

INTERNATIONAL BEST-SELLING SERIES

THE  
RULES  
OF  
LIFE

EXPANDED EDITION



A Personal Code for Living a Better,  
Happier, More Successful Life

RICHARD TEMPLAR

The author of the international bestseller *The Rules of Life*

THE  
RULES  
OF  
LIFE

*A personal code for living a  
better, happier, and more  
successful kind of life*

*Expanded Edition*

RICHARD TEMPLAR

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## **Dedication**

This book is dedicated to Miyamoto Musashi,  
who taught me the strategy of simplicity,  
and Jamie Greenwood, who taught me  
economy of movement. I am indeed deeply  
indebted to both of them

No Fear

No Surprise

No Hesitation

No Doubt

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# Introduction

For reasons that are too long and complicated to go into here, I had to live with my grandparents for a couple of years when I was very young. They, like many of their generation, were hard-working, contented sort of people. My grandfather had taken early retirement owing to an industrial accident (a truck-load of bricks fell on his foot) and my grandmother worked in a large department store in London. Having me dumped unexpectedly on her for a while obviously caused logistical problems. I was too young for school, and my grandfather wasn't to be trusted to look after me at home. (Men didn't look after children in those days...my, how things have changed.) Her solution was to tuck me under her wing—on some days physically as well as metaphorically, as she smuggled me past managers and supervisors—and we went to work together.

Now going to work with “Nan” was fun. I was expected to keep quiet and still for long periods and, as I didn't know any different, assumed this was normal. I found that by watching customers—often from my safe refuge under a huge desk—I could pass the time quite happily. Thus was born an immense appetite for people-watching.

My mother—later I went back to live with her—said it would never get me anywhere. I'm not so sure. You see, early in my career, observation of those around showed that there were a distinct set of behaviors that got people promoted. If there were two women of equal ability, for example, and one dressed, thought, and behaved as if she had already been promoted, she would be the one who got the next available job at that next level. Putting these behaviors into practice gave me a fast track up the career ladder. These “rules” formed the basis of my book *Rules of Work*, now a bestseller in its field.

Just as you can identify behaviors that make some people glide effortlessly onward and upward at work, so you can in life. Observing life in general, people very broadly seem to fall into two main camps: those who seem to have mastered the knack of successful living, and those who still find it all a bit of a struggle. And when I say successfully mastered it, I don't mean by amassing wealth or being at the top in some stressful career. No, I mean mastered it in the old-fashioned sense that my hard-working grandparents would have understood. People who are content, mostly happy on a day-to-day basis, and in general healthy and getting more out of life. Those who are still struggling tend to be not so happy on the whole, and the enjoyment of life just isn't what it should be.

So what's the secret? The answer comes down to a simple choice. We can all choose to do certain things every day of our lives. Some things we do will make us unhappy, and some things we choose to do will make us happier. By observing people, I have reasoned that if we follow a few basic "Rules of Life," we tend to get more done, shrug off adversity more easily, get more out of life, and spread a little happiness around us as we go. People who play by the Rules seem to bring their luck with them, light up a room when they enter, have more enthusiasm for life, and cope better.

So what follows are my Rules of Life. They aren't set in stone, and they aren't secret or difficult. And they are based entirely on my observations of happy and successful people. I have noticed that those who are happy are those who follow most of them. Those who seem miserable are the ones who don't follow them. And the successful ones often don't even realize this is what they are doing—they are natural Rules Players. Whereas the less instinctive ones often feel something is missing and spend their entire life looking for something—often themselves—that will miraculously give their life meaning or fill some empty void within them. But the answer lies much closer to home—simple changes in behavior are all that is required.

Can it really be that easy? No, of course not. To live by the Rules is never easy. If it was, we would all have stumbled on this a long time ago. It has to be hard to make it worthwhile. But, and this is the beauty of the Rules, they are all individually simple and attainable. You can aim high and go for them all or take one or two and start there. Me? No, I never get it all right, ever. I fall by the wayside as often as anyone else, but I do know what to do to get back up again. I know what I have to do to make my life make sense again.

By watching people, I came to realize that all of these Rules of Life are sensible. Personally I love the sort of advice that begins, “Go quietly . . .,” but I’m not sure how I’m supposed to do that. However, a bit of advice such as, “Polish your shoes before you go out” makes more sense to me because that is something I can do and, more importantly, in which I can immediately see the logic. Incidentally, I still feel polished shoes make a better impression than scruffy ones.

