

# The Art of Worldly Wisdom (Baltasar Gracian)

## Preamble:

What follows are notes on Baltasar Gracian's book [\*The Art of Worldly Wisdom\*](#).

Direct quotes from Gracian are in **bold**, commentary is in normal text.

## Notes on The Art of Worldly Wisdom:

### **xix: Arouse no Exaggerated Expectations on Entering**

Expectations can rise to infinity, but results cannot. To keep people satisfied you must keep their expectations down.

**xlili: Think With the Few, Speak With the Many...Truth is for the few, falsehood is for the many.**

Law 38 addendum: In public, pay lip service to whatever is currently politically correct. Do rigorous intellectual exploration in private, either alone or with those who can tolerate hearing ugly truths without hating you for speaking them.

**lxvi: See that Things End Well...A good end gilds all, no matter how unsavory the means may be.**

If you use methods people disapprove of and succeed, you will be rewarded. If you use methods people approve of and fail, you will be punished. It pays to win; it does not pay to play fair.

**lxxx:...We live by information, not by sight...The truth is generally seen, rarely heard**

The truth is rarely given. Usually it is discovered.

**xciv: Keep the Extent of Your Abilities Unknown...The wise man does not allow his knowledge and abilities to be sounded to the bottom...No one must know the extent of his abilities, lest they be disappointed...guesses**

**about the extent of his talents arouse more admiration and fear than accurate knowledge of them, be they ever so great.**

Show enough skill and power to impress people, but never let people see you hit the edge of your limits. Speculation as to your limits arouses far greater admiration than accurate knowledge of your limits.

You do have limits; your intelligence, cunning, energy, and stress tolerance are not infinite. Never hit the edge of your limits in the presence of other people; do so only in private.

**xcix: Reality and Appearance...Things pass for what they seem, not for what they are.**

Perception trumps reality.

**cx: Do Not Wait Till You Are a Sinking Sun...the sun even at its brightest often retires behind a cloud so as not to be seen sinking, and to leave in doubt whether he has sunk or not...A beauty should break her mirror early, before she does so later with her face.**

Quit while you're ahead; retire when you are at your peak. Don't stay in the game to experience your decline.

Better to die while you are still who you want to be, than to stay alive and become something you don't want to be. The greatest day of your life and the last day of your life should be the same day.

**cxxvi:...Reputation depends more on what is concealed than on what is revealed. If a man does not live honorably, he must live cautiously.**

People with sterling reputations are not any more virtuous than others; they are simply better at concealing their sins.

Euphemistic language is the means by which powerful people conceal their sins.

**cxlvi:...Lies always come first...Truth always lags last.**

**clvi: Select Your Friends...Though this is the most important thing in life, it is the one least cared for. Intelligence brings friends to some, chance to most. Yet a man is judged by his friends, for there was never agreement**

**between wise men and fools...Few are the friends of a man's self, most those of his circumstances.**

Who you have as your friends is the most important thing in life.

Real friends, those who will be loyal to you in both good times and bad, are incredibly rare.

Most friends are fair weather friends; friends in name, mercenaries in reality.

**clxxii: Never Compete Against a Man Who Has Nothing to Lose. Thereby you would enter into an unequal conflict. The other man enters without fear; having lost everything including shame, he has no further loss to fear. You do.**

Having nothing to lose is a miserable position to be in. It is also a position of immense power.

**xlxxxi: The Truth, but not the Whole Truth. Nothing demands more caution than the truth. It requires as much to tell the truth as it does to conceal it. A single lie destroys a whole reputation for honesty. The deceit is regarded as treason, and the deceiver as a traitor...Yet not all truths can be spoken, some for our own sake, some for the sake of others.**

There is nothing more dangerous than the truth. It must be treated like a weaponized virus; it must be contained, and released only at the right time, in the right place, upon the right people, and in the right way.

The world is held up by lies.

If all secrets and truths were to be revealed tomorrow, the world would come crashing down.

**clxxxii:...You must moderate your opinion of others so that you do not think so highly of them as to fear them...Many men seem great until you get to know them personally...everyone has weaknesses, either in their heart or their head.**

Powerful men usually seem far greater than they really are. They have mastered the art of displaying their strengths and concealing their weaknesses.

To be a God is impossible. Making people perceive you are a God is possible.

**cxci: Do Not Take Payment in Politeness. It is a kind of fraud.**

Do not take rewards in the form of pleasant words, or in people charming you. Demand money, or favors.

If you are an employee, do not work at a corporation because it has a 'great company culture!'. Work there if they offer the most money.

**cci: The world is full of fools, and yet there is not even one man who thinks he is a fool, or who suspects it might be a possibility.**

Fools are common, wise men are rare.

Do not concern yourself with the opinions of the masses.

**ccxvii: Neither Love nor Hate Forever. Trust the friends of today as if they will be the enemies of tomorrow, and that of the worst kind. This happens in reality, so let it happen in your calculations. Do not put weapons in the hands of friends who may one day use them against you. On the other hand, leave the door of reconciliation open for enemies.**

Your allies today may be your enemies tomorrow, and your enemies today may be your allies tomorrow.

Be careful not to give your allies tools they may one day use against you.

On the other hand, always be open to the possibility of cooperating with an enemy for mutual benefit.

**ccc: A man's greatness is to be measured by his virtue, not by his fortune.**

Life is not about what you get. Life is about what you become.