



## The Laws of Human Nature by Robert Greene: Summary & Notes

**Rated:** 8/10

**Available at:** [Amazon](#)

**ISBN:** 0525428143

**Related:** [The 50th Law](#), [The Art of Seduction](#), [Mastery](#), [48 Laws of Power](#)

[Get access to my collection of 100+ detailed book notes](#)

### Summary

This book is just as full of life knowledge as his others, and even easier to apply to real life.

I didn't like this book on initial read as much as Greene's other books (and he's one of my favourite authors). It is dense and will be long to get through initially, but it will be worth it.

Full of lessons on psychology and strategy that will help you in work, relationships and life.

### Notes

#### Introduction

- The Laws will make you more calm, and more strategic.
- They will help you interpret the clues people constantly emit.
- They will allow you to outthink the toxic people you encounter.
- They will teach you how to motivate and influence people.
- They will give you the power to alter your own negative patterns.
- They will make you more empathetic.
- They will help you see your own potential.

#### 1: Master Your Emotional Self - The Law of Irrationality

- You are largely unaware of how deeply your emotions dominate you.
- Rationality is the ability to counteract these emotional effects, to think instead of react, to open your mind to what is really happening, as opposed to what you are feeling. It does not come naturally; it is a power we must cultivate.

#### Keys to Human Nature

- We can see the difference in the decisions and actions that people take and the results that ensue. Rational people demonstrate over time that they are able to finish a project, to realize their goals, to work effectively with a team, and to create something that lasts. Irrational people

reveal in their lives negative patterns—mistakes that keep repeating, unnecessary conflicts that follow them wherever they go, dreams and projects that are never realized, anger and desires for change that are never translated into concrete action.

- There are three steps to begin on the path towards rationality.

### **Step One: Recognize the Biases**

- There are several you should be particularly aware of: confirmation bias, conviction bias, appearance bias, group bias, blame bias, superiority bias.

### **Step Two: Beware the Inflaming Factors**

- Trigger points from childhood: look for childish intensity and out of character actions.
- Sudden gains or losses: counter these with pessimism or optimism; we underestimate the role of luck.
- Rising pressure: people act differently under pressure.
- Inflaming individuals: distance yourself from people who arouse extreme emotions in you.
- Group effect: beware large groups, and keep close your ability to think for yourself.

### **Step Three: Strategies Toward Bringing Out the Rational Self**

- Know yourself thoroughly
- Examine your emotions to their roots: dig below trigger points to see where they started.
- Increase your reaction time: train yourself to step back.
- Accept people as facts: see other people as phenomena, and avoid the emotional toll.
- Find the optimal balance of thinking and emotion: maintain a balance between skepticism and curiosity.
- Love the rational: taming the emotional self will lead to calmness and clarity.

## **2: Transform Self-Love Into Empathy - The Law of Narcissism**

- We all naturally possess the most remarkable tool for connecting to people and attaining social power—empathy.
- This instrument, however, is blunted by our habitual self-absorption. We are all narcissists, some deeper on the spectrum than others.
- Our mission in life is to come to terms with this self-love and learn how to turn our sensitivity outward, toward others, instead of inward.

### **The Narcissistic Spectrum**

- We must be honest about our own nature and not deny it. We are all narcissists.
- We need to develop our own empathy; to do this we need to develop 4 skills:
- **The empathetic attitude:** you must begin with the assumption you are ignorant. Learn to be curious about other people's point of view.
- **Visceral empathy:** pay attention to moods, as indicated by body language and tone of voice. Mirroring people will also help draw out an empathetic response.
- **Analytic empathy:** gather as much information about the early years of the people you are studying and their relationship to their parents and siblings.
- **The empathetic skill:** to work on this skill, keep several things in mind: The more people you interact with in the flesh, the better you will get at this. And the greater the variety of people you meet, the more versatile your skill will become.

## **3: See Through People's Masks - The Law of Role-Playing**

- People tend to wear the mask that shows them off in the best possible light—humble, confident, diligent. They say the right things, smile, and seem interested in our ideas. They learn to conceal their insecurities and envy.
- If we take this appearance for reality, we never really know their true feelings, and on occasion we are blindsided by their sudden resistance, hostility, and manipulative actions.
- People continually leak out their true feelings and unconscious desires in the nonverbal cues they cannot completely control—facial expressions, vocal inflections, tension in the body, and nervous gestures.
- You must master this language by transforming yourself into a superior reader of men and women.
- On the other hand, since appearances are what people judge you by, you must learn how to present the best front and play your role to maximum effect.

