THE INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLING SERIES

THE RULES TO BREAK

Sample pages

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and a Rules player occupies the moral high ground at all times. Make sure they have nothing to reproach you with.

There will just once in a while be times when you feel you have to express a strong opposing view out of principle. Maybe you're standing up to someone who is victimising another person. On these – hopefully rare – occasions you are free to say exactly how you feel about their behaviour, but don't tell them you dislike them. How will that help? Not only is it unnecessary, but it makes your attack seem personal, which undermines its authority. Keep it objective.

These occasions should be few and far between, however. The rest of the time just act as if you like everyone. Apart from being the most civilised way to behave, you'll also find people much more likeable, and you'll enjoy them more.

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RULE 25

You don't have to like everyone

“. . . and everybody will be your friend”

As we saw in the last Rule, there will be people who don't like you. Who knows why . . . ? Maybe you have some habit that doesn't irritate most people, but really gets to them. Perhaps they're jealous. Or they have some misconception about you. Or your relationship to them isn't conducive to liking each other – maybe you have some position of authority over them that they resent, or perhaps they dislike your brother or uncle or friends and are tarring you with the same brush.

Needing to be liked is a common characteristic, and it can help us to make friends. Clearly you're more likely to be popular if you want to be than if you don't give two hoots. However, many people who want to be liked find it hard to cope with being disliked, even by people who they dislike themselves. Now, that's just not logical. OK, I agree that feelings aren't logical and shouldn't have to be, but I want to spell out what an unrealistic position this is. Once you recognise how daft it is, you may find it easier to overcome.

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Think about it. If you don't like someone, why would you care what they think of you? Why is their opinion of any interest? In some cases, it's even flattering to be disliked by someone you have no respect for. The fact is that if you're happy and comfortable in the relationships and friendships you have, if you're satisfied that you're playing by the Rules, if you have no regrets or embarrassment or shame about the way you behave, you won't allow other people's judgement of you to colour your self-judgement. In other words, if you're confident in yourself, you'll be able to shrug off other people's dislike and tell yourself, ‘That's just the way they are. It's nothing to do with me’.

Sometimes you want to be liked by someone because you have a great deal of respect for them. As a Rules player you will not often find yourself disliked, especially by those you admire. What is more likely to apply, if you're underconfident, is that you'll think people dislike you when in fact they don't. So confidence is the key to overcoming this too.

Over time, following the Rules will give you confidence. It won't come overnight, but when you realise you're living your life well, and doing your best by other people, you'll come to feel more comfortable in your own skin. Hang out with the right people – people you respect and who build you up – tackle any demons in your past that hamper your self-image, and you will eventually get to a point where it doesn't matter to you if a few people, who you have little to do with, don't particularly like you. So what?

RULE 26

. . . and not everyone will like you

Sample pages

"If you don't like it, tough"

How many times do you hear people say that they're unhappy with their job/university course/relationship/house/car or whatever, but they're stuck with it? You may well have said it yourself. The problem with this attitude is that it makes you a victim. You have no control over your circumstances and you simply have to put up with whatever fate has thrown at you.

Look, if you take this attitude, it's hardly surprising if you feel miserable, anxious and trapped. Who wouldn't? If there's really nothing you can do to extricate yourself from this thing that's making you so unhappy, that's immensely frustrating. But highly unlikely.

Are you so sure there isn't an alternative? That's very rarely the case, unless you're in prison, for example, or caught in the kind of poverty trap that is relatively unusual, at least in the West, and in which case you're not likely to be reading this book. Actually, there's almost always an alternative.

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You could switch courses. You could jack in the job. You could move house, work on the relationship – or end it – and get rid of the car. If you're feeling trapped, I recommend you think carefully about your options.

I have a friend whose daughter went to a new school at 16. After a few months, she was really unhappy, and felt trapped on a course she wasn't enjoying, because she wanted the qualifications at the end of it. The teaching was fine at her school, but she didn't fit in well socially and wasn't making any close friends. So she decided to go and look around the college in a nearby town. She found out about transport to get there, and asked about available courses, and how she would swap over.

She discovered that it was possible to change courses. The travel would take longer, but otherwise it would work fine. But the more she thought about it, the more she realised that actually she was OK where she was. The teaching was good, the school was close, which was important, and all in all she just didn't want to risk changing. She decided to stay where she was. She concentrated on existing friendships outside school, and treated her course as a place to work rather than socialise.

So she ended up doing exactly the same as before, but now she was happy doing it. Why? Because she was *choosing* to stay there, rather than feeling trapped. She was taking control of her life, and it was an active decision to stay put.

That's why you should consider all your options. You may end up back where you started, but if you stop playing the victim and put yourself in control instead, by actively looking at the alternatives, you should find you're much more ready to appreciate what you have. Or, of course, you might end up making changes to your life. And that's fine too. Just don't moan that you have no choice, that you're stuck – because that's almost never the case.

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RULE 27

Remember, you have a choice

“You need to get your chores over with”

Sometimes it seems as if life is full of minor irritations and frustrations, none of which is actually in the least important. Putting the laundry through, getting that report finished, checking the oil in the car, buying more bread because it's running out before the weekly shop, phoning your mum, rearranging an appointment, paying a bill, finishing an essay, posting a letter. Lots of them involve other people too – you have to keep messaging someone until they respond, you can't rearrange the appointment until you've spoken to your boss, you need to speak to your tutor before you can complete the essay.

Wouldn't it be great if all these little things would stop getting in the way, and you could actually find the time to live life properly? If you added up all the time you spend on these inconsequential actions and interactions, you'd have so much more time to enjoy life.

Sample pages

You might think that, but you'd be wrong. Because, strange as it may seem, all those million tiny actions and preoccupations are in fact what constitute life. Like a pointillist painting, all those little dots – if viewed from a great enough distance – make up the big picture. And that's a good thing. Take them away, and actually there's nothing much left. A close friend of mine who lost her husband tells me that for a while after he died, she really resented the everyday niggles and necessities of life. She just ignored them for a few weeks because she could – for once no one expected anything of her. But once they'd faded into the background, she found there was nothing to replace them. She realised that they weren't, in fact, a negative frustration. They were a positive thing that needed to be embraced. The spaces between things turned out to be more important than the things themselves.