

The Four Agreements

Our environment domesticates us from childhood and it leads us to live an unreflected life.

There are a lot of elements of our lives we don't choose or have control over. Don Miguel Ruiz calls the sum of these "domestication." It's a process that starts the day we're born. You don't pick your first language, you don't choose your first school and you can't control what attitudes your parents instill in you.

Parents, peers, teachers, religion, all these influences instill a set of rules in us. As children, we have no power over them. We're rewarded when we do good and punished when we step out of line. Compound this for almost two decades and you become someone who's chasing brownie points, afraid of rejection and not questioning society's rules.

The worst thing about this collective dream, as Ruiz labels it, is that eventually, we're so domesticated we continue to do it ourselves. If you've ever broken a rule, like missing a deadline, and then mentally punished, judged and blamed yourself, you've seen this problem in action.

How do you break out of this cycle? With a new set of agreements!

Nothing people say or do to you is personal, but you need to know who you are to be okay with that.

One of those new internal rules you should try to adopt is to never take anything personally. It's the second of the four agreements and I believe it's the most powerful. I recently explained it to a friend over dinner.

Nothing, absolutely nothing, that other people and the world do or say to you, is about you. When someone calls you ugly, it says a whole lot more about them and their problems than about you. Whatever issues *they're* dealing with has led them to take their frustration out on you.

No matter whether it's true or not, when you take it personally, you have to acknowledge it and that means – to some extent – believing it. So you should never ever take anything personally. But not taking hurtful comments and setbacks personal is hard.

According to Ruiz, the only way to really make this a habit is to become very, very self-aware. Knowing deep down who you are, what your truth is and that you're good enough allows you to stop seeking validation and acceptance.

You can use three ways to break old agreements, free yourself and come up with your own.

Can you see how powerful such a new agreement might be when you really embrace it? There are lots of them, waiting to be learned. But to pull off this kind of massive change, you first need to free yourself from the shackles of your old, domesticated system. Don Miguel Ruiz suggests three ways you can do this:

1. **Start noticing the beliefs you have, which are based on fear and make you unhappy.** We all have them. Our attention has been turned towards them since we were little children and we could have done nothing about developing them. But it's time to grow up and pick them apart.
2. **Learn to forgive the people who hurt you, most of all yourself.** The Toltecs called this the parasite in your mind. A fight, a missed bus, a spilled glass of milk, whatever causes negative emotions can lead to a downward spiral and ruin your day. Unless you forgive yourself and everyone involved. This is the only thing that lets you move on instantly.
3. **Remember that each day could be your last to stay in the present.** The initiation of the dead brings clarity. How do you want to live? Do you really want to let the opinion of others decide what you do right now?

These all take time, repeated practice and finding out how you can make them work for you, but they are starting points to untangle the mess in your mind and finally start living by your own agreements.