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RULES
OF
PEOPLE



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THE RULES OF PEOPLE

A personal code for getting
the best from everyone

RICHARD TEMPLAR



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Introduction

Over the years I've written down many Rules based on my observations of what behaviour is most likely to lead to a happy and successful life. Several hundred Rules, in fact, across this whole series of books. Each one of them outlines some way you can behave, something you can do, a way you can look at things, which will go some way to improving your life. Roll them all up together and the potential for getting the best out of life is huge.

However, I'll be the first to admit that there is one tiny flaw in this: other people. It doesn't matter how effectively you assert control over your own actions and reactions, how minutely you plan your own life – other people can always come along and chuck a spanner in your freshly oiled and smooth-running works. And there's nothing you can do about other people's behaviour. Or is there?

Well, that's where this book comes in. Because actually, you'd be surprised just how much you can do to encourage other people to behave in ways which will benefit both you and them. I'm sure you've realised through your life that the best times are the ones when everyone is pulling together, working in harmony, feeling a spirit of co-operation. Unless you're a sociopath – which I doubt if you've picked up this book – you're happier when the people around you are happy. Not rocket science, is it?

So it follows that the more you can do to make everyone else's life better, not just your own, the easier and more enjoyable your own life becomes. The skill is in creating happy people around you. Yes, even that grumpy colleague, or your stressy sister, or your critical college tutor could be a bit less grumpy or stressy or picky if you knew how to handle them. Of course you can't wave a magic wand and make all their troubles vanish, but you can at least make the time they spend around you more pleasant for everyone.

Many years ago I worked with a guy who was really difficult. I hated going into the office in the mornings. He didn't like me any

more than I liked him, and while we both remained civil and well-behaved, the animosity was obvious. Eventually someone sensible banged our heads together, and I resolved to give him a second chance. Fortunately he did the same thing with me.

Now, the only thing that changed at this point was our behaviour. I was still the same person and so was he. However, those little changes in behaviour made so much difference that we saw a completely new side to each other. And – almost as if we'd been acting out some corny movie – we became firm friends, keeping closely in touch even after we'd both moved on to other jobs and other parts of the country.

It taught me just how much difference my own behaviour makes to the way other people act around me. And in the decades since, I've observed countless times – in others as well as myself – how one person modifying their behaviour can influence the people they interact with.

We all deal with lots of very different people in a normal day – different in terms of their own personality, and in terms of their relationship with us. There are people you encounter at work or college, who you want straightforward dealings with that don't cause hassle or unpleasantness. Then there's your family, who you care deeply about and can't really feel good unless they're all broadly OK. And then there are your friends, who you hang out with because you like being together, but sometimes you worry about them, and some of them can be tricky at times. And there are all the people you encounter in between – the shopkeeper you always stop for a natter with, the neighbour who is mostly friendly but doesn't like your cat, the client you're trying to close a deal with, the chap who organises your running club, your dentist, the customers who come into your shop, your child's teacher . . . these diverse people will all make your life easier if you can do the same for them.

All those different people having different lives – how are you supposed to know how to get the best out of them all? The answer is that they're not as different as you might think. Not in the ways

that matter. The guidelines, principles, strategies – the Rules – that you need to know will help your relationships with everyone.

The first section of this book is all about understanding people: what makes us all tick. We're all pretty similar underneath, and if you understand people in general you're a long way to understanding the specific people you come across every day. I've also included a section on how to help people, because we all want the people around us to feel good. Sometimes we love them so much it hurts if they're in any trouble, sometimes we want to get the best out of them, and most times we'd rather other people were happier than not. It makes it easier to sleep at night if we've done our best for the people we've met that day.

Of course, a lot of your dealings will be with people who you'd rather were for you than against you. You want to get them on your side because they can give you support, or make your life easier, or improve your sales, or go along with your decisions. There are lots of ways to encourage people to throw in their lot on your side, and to feel good about it. And that's what you want. We Rules players aren't interested in manipulating or coercing people. We want them on our side willingly. In fact we don't want sides at all. Just everyone in agreement.