### Keys to Human Nature

- Your task as a student of human nature is twofold: First, you must understand and accept the theatrical quality of life. You do not moralize and rail against the role-playing and the wearing of masks so essential to smooth social functioning.
- Second, you must not be naive and mistake people's appearances for reality. You are not blinded by people's acting skills. You transform yourself into a master decoder of their true feelings, working on your observation skills and practicing them as much as you can in daily life.

### Observational Skills

- Try and rediscover skills you had in your earlier years.
- Start by trying to observe facial expressions that contradict what a person is saying.
- Move on to voice afterwards, and then body language.
- You can practice this on people you know, and also in public places.
- Observe yourself too.
- Everything people do is a gesture of some sort or another.

### Decoding Keys

- Your task is to look past the distractions and become aware of those signs that leak out automatically, revealing something of the true emotion beneath the mask. The three categories of the most important cues to observe and identify are *dislike/like*, *dominance/submission*, and *deception*.

### Dislike/Like Cues:

- We often feel something isn't right; we must learn to trust such intuitive responses and look for signs.
- People give out clear indications in their body language of active dislike or hostility. These include the sudden squinting of the eyes at something you have said, the glare, the pursing of the lips until they nearly disappear, the stiff neck, the torso or feet that turn away from you while you are still engaged in a conversation, the folding of the arms as you try to make a point, and an overall tenseness in the body.
- A good way to gauge subtler body language is how someone behaves towards you versus others.
- When people start to feel comfortable in your presence, they will stand closer to you or lean in, their arms not folded or revealing any tension. If you are giving a talk or telling a story, frequent head nods, attentive gazes, and genuine smiles will indicate that people agree with what you are saying and are losing their resistance. They exchange more looks. Perhaps the best and most exciting sign of all is synchrony, the other person unconsciously mirroring you.

- You can also train yourself to not only monitor these changes that show your influence but induce them as well by displaying positive cues yourself. You begin to slowly stand or lean closer, revealing subtle signs of openness. You nod and smile as others talk. You mirror their behavior and their breathing patterns.

### **Dominance/Submission Cues:**

- Confidence usually comes with a greater feeling of relaxation that is clearly reflected in the face, and with a greater freedom of movement. Those who are powerful will feel allowed to look around more at others, choosing to make eye contact with whomever they please.
- Their eyelids are more closed, a sign of seriousness and competence. If they feel bored or annoyed, they show it more freely and openly. They often smile less, frequent smiling being a sign of overall insecurity.
- They feel more entitled to touch people, such as with friendly pats on the back or on the arm.
- They stand taller, and their gestures are relaxed and comfortable. Most important, others feel compelled to imitate their style and mannerisms.
- For deception, the best we can do is to learn to recognize certain telltale signs of an attempt at deception and maintain our skepticism as we examine the evidence further.
- The most clear and common sign comes when people assume an extra-animated front.
- Similarly, if people are trying to cover something up, they tend to become extra vehement, righteous, and chatty. They are playing on the conviction bias.
- In both cases—the cover-up and the soft sell—the deceiver is striving to distract you from the truth.
- With such deceivers you will often notice that one part of the face or the body is more expressive to attract your attention. This will often be the area around the mouth, with large smiles and changing expressions. This is the easiest area of the body for people to manipulate and create an animated effect. But it could also be exaggerated gestures with the hands and arms.
- The key is that you will detect tension and anxiety in other parts of the body, because it is impossible for them to control all of the muscles.

### **The Art of Impression Management**

- Master the nonverbal cues: radiate confidence, flash genuine smiles, mirror the people you deal with.
- Be a method actor: learn how to consciously put yourself in the right emotional mood.
- Adapt to your audience: shape your nonverbal cues to audience style and taste.
- Create the proper first impression: give extra attention to your first appearance before an individual or group.
- Use dramatic effects: make your appearances and behavior less predictable.
- Project saintly qualities: show yourself as progressive, supremely tolerant and open-minded.