You won’t actually find shoe polishing here, nor will you find anything inspirational and New Age, which doesn’t mean those things don’t count. It’s just that I feel it is better to have realistic things we can do rather than uplifting clichés that may well be true—time is a great healer, for example, and love does conquer all—but when you want things to do, clichés don’t hit the button as far as I’m concerned.

What you will find here is good old-fashioned common sense. There is nothing here you don’t already know. This book isn’t a revelation; it’s a reminder. It reminds you that the Rules of Life are universal, obvious, simple. Do them. They work.

But what about those who don’t do them and still seem successful? Well, I’m sure we all know people who have acquired great wealth and who are ruthless, unpleasant, dictatorial, and sail morally pretty close to the wind. And if that is what you want, it is attainable. But I’m assuming you want to be able to sleep nights, live with yourself, and be a thoroughly nice person. And

the beauty of all this is it is entirely down to personal choice. We all choose every day whether we are on the side of the angels or the beasts. The Rules of Life help you choose to be on the side of the angels, but it's not compulsory. Personally, when I go to sleep at night, I like to do a quick recap of my day and then, hopefully, I can say to myself, "Yep, good day, did OK," and feel proud of what I've achieved, rather than feeling regretful and dissatisfied with my actions and life. I like to go to sleep feeling I've made a difference, been kind to people rather than hurting them, spread a little happiness, had some fun and generally got nearer to 10 than 1 out of 10 for good behavior.

The Rules of Life aren't about making lots of money and being incredibly successful. (You might need to read *The Rules of Work* for that.) It is quite simply about how you feel inside, how you affect people around you, what sort of a friend, partner, and parent you are, what sort of impact you make on the world, and what sort of impression you leave in your wake.

I regard my books, sometimes, a little like children. I pat them on the head, wipe their nose, and send them out into the world. I like to know how they've been received. So if *The Rules of Life* makes a difference to you, or you have a Rule or two of your own that I've missed, I'm always interested in hearing from you. You can email me at [Richard.Templar@RichardTemplar.co.uk](mailto:Richard.Templar@RichardTemplar.co.uk).

*Richard Templar*

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Elif Vatanoglu

and Donna the pizza lady

PART I

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RULES  
FOR YOU

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I've divided the Rules of Life into four areas—you, your partner, your family and friends, and your social circle (including work and friends)—to represent the four unconscious circles we all draw around ourselves.

Let's begin with the most important of these, the Rules for ourselves—personal Rules, Rules for us. These are the Rules that will help get us out of bed in the mornings, face the world with a positive attitude, and navigate our way safely and successfully through our day, no matter what may arise. These are the Rules that will help reduce stress levels, give us the right kind of outlook, encourage us to set our own standards, and have goals to aim for.

I guess that for each and every one of us, these Rules will have to be adapted to take into account our upbringing, our age, and our situation. We all need to have personal standards to live up to. They will vary from person to person, but it is vitally important to have them. Without them we are adrift and unable to monitor how we are doing. With them we have a firm center, somewhere we can get back to, somewhere to touch base and recharge. They are our benchmark for personal progress.

But it's not all about standards; it's also about lightening up, having fun, and enjoying life.

# RULE 1

## Keep It Under Your Hat

You are about to become a Rules Player. You are about to embark on a life-changing adventure, possibly, if you choose to accept your mission. You are about to discover ways to become positive, happy, and successful in everything you do. So there's no need to say anything to anybody about it. Keep quiet. No one likes a smart arse. That's it. First Rule: *Keep It Under Your Hat*.

There may well be times when you do want to talk to other people about what you're doing because, quite naturally, you want to share it with somebody. Well, you can't and you don't. Let people find out for themselves with no clues from you. You may think this unfair, but it is actually fairer than you believe. If you tell them, they'll shy away. And quite rightly so—we all hate being preached at. It's a bit like when you give up smoking and suddenly find this new healthier way of living and you simply have to convert all your old smoking friends. Trouble is, they aren't ready to quit yet and you find they label you as smug or self-righteous or, even worse, an ex-smoker. And how we all hate those.

