

Simple Rules Summary

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1-Sentence-Summary: *Simple Rules* shows you how to navigate our incredibly complex world by learning the structure of and coming up with your own set of easy, clear-cut rules to follow for the most various situations in life.

Read in: 4 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:



Dr. Donald Sull is a Harvard and MIT professor, focusing on how companies can come up with strategies and execute them in a turbulent, fast-changing environment. In 2015, he partnered with Kathleen M. Eisenhardt, a Stanford professor in Management Science and Engineering to transfer what he's learned about managing complexity from business to life.

The result is *Simple Rules*, which is aimed at showing you the kind of heuristics at play in some of the world's most successful companies and in nature. After reading it, you won't only know what kinds of simple rules exist, but also how to come up with your own, so you can decide better and faster when things get hectic in everyday life.

Dr. Sull has identified six categories of simple rules, as well as a three-step process to come up with your own, which I'd like to share with you in today's 3 lessons:

1. Boundary rules, prioritizing rules and stopping rules make you more effective.
2. You can become more efficient with how-to rules, coordination rules and timing rules.
3. To reach your goals faster, create your own simple rules in three steps.

When it comes to making life simpler, there's nothing to wait for. Let's get to work!

Lesson 1: Increase your effectiveness with boundary rules, prioritizing rules and stopping rules.

There is a Frank Zappa song called “Don’t Eat The Yellow Snow,” which has been ripped off and piggybacked on a lot, especially in comedy. A patch of yellow snow is likely the result of someone taking a pee, so you’d best avoid it, no matter how thirsty you are.

Aside from a good laugh, this quote is also a “simple rule.” If snow is yellow, don’t eat it. Period. Which brings us right to the first category Dr. Sull describes in the book:

1. **Boundary rules.** These help you make binary decisions. Based on the rule you can either say “yes” or “no.” For example, a simple rule burglars use is “Never break into a house with a car parked in front of it.”
2. **Prioritizing rules.** When there’s more than one option, you can rank them, which is a very typical approach to simplify investing. For example, you could decide to save 10% of your income as cash, invest another 10% in stocks and use another 10% to buy books and get smarter.
3. **Stopping rules.** Just like beginning a process can be made binary, so can deciding when to end it. Having a fixed cut-off point can simplify losing weight, for example. “Stop eating once you’re full” or “eat no more than one piece of candy per day” are a lot simpler to follow than complex diets.

What all of these have in common is that they help you decide *what* to do, thus making you more effective aka helping you do the right thing. The next three will help you with *how* you’re doing things.

Lesson 2: Your efficiency depends on how well you use how-to, coordination and timing rules.

Once you’ve become effective and are spending your time on the right things, it’s all about maximizing efficiency – doing things the best way possible. This is where another three types of rules come in.

1. **How-To Rules.** These are supposed to make processes easier, yet not be so strict they’ll entirely quench your creativity. For example, sticking to a maximum of three sentences per paragraph when writing blog articles makes it simple to structure your posts, but doesn’t limit what you can write about.
2. **Coordination Rules.** When humans interact, things get really tricky, especially in a group setting. But if you commit to, say, always holding the door for people or never responding to criticism with “You’re wrong,” you can master even complex conversations.
3. **Timing Rules.** Lastly, when you do things matters too. Will you brush your teeth before breakfast or afterwards? Read in the morning or at night? The act of deciding this up front makes it much more likely you’ll stick to your guns.

Okay, now that's great, you know what types of simple rules there are. But how do you come up with your own?

Lesson 3: You can reach any goal faster if you can find a simple rule for it. Do it in these three steps.

As long as you're aware of your goal, there's a decent chance you can back it up with a simple rule to help you get there faster. Let's say you want to lose 20 pounds. Take these three steps to find a simple rule for it:

1. **Figure out the critical action.** The components of losing weight are eating less and moving more. Diet usually has a much bigger impact, so it's crucial that you don't overeat.
2. **Find the bottleneck.** If eating too much is the problem, identify when, where and why you go berserk with food. Is it the bag of chips in front of the TV at night? The fast food lunch? The sugary cereal?
3. **Eliminate the bottleneck with the rule.** In the above examples, your rule could end up being "always eat snacks from a small bowl, never from the bag," "bring lunch to work" or "never buy cereal with more than 5 grams of sugar in it per 100 g."

As you can see, if you know the two or three critical places you mess up in when striving towards your goals, you can put out your most urgent fires with just a few rules!

Simple Rules Review

The world has gotten more complex, but that doesn't mean life has to as well. How complicated or simple our lives are is mostly up to us. *Simple Rules* offers a refreshing take here. I like that it leaves lots of room for creative flexibility, which really removes overwhelm. Good read!

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What else can you learn from the blinks?

- How the need for simple rules becomes instantly clear when looking at the US tax code
- The two big advantages of simple rules
- How bees defend their hives against hornets with thermoballing and what you can learn from that
- Why Zipcar, the world's largest car-sharing network, doesn't need drop-off stations
- The two necessary precursors to creating good simple rules for yourself
- Why no simple rule lasts forever

Who would I recommend the Simple Rules summary to?

The 20 year old accountant with a low-movement desk job, who's desperate to lose weight, the 44 year old improv comedian, who's looking to improve his performance and anyone who doesn't get up at the same time each day (yet).