## **4: Determine the Strength of People's Character - The Law of Compulsive Behavior**

- When choosing people to work and associate with, do not be mesmerized by their reputation or taken in by the surface image they try to project. Instead, train yourself to look deep within them and see their character.
- Gauge the relative strength of their character by how well they handle adversity, their ability to adapt and work with other people, their patience and ability to learn.
- A person of strong character is like gold—rare but invaluable. They can adapt, learn, and improve themselves.

## Keys to Human Nature

- Character, then, is something that is so deeply ingrained or stamped within us that it compels us to act in certain ways, beyond our awareness and control. We can conceive of this character as having three essential components, each layered on top of the other, giving this character depth.
- The first comes from genetics. The second, our early years and the attachments we formed. The third is from our habits and experiences as we get older.
- First, we must understand our own character, and find the negative patterns that you can see recurring in your life.
- Second, we must develop our skill in reading the character of people we deal with.

## Character Signs

- The most significant indicator of people's character comes through their actions over time.
- At times of stress or crisis is when flaws become apparent, and similarly, how people handle power and responsibility.
- Note that extroverts and introverts will have different characteristics, and you must recognize those to categorize them and judge their character correctly.
- It is critical that you measure the relative strength of someone's character as well.
- The strength emanates from a feeling of personal security and self-worth. This allows such people to take criticism and learn from their experiences. This means they do not give up so easily, since they want to learn how to get better. They are rigorously persistent. People of strong character are open to new ideas and ways of doing things without compromising the basic principles they adhere to. In adversity they can retain their presence of mind. They can handle chaos and the unpredictable without succumbing to anxiety. They keep their word. They have patience, can organize a lot of material, and complete what they start. Not continually insecure about their status, they can also subsume their personal interests to the good of the group, knowing that what works best for the team will in the end make their life easier and better.

## Toxic Types

In general, you must learn to identify toxic character, and to not get involved or disengage as quickly as possible.

- **The Hyperperfectionist:** patterns of initial success followed by burnout and spectacular failures.
- **The Relentless Rebel:** initially seem exciting, but are locked in adolescence.
- **The Personalizer:** seem sensitive and thoughtful, but take everything personally.
- **The Drama Magnet:** they are exciting to be around, but will eventually cause ugly drama.
- **The Big Talker:** they have big ideas, and are looking for help and backers, but can be afraid of actually implementing them.
- **The Sexualizer:** they seem charged with sexual energy, but will blend the boundaries of when this is appropriate.
- **The Pampered Prince/Princess:** they seem calm and confident and with a regal air, but will cause others to feel guilty for not attending to them.
- **The Savior:** they will save you from your difficulties and troubles; it is better to become self-reliant.
- **The Easy Moralizer:** they communicate a sense of injustice at this or that, but have a secret side with flaws.

## The Superior Character

- You can go in one of two directions: ignorance and denial, or examining yourself as thoroughly as possible.
- The result of denial is simple: the compulsive behavior and the patterns become even more set into place.
- The other direction is harder to take, but it is the only path that leads to true power and the formation of a superior character. It works in the following manner: You examine yourself as thoroughly as possible. You look at the deepest layers of your character, determining whether you are an introvert or extrovert, whether you tend to be governed by high levels of anxiety and sensitivity, or hostility and anger, or a profound need to engage with people. You look at your primal inclinations—those subjects and activities you are naturally drawn to. You examine the quality of attachments you formed with your parents, looking at your current relationships as the best sign of this. You look with rigorous honesty at your own mistakes and the patterns that continually hold you back. You know your limitations—those situations in which you do not do your best. You also become aware of the natural strengths in your character that have survived past adolescence.
- Now, with this awareness, you are no longer the captive of your character, compelled to endlessly repeat the same strategies and mistakes. As you see yourself falling into one of your usual patterns, you can catch yourself in time and step back. You may not be able to completely eliminate such patterns, but with practice you can mitigate their effects. Knowing your limitations, you will not try your hand at things for which you have no capacity or inclination.
- Finally, you need to also refine or cultivate those traits that go into a strong character—resilience under pressure, attention to detail, the ability to complete things, to work with a team, to be tolerant of people's differences. The only way to do so is to work on your habits, which go into the slow formation of your character. For instance, you train yourself to not react in the moment by repeatedly placing yourself in stressful or adverse situations in order to get used to them.