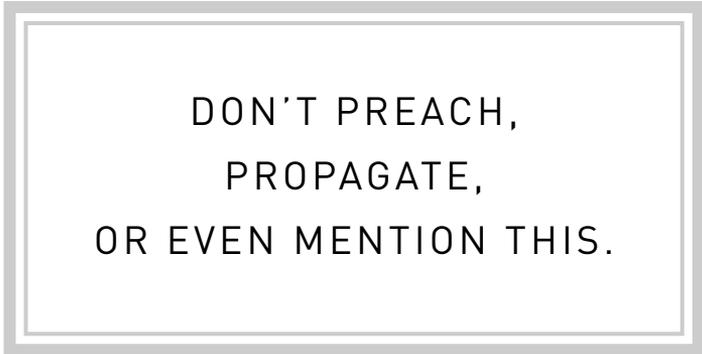
So the first Rule is, quite simply, don't preach, propagate, try to convert, shout from the rooftops, or even mention this.

You will get a warm glow from changing your attitude to life and having people ask what it is you have done, are doing, and you can say that it's nothing, merely a sunny day and you feel better/happier/livelier/whatever. There is no need to go into any detail because that's not really what people want to know. In fact, it's exactly the opposite of what they want to

# RULE 1

know. It's a bit like when someone asks how you are. What they want to really hear is just the one word, "Fine." Even if you are in the very pits of despair, that's all people want to hear because anything more requires commitment on their part. And for a casual "How are you?", that's most certainly not what they want. What they want is just "Fine." And then they can be about their business without any further involvement. If you don't say "Fine" but instead unburden yourself, they will back off pretty quickly.

And it's the same with being a Rules Player. No one really wants to know, so keep quiet. How do I know? Because when I wrote *The Rules of Work*, which turned a lot of people onto the ability to be successful in the workplace without having to resort to underhand means, I suggested the same thing and found it worked. Just get on with it, do it quietly, and go about your daily life happily and smugly without having to tell anyone anything.



DON'T PREACH,  
PROPAGATE,  
OR EVEN MENTION THIS.

## RULE 2

# You'll Get Older But Not Necessarily Wiser

There is an assumption that as we get older we will get wiser; not true, I'm afraid. But we can carry on being just as foolish, still making plenty of mistakes. It's just that we make new ones, different ones. We do learn from experience and may not make the same mistakes again, but there is a whole new pickle jar of fresh ones just lying in wait for us to trip up and fall into. The secret is to accept this and not to beat yourself up when you do make new ones. The Rule really is: Be kind to yourself when you do muck things up. Be forgiving, and accept that it's all part of that growing older but no wiser routine.

Looking back, we can always see the mistakes we made, but we fail to see the ones looming up. Wisdom isn't about not making mistakes, but about learning to escape afterward with our dignity and sanity intact.

When we are young, aging seems to be something that happens to, well, old people. But it does happen to us all, and we have no choice but to embrace it and roll with it. Whatever we do and however we are, the fact is we are going to get older. And this aging process does seem to speed up as we get older.

You can look at it this way—the older you get, the more areas you've covered to make mistakes in. There will always be new areas of experience where we have no guidelines and where we'll handle things badly, overreact, get it wrong. And the more flexible we are, the more adventurous, the more life-embracing, then the more new avenues there will be to explore—and make mistakes in, of course.

## RULE 2

As long as we look back and see where we went wrong and resolve not to repeat such mistakes, there is little else we need to do. Remember that any Rules that apply to you also apply to everyone else around you. Others are all getting older, too. And not any wiser particularly. Once you accept this, you'll be more forgiving and kinder toward yourself and others.

Finally, yes, time does heal, and things do get better as you get older. After all, the more mistakes you've made, the less likely that you'll come up with new ones. The best thing is that if you get a lot of your mistakes over and done with early on in life, there will be less to learn the hard way later on. And that's what youth is all about: a chance to make all the mistakes you can and get them out of the way.

WISDOM ISN'T ABOUT NOT  
MAKING MISTAKES BUT  
ABOUT LEARNING TO  
ESCAPE AFTERWARD WITH  
OUR DIGNITY AND SANITY  
INTACT.

## RULE 3

# Accept What Is Done Is Done

People make mistakes. Sometimes very serious ones. As often as not, the mistakes aren't deliberate or personal. Sometimes people just don't know what they are doing. This means that if, in the past, people have behaved badly toward you, it wasn't necessarily because they meant to be horrid, but because they were as naïve, as foolish, as human as the rest of us. They made mistakes in the way they brought you up or finished a relationship with you or whatever, not because they wanted to do it that way, but because they didn't know any different.

