**20 Paradoxes That Give Us Wisdom and Perspective**

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Paradoxes may seem logically impossible, but they’re often true. Paradoxes reveal the essence of the human condition, while pushing us to question what’s really true. From everyday tips to poignant life lessons, paradoxes can teach us how to navigate the world in a wiser fashion.

1. The best things in life are free. We’ve all heard this phrase, but it’s somewhat paradoxical. Most of the time, we have to pay for value. The more valuable something is, the higher it costs. But many of the most satisfying things in life can’t be bought. They are freely available to anyone who is wise enough to seek them out.
2. The more choices we have, the more paralyzed we become. In today’s world, we often think that having everything at our fingertips makes life easier. In some ways it does. However, when faced with a multitude of choices we often become stressed and unable to make a decision. Don’t drive yourself crazy with what-ifs. Just do what you think is best.
3. Stop looking for happiness if you want to find it. Often referred to as the Paradox of Hedonism, the idea is that we tend to find happiness when we aren’t actively searching. Happiness is elusive, and we don’t always find it in the places we’d expect. Happiness isn’t a place, but rather a state. Let happiness come to you when it’s ready.
4. The best ideas come when you’re thinking about something else. Inventor Philo T. Farnsworth purportedly came up with the idea for television while plowing a potato field. Among smart and successful people, these peculiar stories are common. Great thinkers think abstractly, leading their minds to connect seemingly unrelated things. If you’re ever running dry of ideas, try doing something completely unrelated to the task.
5. We don’t appreciate what we have until it’s gone. It is an unfortunate tendency, but sometimes we can’t recognize the value of something until we notice its absence. You probably wouldn’t be thankful for your roof unless it collapsed one day. It takes effort to appreciate what you already have because it’s hard to imagine life without it. Consciously keeping track of what you’re grateful for is a great way to stay humble.
6. The more you multitask, the less you get done. Research has shown that the human ability to multitask is technically nonexistent. Well…that’s embarrassing. All this time we thought we were being more productive, but our brains can only focus on one thing at a time. So if you are multitasking, you may just be doing lots of things poorly or partially. Put your individual focus and effort into important projects.
7. You get what you give. When people are generous, they naturally attract the generosity of others. People who are selfish and always looking out for themselves repel generosity. Kindness and selfishness doesn’t go unnoticed. Be generous. Give to others and you won’t have to worry about receiving.
8. The more you try to control a situation, the less control you have. Everyone knows a control freak or two, and you may have even seen firsthand how ultra planning can backfire. Most things in life are uncontrollable, and when we try too hard we can actually make things worse. The only thing we can definitely control is ourselves. The best way to handle situations is to accept change and adapt to it.
9. The things that deeply move us don’t exist. Philosophers call it the Paradox of Fiction. Humans have always been affected by stories, art, and literature. We can be influenced and inspired by characters that aren’t real and events that never occurred. Why is it that some of our strongest and most profound emotional reactions are driven by things that never existed? Fiction has the power to change reality. Now go read a book!
10. Insanity is rational. A study showed that certain mental illnesses may allow people to be more logical than the average person. When given a quiz full of logic questions, schizophrenic participants performed far better than participants without the illness. Never underestimate someone just because they’re different from you
11. The longer you sleep, the more tired you are when you wake up. Why is it that sometimes we sleep 5 hours and wake up refreshed, while other times we sleep 10 hours and wake up feeling like a plane hit us? This is a common problem, particularly for people who get little sleep on weekdays and too much sleep on weekends. This happens when your circadian rhythm is thrown off. Adopt a steady sleep routine to feel more energetic.
12. We can only change when we accept who we are. “The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change.” -Carl Rogers. When we spend our time and energy hating ourselves and wishing we could change, it uses up the energy that we could be using to change. Accept yourself and work hard. Change will come naturally.
13. The faster you run from your problems, the quicker they catch up. Sure you can run away, travel across the world, or backpack through Europe. But if your main goal for leaving is to solve problems, you will end up disappointed. Most problems arise from who we are, not where we are.  If you run, your “baggage” will be right there with you- at the baggage claim. Face your problems head on so they don’t become worse.
14. The institutions that teach us equip us to question those institutions. “The paradox of education is that as one begins to become conscious one begins to examine the society in which he is being educated.”- James Baldwin. While we need institutions to teach us, they often teach us best about the things we reject or want to change about them. Learn all you can from others, but think for yourself.
15. We can eat more and lose weight? If you are overweight and consistently dieting with a piece of lettuce for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, you may actually be contributing to the problem. Under-eating can slow your metabolism, meaning less energy consumed and less burned. As long as your diet is clean and healthy, frequent meals are the way to go. Eat often and eat real food to stay healthy.
16. If you want a faster commute, shut down a traffic route. Named after the mathematician who discovered it, Braess’ Paradox refers to the odd phenomenon that occurs when towns block off a main road. One would think that this would worsen traffic, but it often improves it. Since faster routes become more attractive to drivers, this can increase commute times for everyone, even those on other routes. Check out the full explanation [here](https://www.oasys-software.com/blog/2012/05/braess%E2%80%99-paradox-or-why-improving-something-can-make-it-worse/). Don’t rely on shortcuts, they aren’t always what they seem.
17. If you want to find love, stop looking. “I walked into the coffee shop, expecting to meet my true love, and there he was!” Have you ever heard someone say this? Didn’t think so. That’s because we tend to fall for people when we don’t expect it. Although difficult for lonely people, it is smarter to be patient rather than desperately search for soulmate. Be yourself, do what you do, and the right person will naturally come along.
18. The more you wait the longer things take. Who hasn’t sat in math class, staring painfully at the clock as it slowly ticks forward? Although it’s only a perception, the more conscious waiting we do, the longer things often seem to take. Time flies when you’re having fun, so you are better off trying to make the best of long division while you’re stuck doing it. Try to make the most out of things you dislike. It will only make them pass quicker.
19. People who talk the most say the least. There is a longstanding suspicion that chatterboxes talk a lot and say little, which is sometimes true. While packed with verbiage, their speech is often devoid of substance. Meanwhile, people who hold their tongue are often lauded for their profound speech.  Speak to be understood, not to impress or gain attention.
20. Cats and toast don’t mix. The infamous [Buttered Cat Paradox](http://mentalfloss.com/article/27716/buttered-cat-paradox) is perhaps the most mind-boggling of all. The premise: Buttered toast is known to fall face down when dropped (Yes, it was determined by physicists.) Cats are known to land right side up, as long as the fall is far enough from the ground. So the question arises: What would happen if we strapped toast (butter side up) to a cat’s back, and the poor cat was dropped from several feet up? Some speculate that just before reaching the ground, the kitty would begin spinning indefinitely. However, no one is willing to endanger their cat to find out