## 5: Become an Elusive Object of Desire - The Law of Covetousness

- Absence and presence have very primal effects upon us. Too much presence suffocates; a degree of absence spurs our interest.
- We are marked by the continual desire to possess what we do not have—the object projected by our fantasies.
- Learn to create some mystery around you, to use strategic absence to make people desire your return, to want to possess you. Dangle in front of others what they are missing most in life, what they are forbidden to have, and they will go crazy with desire.
- The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence. Overcome this weakness in yourself by embracing your circumstances, your fate.

### The Object of Desire

- Instead of focusing on what you want and covet in the world, you must train yourself to focus on others, on their repressed desires and unmet fantasies.
- People do not want truth and honesty, no matter how much we hear such nonsense endlessly repeated. They want their imaginations to be stimulated and to be taken beyond their banal circumstances. They want fantasy and objects of desire to covet and grope after. Create an air of mystery around you and your work. Associate it with something new, unfamiliar, exotic, progressive, and taboo.
- Do not define your message but leave it vague. Create an illusion of ubiquity—your object is seen everywhere and desired by others.

### Keys to Human Nature

- By nature, we humans are not easily contented with our circumstances. By some perverse force

within us, the moment we possess something or get what we want, our minds begin to drift toward something new and different, to imagine we can have better.

- More and more people have come to believe that others should simply desire them for who they are. This means revealing as much as they can about themselves, exposing all of their likes and dislikes, and making themselves as familiar as possible. They leave no room for imagination or fantasy.
- **Understand:** People may point to all of this as evidence that we humans are becoming more honest and truthful, but human nature does not change within a few generations. People have become more obvious and forthright not out of some deep moral calling but out of increasing self-absorption and overall laziness. It requires no effort to simply be oneself or to blast one's message.
- Do not swallow the easy moralism of the day, which urges honesty at the expense of desirability. Go in the opposite direction. With so few people out there who understand the art of desirability, it affords you endless opportunities to shine and exploit people's repressed fantasies.

### Strategies for Stimulating Desire

#### **Know how and when to withdraw.**

- Your presence should have a bit of coldness to it, as if you could do without others.
- Add to this a bit of blankness and ambiguity as to who you are. Your opinions, values, and tastes are never too obvious to people.
- With the work you produce you can create similar covetous effects. Always leave the presentation and the message relatively open-ended.

#### **Create rivalries of desire.**

- If you can somehow create the impression that others desire you or your work, you will pull people into your current without having to say a word or impose yourself.

#### **Use induction.**

- Associate your object with something ever so slightly illicit, unconventional, or politically advanced.
- Incorporate desire by giving the impression you are revealing secrets that should really not be shared.
- It is not possession but desire that secretly impels people.

### The Supreme Desire

- In general, do not constantly wait and hope for something better, but rather make the most of what you have.
- In the end what you really must covet is a deeper relationship to reality, which will bring you calmness, focus, and practical powers to alter what it is possible to alter.

## **6: Elevate Your Perspective - The Law of Shortsightedness**

- It is in the animal part of your nature to be most impressed by what you can see and hear in the present—the latest news reports and trends, the opinions and actions of the people around you, whatever seems the most dramatic.
- Learn to measure people by the narrowness or breadth of their vision; avoid entangling yourself with those who cannot see the consequences of their actions, who are in a continual reactive mode. They will infect you with this energy. Your eyes must be on the larger trends that govern events, on that which is not immediately visible. Never lose sight of your long-term

goals. With an elevated perspective, you will have the patience and clarity to reach almost any objective.

## Keys to Human Nature

- First, facing a problem, conflict, or some exciting opportunity, we train ourselves to detach from the heat of the moment.
- Next, we start to deepen and widen our perspective. In considering the nature of the problem we are confronting, we don't just grab for an immediate explanation, but instead we dig deeper and consider other possibilities, other possible motivations for the people involved. We force ourselves to look at the overall context of the event, not just what immediately grabs our attention. We imagine as best we can the negative consequences of the various strategies we are contemplating.

## Four Signs of Shortsightedness and Strategies to Overcome Them

### 1. Unintended consequences.

- In any group or team, put at least one person in charge of gaming out all of the possible consequences of a strategy or line of action, preferably someone with a skeptical and prudent frame of mind.