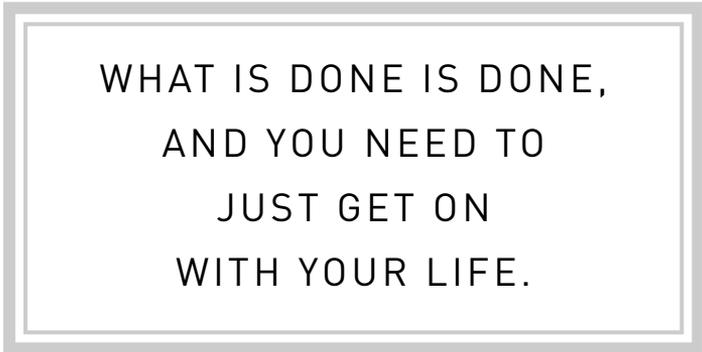
If you want to, you can let go of any feelings of resentment, of regret, of anger. You can accept that you are a fabulous human being because of all the bad things that have happened to you, not in spite of them. What is done is done, and you need to just get on with your life. Don't use the labels "good" and "bad." Yes, I know some of it is indeed bad, but it is how we let it affect us that is the real "bad." You could let all these things get you down, fizzle away internally like some emotional acid making you ill and resentful and stuck. But you will let them go, embrace them as character forming, and in general as positive rather than negative.

On paper I had a seriously dysfunctional childhood and for a while was resentful. I blamed my bizarre upbringing for all that was weak or dispirited or badly formed in me. It's so easy to do. But once I accepted that what was done was done, and that I could choose to forgive and get on with my life, things improved enormously. Not all of my siblings chose the same route, and they carried on building up the resentment until it overwhelmed them.

## RULE 3

For me it was essential, if I wanted more out of my life, to embrace all the bad things as being an important part of me and to move on. In fact, I wanted them to fuel me into my future, to become positive to such an extent that I couldn't imagine being me without them. Now, if given the choice, I wouldn't change a thing. Yes, looking back, it was tough being the kid I was, living the life I did, but it has certainly helped make me, me.

I think the change occurred once I realized that even if I could get in front of me all the people who had “done me wrong,” there would still be nothing they could do. I could shout at them, berate them, rant at them, but there would be nothing they could do to make amends or put things right. They, too, would have to accept that what's done is done. There is no going back, only forward. Make it a motto for life—keep moving forward.



WHAT IS DONE IS DONE,  
AND YOU NEED TO  
JUST GET ON  
WITH YOUR LIFE.

# RULE 4

## Accept Yourself

If you accept that what's done is done, you are left with yourself exactly as you are. You can't go back and change anything, so you've got to work with what you've got. I'm not suggesting anything New Age here such as love yourself—that's far too ambitious. No, let's begin with simple accepting. Accepting is easy because it is exactly what it says—accepting. You don't have to improve or change or strive for perfection. Quite the opposite. Just accept.

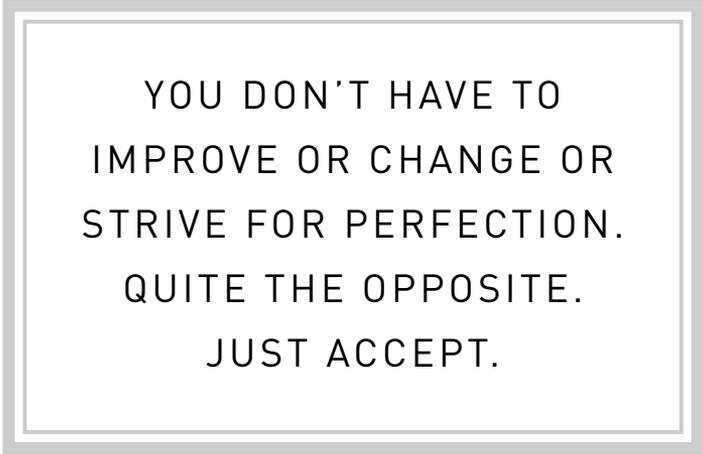
That means accepting all the warts and emotional lumps and bumps, the bad parts, the weaknesses, and the rest of it. This doesn't mean we are happy with everything about ourselves, or that we are going to be lazy and lead a bad life. We are going to accept the way we are, initially, and then build on that. What we are not going to do is beat ourselves up because we don't like some parts. Yes, we can change lots, but that will come later. We're only up to Rule 4 here.

This has to be a Rule because there can be no choice here. We have to accept that we are the way we are—the result of everything that has happened. It all just is. You, like me, like all of us, are human. That means you're pretty complex. You come fully loaded with desires, anguish, sins, pettiness at times, mistakes, ill temper, rudeness, deviation, hesitation, and repetition. That's what makes a human being so wonderful: the complexity. None of us can ever be perfect. We start with what we've got and who we are and then we can only make a choice, each day, to strive for some kind of better. And that's all people can ask of us—to make that choice. To be awake and aware, to be ready to do the right thing. And accept that some days you aren't going to make it. Some days you will,

# RULE 4

like all of us, fall far short. That's OK; don't beat yourself up. Pick yourself up and start again. Accept that you will fail from time to time and that you are human.