Having said all that, there's no denying that some people can be just plain tricky. Maybe they've had a tough day, maybe they've had a tough life, maybe they have no excuse. Whatever the reason, it helps to know the best way to handle them, so I've concluded the book with some useful Rules for getting the best out of some of your more challenging colleagues, family and friends.

All the central Rules are here, but of course there will always be other useful guidelines for dealing with people. If you have any favourites of your own, you can contact me via my Facebook page (below). I can't promise always to find time to respond, but I can promise you that I'll read your post with interest.

Richard Templar

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UNDERSTANDING PEOPLE

When everyone is happy and pulling together, we all benefit. You want to get the best out of people, for their benefit and yours, and you also want to be able to help and support them as well as possible. The two go hand in hand really. So to get the best, you have to know what makes them tick.

You wouldn't expect to be able to fix your car when it breaks down without knowing what goes on under the bonnet. It might have been something really simple, but without a grasp of basic mechanics you can't fix it, can't expect it to get you home. A simple understanding about how the internal combustion engine works, though, and you've a decent chance of making it to your destination.

Just so, even a rudimentary knowledge of what makes people work will mean you can get what you need from them, and help them along the way too. This first group of Rules sets out principles of human behaviour which will be useful in dealing with other people. These are the underlying factors which cause people to behave as they do, and which can give you clues to persuading them to behave differently where their current style works against either you or them, or both.

I've included a few Rules at the end of this section about helping your own child once they become a teenager, because I've found a lot of parents feel they flounder at this stage. They can see their almost-adult offspring need support but don't feel confident about how to give it. Mind you, all the Rules apply to teenagers you know who aren't your own child, and a lot of them are echoed in other relationships too.

There's nothing tricky or scientific here – I'm not clever enough for that. These are just basic observations, many of which you will recognise once you think about them.

RULE 1

Understanding helps

We all have a backstory. It explains why we behave as we do. OK, it doesn't always justify it, but at least it's a reason for our behaviour. Of course, no one else ever knows all the details and complexities of your backstory like you do, but lots of people get the gist.

There'll be a reason why certain things make you feel more anxious, stressed, excited, cynical, depressed, relaxed, angry, confident than other people do. It might be genetic, it might be because of bad past experiences, or according to Freud it might all be down to your parents. Friends might say that you shouldn't stress so much about this, or be so suspicious about that, or be too laid back, or shout so much. But they don't understand – if they'd been to the same school as you, or lived through the poverty you have, or had siblings like yours, or worked for your last boss, they'd realise why you behave that way.

Listen, this is true of everyone. There's no one on the planet who isn't shaped by their personal experiences. So when your colleague snaps at you, or your friend lets you down, or your partner forgets your birthday, just remember there's always a reason. It might be a rubbish reason, but there's a reason.

And I'm telling you this because if you can understand the reason, it makes it easier to deal with other people's negative behaviour. Even if you can't change the way they act, you'll find it slightly easier to take if you get the reasons behind it. And often simply because you're prepared to understand, they can let go of being defensive and decide to change their behaviour.

Suppose your boss is always stressy whenever there's a risk of getting behind schedule, whether it's a prestige project or just an internal lunch meeting. It's not your fault, and you don't appreciate them taking out their stress on you. But what if you knew – or even just suspected – that their father was a strict disciplinarian who

hated lateness? Or in their last job they missed out on promotion because they missed a crucial deadline? Doesn't that make you feel a weensy bit more sympathetic? Wouldn't you like to help a bit? Good. Then make sure that you're always in good time, and if anything has to run up to the wire, keep your boss fully in the picture well in advance about when everything will happen, and spell out why it means you won't overrun. There now. Your boss will be less stressed and less stressy with you. Isn't that better?

Let's be clear – I'm not excusing bad behaviour.¹ Of course no one should take their stress out on someone who doesn't deserve it. Or their anger, their anxiety, their insecurity or anything else. But it happens. This is about helping you to cope when you're on the receiving end of it. I'm not asking you to understand the other person's motivations for their sake, but for yours.