### 2. Tactical hell.

- You find yourself embroiled in several struggles or battles. You have actually lost sight of your long-term goals, what you're really fighting for. Instead it has become a question of asserting your ego and proving you are right.
- The only solution is to back out temporarily or permanently from these battles, particularly if they are occurring on several fronts. You need some detachment and perspective.
- Win through your actions, not your words.
- Start to think again about your long-term goals. Create a ladder of values and priorities in your life, reminding yourself of what really matters to you.
- In life as in warfare, strategists will always prevail over tacticians.

### 3. Ticker tape fever.

- When we face any kind of problem or obstacle, we must make an effort to slow things down and step back, wait a day or two before taking action.
- Second, when faced with issues that are important, we must have a clear sense of our long-term goals and how to attain them.

### 4. Lost in trivia.

- You feel overwhelmed by the complexity of your work. You feel the need to be on top of all the details and global trends so you can control things better, but you are drowning in information.
- What you need is a mental filtering system based on a scale of priorities and your long-term goals. Knowing what you want to accomplish in the end will help you weed out the essential from the nonessential.

## The Farsighted Human

- Your task as a student of human nature, and someone aspiring to reach the greater potential of the human animal, is to widen your relationship to time as much as possible, and slow it down. This means you do not see the passage of time as an enemy but rather as a great ally.
- In relation to the future, you think deeply about your long-term goals. They are not vague dreams but concrete objectives, and you have mapped out a path to reach them.



- You know what you like and dislike, you know who you are. This will help you maintain your self-love, which is so critical in resisting the descent into deep narcissism and in helping you to develop empathy.
- "The years teach much which the days never know." —Ralph Waldo Emerson

## 7: Soften People's Resistance by Confirming Their Self-Opinion - The Law of Defensiveness

- Life is harsh and people competitive. We naturally must look after our own interests. We also want to feel that we are independent, doing our own bidding. That is why when others try to persuade or change us, we become defensive and resistant.
- That is why to get people to move from their defensive positions you must always make it seem like what they are doing is of their own free will.
- Creating a feeling of mutual warmth helps soften people's resistance and makes them want to help. Never attack people for their beliefs or make them feel insecure about their intelligence or goodness—that will only strengthen their defensiveness and make your task impossible.
- Make them feel that by doing what you want they are being noble and altruistic - the ultimate lure. Learn to tame your own stubborn nature and free your mind from its defensive and closed positions, unleashing your creative powers.

### The Influence Game

- Understand: Influence over people and the power that it brings are gained in the opposite way from what you might imagine. Normally we try to charm people with our own ideas, showing ourselves off in the best light.
- The road to influence and power is to go in the opposite direction: Put the focus on others. Let them do the talking. Let them be the stars of the show. Their opinions and values are worth emulating.

### Keys to Human Nature

- The key to influencing people is that they feel inwardly secure—not judged but accepted by friends, the group, or the loved one.
- Understand: creating this feeling of validation is the golden key that will unlock people's defences.
- People have a perception about themselves that we shall call their self-opinion. This self-opinion can be accurate or not—it doesn't matter. What matters is how people perceive their own character and worthiness. And there are three qualities to people's self-opinion that are nearly universal: "I am autonomous, acting of my own free will"; "I am intelligent in my own way"; and "I am basically good and decent."
- To convince people of something, actively confirm their self-opinion. In this case you are fulfilling one of people's greatest emotional needs. We can imagine that we are independent, intelligent, decent, and self-reliant, but only other people can truly confirm this for us.
- Your task is simple: instill in people a feeling of inner security. Mirror their values; show that you like and respect them. Make them feel you appreciate their wisdom and experience. Generate an atmosphere of mutual warmth. Get them to laugh along with you, instilling a feeling of rapport. All of this works best if the feelings are not completely faked.

### Five Strategies for Becoming a Master Persuader

#### 1. Transform yourself into a deep listener.

- Imagine every person you encounter as someone who is full of undiscovered surprises. Seek to discover them.

## **2. Infect people with the proper mood.**

- If you are relaxed, happy, and anticipating a pleasurable experience, others will sense and mirror this.