I know it can be hard at times, but once you have picked up the gauntlet of becoming a Rules Player, you're well on the path to improvement. Stop picking faults with yourself or giving yourself a hard time. Instead, accept that you are what you are. You're doing the best you can at this point in time, so give yourself a pat on the back and move on.



YOU DON'T HAVE TO  
IMPROVE OR CHANGE OR  
STRIVE FOR PERFECTION.  
QUITE THE OPPOSITE.  
JUST ACCEPT.

# RULE 5

## Know What Counts and What Doesn't

Being here counts. Being kind and considerate counts. Getting through each day without seriously offending anyone or hurting anyone counts. Having the latest technology doesn't.

Sorry, I don't hate technology. In fact, I probably have pretty much all the latest gizmos. I just (a) don't overly rely too much on any of it and (b) see them all as useful tools rather than having any intrinsic meaning in themselves, in a status symbol or one-up kind of way.

Doing something useful with your life counts. Going shopping because you're bored doesn't. Yes, by all means go shopping, but see what you do as counting or not counting, being real or not being real, having real value or not, being of some benefit or not. This does not mean chucking it all up and going off to some fly-infested swamp to work with the locals and catch malaria—although that in itself would count, but you don't have to go to quite those extremes to make your life meaningful.

I guess the Rule means focusing on what is important to you in your life and making positive changes to ensure you feel happy with what you are dedicating your life to (see Rule 6). This doesn't mean long-term plans mapped out to the smallest detail. It means knowing, roughly, where you are going and what you are doing. Be awake rather than asleep. A fellow author, Tim Freke, calls it “lucid living”<sup>\*</sup>—a perfect term for what we are talking about.

<sup>\*</sup> Lucid Living by Tim Freke (Books for Burning, 2005).

## RULE 5

There are some things in this life that are important and a whole lot of things that aren't. It doesn't take too much discrimination to work out which are which. And there are a whole lot more things that don't count, aren't really important, to choose from. I'm not saying we can't have trivia in our lives—we can and it's fine. Just don't go mistaking the trivia for what is really important. Having time for loved ones and friends is important; watching the latest soap isn't. Repaying a debt is important; what brand of detergent you use isn't. Nurturing our children and teaching them real values is important; dressing them in designer fashion isn't. You get the idea. Think about what you do that counts—and do more of it.

THERE ARE SOME THINGS  
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IMPORTANT AND A WHOLE  
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AREN'T.

# RULE 6

## Dedicate Your Life to Something

To know what counts and what doesn't, you have to know what you are dedicating your life to. There are, of course, no right or wrong answers to this one because it's a very personal choice—but it's really useful to have an answer, rather than not really knowing.

As an example, my own life has been driven by two things: (a) someone once told me that if my soul or spirit was the only thing I was likely to be taking with me when I went, then it ought to be the best thing I had; (b) my curious upbringing.

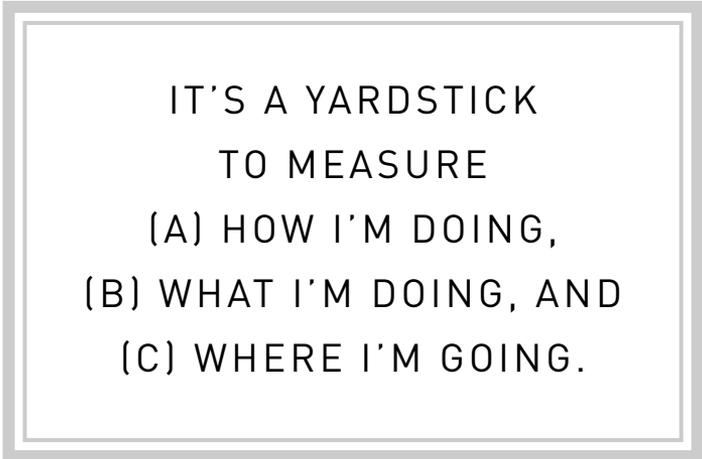
The first one isn't, for me at least, in any way religious. It just struck a chord with me, triggered something. Whatever it was I was taking with me, then perhaps I ought to do a bit of work on it. Make sure it really is the very best thing about me. That got me thinking. How on earth do you go about that? The answer still is that I haven't got a clue. I have explored and experimented, learned and made mistakes, been a seeker and a follower, read and observed, and wrestled with this great problem all my life. How do you go about improving your life on that level? I think the only conclusion I have come to is to live as decent a life as possible, to go through causing as little damage as possible, to treat everyone with whom you come into contact with respect and dignity. It's something to dedicate my life to, and it works for me.

