It's easy. It's peace that is difficult: learned, inculcated, earned.

Parents must reward those attitudes and actions that will bring their child success in the world outside the family, and use threat and punishment when necessary to eliminate behaviours that will lead to misery and failure.

Much more of our sanity than we commonly realize is a consequence of our fortunate immersion in a social community.

Bad laws drive out respect for good laws.

So, don't encumber children with too many rules.

"Limit the rules to what, exactly?" Here are some suggestions:

Do not bite, kick or hit, except in self-defence.

Do not torture and bully other children, so you don't end up in jail.

Eat in a civilized and thankful manner, so that people are happy to have you at their house, and pleased to feed you.

Learn to share, so other kids will play with you.

Pay attention when spoken to by adults, so they don't hate you and might therefore deign to teach you something.

Go to sleep properly, and peaceably, so that your parents can have a private life and not resent your existence.

Take care of your belongings, because you need to learn how and because you're lucky to have them.

Be good company when something fun is happening, so that you're invited for the fun.

Act so that other people are happy you're around, so that people will want you around.

A child who knows these rules will be welcome everywhere.

Parents have a duty to act as proxies for the real world.

This obligation supersedes any responsibility to ensure happiness, foster creativity, or boost self-esteem.

A child who pays attention, instead of drifting, and is comical, but not annoying, and is trustworthy - that child will have friends wherever he goes.

It is possible to learn good by experiencing evil.

The majority of people who were abused as children do not abuse their own children.

The desire for vengeance, however justified, also bars the way to other productive thoughts.

If it's her fault, she might be able to do something about it.

If it's God's fault, however - if reality itself is flawed - then she is doomed.

A hurricane is an act of God. But failure to prepare, when the necessity for preparation is well known - that's sin.

Have you taken full advantage of the opportunities offered to you?

Do you have habits that are destroying your health and well-being?

Are you truly shouldering your responsibilities?

Don't reorganize the state until you have ordered your own experience.

There is little difference between sacrifice and work. They are also both uniquely human.

The discovery of the causal relationship between our efforts today and the quality of tomorrow motivated the social contract - the organization that enables today's work to be stored, reliably, mostly in the form of promises from others.

It takes a long time to learn to keep anything later for yourself.

You are sharing with your future self.

The future is largely composed of other human beings - often precisely those who have watched and evaluated and appraised the tiniest details of your past behavior.

To share does not mean to give away something you value, and get nothing back.

That is instead only what every child who refuses to share fears it means.

To share means, properly, to initiate the process of trade.

Benjamin Franklin once suggested that a newcomer to a neighbourhood ask a new neighbour to do him or her a favour.

The latter could now ask the former for a favour, in return, because of the debt incurred, increasing their mutual familiarity and trust.

In that manner both parties could overcome their natural hesitancy and mutual fear of the stranger.

The society produced by Christianity was far less barbaric than the pagan - even the Roman - ones it replaced. Christian society at least recognized that feeding slaves to ravenous lions for the entertainment of the populace was wrong, even if many barbaric practices still existed. It objected to infanticide, to prostitution, and to the principle that might means right. It insisted that women were as valuable as men. This was asking the impossible, but it happened.

After the solution is implemented, the fact that such problems had ever existed disappears from view.

The fact that automobiles pollute only becomes a problem of sufficient magnitude to attract public attention when the far worse problems that the internal combustion engine solves has vanished from view.

People stricken with poverty don't care about carbon dioxide.

Nietzsche described himself as philosophizing with a hammer.

An idea that grips a person is alive. It wants to express itself, to live in the world.

When an idea manifests itself within a person, it has a strong proclivity to make of that person its avatar: to impel that person to act it out.

Sometimes the person will die, rather than allowing the idea to perish.

Only the idea need die, and that the person with the idea can stop being its avatar, change his or her ways, and continue.

Once you have placed "make the world better" at the top of your value hierarchy, you experience ever-deepening meaning.

It's how you make amends for the pathology of history.

Expedience: That's avoiding responsibility. It's cowardly, and shallow, and wrong.

There is no faith and no courage and no sacrifice in doing what is expedient.

What should you do, when you don't know what to do? Tell the truth.

People define their utopia and then bend their lives into knots trying to make it reality.

An eighteen-year-old decides, arbitrarily, that she wants to retire at fifty-two. She works for three decades to make that happen, failing to notice that she made that decision when she was little more than a child. What did she know about her fifty-two-year-old self, when still a teenager?

Oversimplification and falsification is particularly typical of ideologues. They adopt a single axiom: government is bad, immigration is bad, capitalism is bad, patriarchy is bad. Then they filter and screen their experiences and insist ever more narrowly that everything can be explained by that axiom.

If you will not reveal yourself to others, so much of what you could be will never be forced by necessity to come forward.

New genes in the central nervous system turn themselves on when an organism is placed (or places itself) in a new situation.

These are the building blocks for new structures in the brain.

