

# Maxims and Reflections (Francesco Guicciardini)

## Preamble:

What follows are notes on Francesco Guicciardini's [\*Maxims and Reflections\*](#).

Quotes from the book are in **bold**, my own commentary is in Normal Text.

## Wisdom from Francesco Guicciardini:

**"Unless necessity requires it, avoid saying anything which if repeated would displease others. In ways you could not possibly foresee, what you say will be repeated in ways that do you harm."**

**"Do not believe those who say they have voluntarily left positions of power for love of leisure and peace. Nearly always, they left by necessity or by force. As soon as they are offered the chance to return to their previous position, they will seize it with the intensity that a fire seizes dry wood."**

**"People underestimate how good the favors you have done for them are, and overestimate how bad the harms you have inflicted upon them are. As such, avoid doing someone a favor if doing it requires you inflict harm upon someone else; the former person will be less grateful than the latter person is angry."**

**"Always deny what you want people to believe is false, and affirm what you want people to believe is true. Though there may be definitive evidence to the contrary, a fervent affirmation or denial will often create at least some doubt in the mind of your listener."**

**"Speculation as to how much power you wield inspires more fear and obedience than accurate knowledge of your power."**

**"Revolution is pointless if it does nothing to address your grievances, but simply changes the faces of those who wield power."**

Every society has elites; a tiny minority of people who wield almost all the power. Revolution does not change this fact. What revolution does do is change who is in the category of 'elite'.

**"The true test of a man's spirit comes when he is attacked by an unexpected danger."**

You know nothing about a man until you see how he responds to an unforeseen catastrophe.

**"Revenge is a waste of time, but deterrence is not. Harming someone to set an example so that others are deterred from attacking you in the future is perfectly rational."**

**"Hide your failures and exaggerate your successes. Give the impression that things are going well."**

When people perceive you are powerful and high status, it makes them more inclined to do you favors and more hesitant to harm you. As such, it is tactically advantageous to make people overestimate how well things are going for you.

Conversely, when people perceive you are powerless and low status it makes them less inclined to do you favors and more willing to harm you. As such, if things are going badly for you hide it.

**"Keep yourself in view of the Prince (master) you serve. Often matters will arise out of nowhere, and he will send someone who is physically present to attend to them; be present and visible, so that he entrusts you with such responsibilities. If you are not present, he will entrust responsibility and power to another who is."**

**"It is the few, not the many, who determine the affairs of the world...the interests of the few are almost always different than the interests of the many."**

Power is pareto distributed. A minority of people are immensely powerful, most people are powerless.

**"If you dislike a man, do your best to hide it. In ways you cannot possibly foresee you may need his help, and you can hardly get it if he knows you despise him."**

**"If you have offended or harmed a man, do not trust or confide in him even regarding a business deal that would be profitable for him. Many men will prioritize avenging an offense over doing what is objectively in their own best interest."**

Many men will foolishly prioritize their ego, over doing what is most tactically effective. They will prioritize their ego over their bank account.

**"When predicting someone's behavior, don't do so on the basis of 'What would a rational man do, given such circumstances?' Rather, predict their behavior based on how their emotions and ego are biasing them."**

**"You would think a master would know his subordinates better than anyone, but very often a master knows less about his subordinates' true personalities than anyone else. When dealing with most people subordinates are frank and straightforward, but when dealing with their master subordinates wear a mask."**

People closely monitor their words and behavior when in the presence of superiors (those more powerful than themselves), but monitor their words and behavior very little when only in the presence of equals and subordinates.

**"All regimes are mortal. A man living in the final stage of his society's existence should not feel as sorry for his country as he should for himself. What happened to his country was inevitable, but to be born at a time when his civilization was collapsing was his own bad luck."**

**"Never speak badly of someone whether present or absent, unless you gain something by doing so. Making enemies pointlessly is foolishness. This sounds obvious, yet many go wrong here."**

**"All political power is rooted in violence."**

**"Nothing offends a superior more than feeling he has not been granted the reverence he believes is due."**

If a superior dislikes you and you don't know why, it's most likely because they feel you have not been sufficiently obsequious in your dealings with them.

**"If you are about to be attacked, use any measure that may bring delay. Often delaying another day or just another hour will bring some accident of chance that saves you."**

The world is an uncertain place.

Even if defeat is inevitable, delay it as long as possible. The longer you delay, the more opportunity there is for a random event to occur that saves you.

Conversely, even when victory seems inevitable you must seize it as fast as possible; the more that victory is delayed, the more opportunity there is for a random event to occur that destroys you.