And how can my curious upbringing cause me to focus on what I am dedicating my life to? Well, having had a “dysfunctional” upbringing and having chosen to let it motivate me rather than affect me, I am acutely aware that many people also need to discard that feeling of being badly affected by

# RULE 6

what has gone before. This is what I dedicate my life to. Yes, it might be crazy; I might be crazy. But at least I have something I can focus on, something (for me) that counts.

Now, none of this is big stuff, and by that I mean I don't go around with this emblazoned on my forehead—"Templar dedicates his life to ..." sort of thing. It's more that quietly, in my heart, I have something that I can devote my attention to. It's a yardstick by which I can measure (a) how I'm doing, (b) what I'm doing, and (c) where I'm going. You don't need to trumpet it. You don't need to tell anyone (see Rule 1). You don't even need to think it out in too much detail. A simple internal mission statement will do. Disney's mission, for example, is: "To make people happy." Decide what it is you are dedicating your life to. It makes the rest much easier.



IT'S A YARDSTICK  
TO MEASURE  
(A) HOW I'M DOING,  
(B) WHAT I'M DOING, AND  
(C) WHERE I'M GOING.

# RULE 7

## Be Flexible in Your Thinking

Once your thinking gets crystallized, rigid, and formed, you've lost the battle. Once you think you have all the answers, you might as well hang up your boots. Once you get set in your ways, you're already part of history.

To get the most out of life, you have to keep all your options open, keep your thinking and life flexible. You have to be ready to roll as the storm breaks—and, by golly, it always breaks when you least expect it. The instant you are established in a set pattern, you set yourself up for being knocked off-course. You might need to examine your thinking pretty closely to understand what I mean. Flexible thinking is a bit like mental martial arts—being ready to duck and weave, dodge and flow. Try to see life not as the enemy, but as a friendly sparring partner. If you're flexible, you'll have fun. If you stand your ground, you're likely to get knocked about a bit.

We all have set patterns in life. We like to label ourselves as this or that and are quite proud of our opinions and beliefs. We all like to read a set paper, watch the same sorts of TV shows or movies, go to the same sort of shops every time, eat the sort of food that suits us, wear the same type of clothes. And all this is fine. But if we cut ourselves off from all other possibilities, we become boring, rigid, hardened—and thus likely to get knocked about a bit.

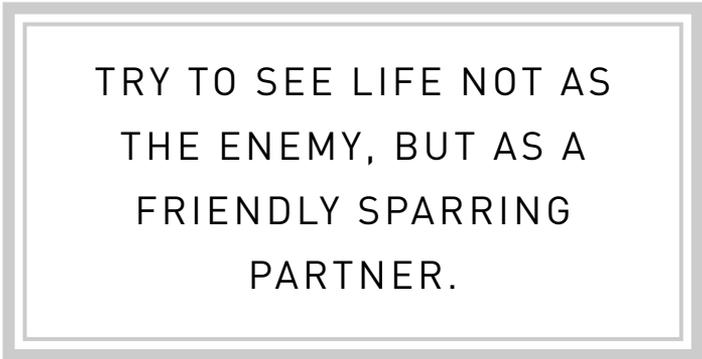
You have to see life as a series of adventures. Each adventure is a chance to have fun, learn something, explore the world, expand your circle of experience and friends, and broaden your horizons. Shutting down to adventure means exactly that—you are shut down.

# RULE 7

The second you are offered an opportunity to have an adventure, to change your thinking, to step outside of yourself, go for it and see what happens. If this thought scares you, remember that you can always go back into your shell the second it's over, if you want to.

But even saying yes to every opportunity isn't set in stone as a rule, because that would be inflexible. The really flexible thinkers know when to say "no" as well as when to say "yes."

If you want to know how flexible your thinking is, here are a couple of tests. Are the books by the side of your bed the same sorts of books you've always read? Have you found yourself saying anything like, "I don't know any people like that" or "I don't go to those kind of places"? If so, then perhaps it's time to broaden your mind and take the shackles off your thinking.



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