A lot of you will not be called forth by stasis. You have to say something, go somewhere and do things to get turned on.

If you have a weak character, then adversity will mow you down when it appears.

Everyone needs a concrete, specific goal - an ambition, and a purpose.

An aim provides a destination.

An aim defines progress and makes such progress exciting.

If you have no aim everything can mean anything or nothing.

Error necessitates sacrifice to correct it.

Every bit of learning is a little death.

Every bit of new information challenges a previous conception, forcing it to dissolve into chaos before it can be reborn as something better.

Sometimes such deaths virtually destroy us.

Advice is what you get when the person you're talking with about something horrible and complicated wishes you would just shut up and go away.

Advice is what you get when the person you are talking to wants to revel in the superiority of his or her own intelligence.

There was no way of knowing the objective truth, and there never would be.

There was no objective observer, and there never would be.

There was no complete and accurate story.

Memory is the past's guide to the future.

If you remember that something bad happened, and you can figure out why, then you can try to avoid that bad thing happening again.

That's the purpose of memory.

It's not "to remember the past." It's to stop the same damn thing from happening over and over.

To think, you have to be at least two people at the same time. Then you have to let those people disagree.

Thinking is an internal dialogue between two or more different views of the world.

What are you to do, then, if you aren't very good at thinking, at being two people at one time?

That's easy. You talk. But you need someone to listen.

A listening person is your collaborator and your opponent. A listening person tests your talking (and your thinking) without having to say anything.

Summarize to aid in consolidation and utility of memory.

A long, meandering, emotion-laden account becomes shorter. It is now summed up in your memory

It is now a better memory. It is now less weighty. It has been distilled; reduced to the gist. We have extracted the moral of the story.

It becomes a description of the cause and the result of what happened, formulated such that repetition of the tragedy and pain becomes less likely in the future.

“This is what happened. This is why. This is what I have to do to avoid such things from now on”: That’s a successful memory. That’s the purpose of memory.

To discuss an event, particularly something emotional, like a death or serious illness, is to slowly choose what to leave behind.

We use the reactions of others to keep our complex selves functional.

People organize their brains with conversation. If they don’t have anyone to tell their story to, they lose their minds. Like hoarders, they cannot unclutter themselves.

Too-early problem-solving may indicate a desire to escape from the effort of the problem-formulating conversation.

If you identify things, with careful attention and language, you bring them forward as viable, obedient objects, detaching them from their

underlying near-universal interconnectedness. You simplify them. You make them specific and useful, and reduce their complexity.

If you leave things vague, then this makes the world too complex to be managed.

Consciously define the topic of a conversation, particularly when it is difficult.

You must determine where you have been in your life, so that you can know where you are now.

Otherwise you can't get to where you're going.

Say what you mean, so you can find out what you mean.

Act out what you say, so you can find out what happens.

Then pay attention. Note your errors. Articulate them. Strive to correct them.

Admit to what you want. Tell those around you who you are.

Children weren't trying to be safe — they were trying to become competent.

It's competence that makes people as safe as they can truly be.

If things are made too safe, people (including children) start to figure out ways to make them dangerous again.

When someone says, too loudly, “I stand for this!”, always wonder, “What, then, do you stand against?”

If you cannot understand why someone did something, look at the consequences - and infer the motivation.

If someone is taking advantage of you, you now face a moral obligation to speak up for yourself.

Gather some evidence, strategically, so that when you confront that person, you can give them several examples of their misbehaviour (at least three), so they can't easily weasel out of your accusations. It might mean failing to concede when they offer you their counterarguments. People rarely have more than four at hand.

If you remain unmoved, they get angry, or cry, or run away.

If you can push your point past the first four responses and stand fast against the consequent emotion, you will gain your target's attention - and, perhaps, their respect.

You must also know clearly what you want out of the situation, and be prepared to clearly articulate your desire.

It's a good idea to tell the person you are confronting exactly what you would like them to do instead of what they have done or currently are doing.

Make your request as small and reasonable as possible - but ensure that its fulfillment would satisfy you.

Come to the discussion with a solution, instead of just a problem.

A woman should not look after a man, because she must look after children, and a man should not be a child.

Women don't want boys.

They want someone to contend with; someone to grapple with.

If they're tough, they want someone tougher.

If they're smart, they want someone smarter.

They desire someone who brings to the table something they can't already provide.

If you think tough men are dangerous, wait until you see what weak men are capable of.

“Minimal group identification:”

People are social because they like the members of their own group.

People are antisocial because they don't like the members of other groups.

Cooperation is for safety, security and companionship.

Competition is for personal growth and status.

If a group is too small, it has no power or prestige, and cannot fend off other groups. Being one of its members is not that useful.

If a group is too large, the probability of climbing to the top declines. So, it becomes too hard to get ahead.

Sacrifice everything you hold dear to yet greater perfection.

Let the deadwood burn off, so that new growth can prevail.

Source: [12 Rules for Life - by Jordan Peterson | Derek Sivers](#)