**THERE'S NO ONE ON THE
PLANET WHOSE PERSONAL
EXPERIENCES AND MAKE-UP
DON'T SHAPE THEIR
BEHAVIOUR**

¹ Theirs or yours.

RULE 2

No one has to be like you

I used to sit next to someone at work who liked their desk to be unnecessarily, pointlessly, excruciatingly tidy. That's how I saw it anyway. All the files lined up, neat little coaster to put a coffee mug down on, every pen and hole puncher and paperclip exactly in place. It followed through to the way he worked too. Everything had to be filed the instant he finished using it, all notes had to be made in the right colour pen, every email colour-coded and archived, detailed to-do lists all marked with codes to indicate priority, urgency and importance.

It drove me mad. He couldn't do anything impulsively, or change direction in the middle of a task, or be spontaneous about following up ideas. Or cope with me dropping an untidy file on top of his perfect array of squared-up paperwork. I used to think it was absurd that he was stifling his own creativity and hamstringing his ability to be flexible.

But . . . As usual, I had to concede eventually that there was a but, and it was this. If there was a sudden emergency, guess who could always find the relevant email before anyone else? Who could be relied on to notice if the rest of us forgot some vital component of a task? Who could organise any event or project with superhuman efficiency? Who was always on time at every meeting with all the paperwork, and spare copies in case people like me had left theirs on their desks?

If I'm completely honest, for a long time I looked down on my colleague because he couldn't generate ideas like I could, or get other departments to put themselves out for ours, or act spontaneously. But it wasn't his precisely ordered desk that stopped him doing those things. He just wasn't that kind of person. The desk was the most obvious indicator of who he was, and of his own particular skill set, which was very different from mine. And – I came to realise – at least as valuable as mine. Just different.

Almost all of us are guilty at times of thinking our way is best. And that people who are different from us are wrong – or at least less right than us. I remember at the age of about 12 staying over at a friend's house and discovering that his family used a different brand of toothpaste from ours. I thought they were really weird – obviously our toothpaste was the best brand, or we wouldn't use it. So why weren't they using it too?

Like all this stuff, I know you know it really. It's just easy to forget sometimes. When other people are driving us up the wall, it's so much simpler to criticise them for being stupid or irrational or unreasonable than to consider that maybe their behaviour is actually quite legitimate but doesn't happen to suit us. However, if you want to get the best out of people – for you as well as for them – you have to be firm with yourself about acknowledging that just because you don't like something, it doesn't mean it's wrong. Once I finally accepted that my colleague was never going to have a messy desk like mine, and that actually that was OK, it was much easier to like him and appreciate him.

**JUST BECAUSE YOU DON'T LIKE
SOMETHING, DOESN'T MEAN
IT'S WRONG**

RULE 3

People hear what they want to hear

A teacher friend of mine tells me it can be really hard getting through to a student that they're studying the wrong subject if they want good grades – this subject just isn't their forté and they're not going to do well in it. Sometimes, she tells me, she has to be quite brutal just to get them to listen to what she's saying.

The fact is that people are programmed to pick out the things that they want to hear, and ignore the things they don't – programmed to such a degree they're unaware they're doing it. But if you want to get people on your side, and get their co-operation, you need to understand that if they don't want to hear something, it will take a lot more effort from you to get your point across.

It's human nature – no use getting frustrated by it. You just need to take it into account. Whether you're telling your boss that the report you're working on can't be completed to their deadline, or telling your sister that you can't all go on holiday together as one huge family, have your antennae tuned to whether they've really taken on board what you're saying. If you suspect they haven't – if they're arguing with the facts, or still talking just as they were before you put them straight – explain it more clearly ('The next data drop isn't until the twenty-second of the month, which means we can't start crunching the numbers until then') and, if they still don't seem convinced, ask them questions ('Can we guesstimate the figures so we don't need the latest data?'). Questions will force them to think about the problem, so it makes them engage with the problem they're sidestepping.

And don't blither about. Make your words concise, clear, specific, blunt. Don't tell your boss, 'The problem is that, well, you know, it's looking tricky for the end of the month. I mean, the data drop is very close to the deadline, and it's a lot of work, so...hard to