## **3. Confirm their self-opinion.**

- Allow people to convince you of their point, and ask them for advice. They will be more open to future changes.
- Inspire them with a greater cause.
- Remind them of the good things they have done in the past. They will want to confirm those actions ("I am generous").

## **4. Allay their insecurities.**

- Praise and flatter the qualities people are most insecure about. Praise for effort instead of talent.

## **5. Use people's resistance and stubbornness.**

- For those who are difficult to influence, channel their strong emotions in a productive direction, use their language, and agree with their hard positions—they may seek to rebel.

### The Flexible Mind–Self-Strategies

- When it comes to the ideas and opinions you hold, see them as toys or building blocks that you are playing with. Some you will keep, others you will knock down, but your spirit remains flexible and playful.
- When it comes to your own self-opinion, try to have some ironic distance from it. Make yourself aware of its existence and how it operates within you. Come to terms with the fact that you are not as free and autonomous as you like to believe.

## **8: Change Your Circumstances by Changing Your Attitude - The Law of Self-Sabotage**

- Each of us has a particular way of looking at the world, of interpreting events and the actions of people around us. This is our attitude, and it determines much of what happens to us in life.
- If our attitude is essentially fearful, we see the negative in every circumstance. We stop ourselves from taking chances. We blame others for mistakes and fail to learn from them.
- If we feel hostile or suspicious, we make others feel such emotions in our presence. We sabotage our career and relationships by unconsciously creating the circumstances we fear the most.
- The human attitude, however, is malleable. By making our attitude more positive, open, and tolerant of other people, we can spark a different dynamic—we can learn from adversity, create opportunities out of nothing, and draw people to us.

### The Ultimate Freedom

- Understand: We all have moments of great doubt about ourselves.
- By accepting people, by understanding and if possible even loving them for their human nature, we can liberate our minds from obsessive and petty emotions.

### Keys to Human Nature

- What we must understand about the attitude is not only how it colors our perceptions but also how it actively determines what happens to us in life—our health, our relations with people,

and our success. Our attitude has a self-fulfilling dynamic.

- Your task as a student of human nature is twofold: First, you must become aware of your own attitude and how it slants your perceptions.
- Second, you must not only be aware of the role of your attitude but also believe in its supreme power to alter your circumstances.
- View your health as largely dependent on your attitude. Feeling excited and open to adventure, you can tap into energy reserves you did not know that you had.
- View problems and failures as means to learn and toughen yourself up. You can get through anything with persistence.
- Do not be afraid to exaggerate the role of willpower. It is an exaggeration with a purpose. It leads to a positive self-fulfilling dynamic, and that is all you care about.

### The Constricted (Negative) Attitude

#### **The Hostile Attitude.**

- Their hostility permeates everything they do—the way they argue and provoke (they are always right); the nasty undertone of their jokes; the greediness with which they demand attention; the pleasure they get out of criticizing others and seeing them fail.

#### **The Anxious Attitude.**

- If you notice such tendencies in yourself, the best antidote is to pour your energies into work. Focusing your attention outward into a project of some sort will have a calming effect.

#### **The Avoidant Attitude.**

- People with this attitude see the world through the lens of their insecurities, generally related to doubts about their competence and intelligence.
- These types find it hard to commit to anything, for a good reason.

#### **The Depressive Attitude.**

- These types often have a secret need to wound others, encouraging behavior such as betrayal or criticism that will feed their depression.

#### **The Resentful Attitude.**

- Because they have a continual feeling of being wronged, they tend to project this on to the world, seeing oppressors everywhere.
- In general, they carry themselves with an air of arrogance; they are above others even if no one recognizes this.

### The Expansive (Positive) Attitude

- Without wasting another day under such conditions, your goal is to break out, to expand what you see and what you experience.

#### **How to view the world:**

- See yourself as an explorer.
- You are in continual search of new ideas and new ways of thinking.

#### **How to view adversity:**

- Your goal is to move in the opposite direction, to embrace all obstacles as learning experiences, as means to getting stronger.

### **How to view yourself:**

- Whatever you are doing now, you are in fact capable of much more, and by thinking that, you will create a very different dynamic.
- These moments can come from exerting yourself past what you thought were your limits; they can come from overcoming great obstacles, climbing a mountain, taking a trip to a very different culture, or the deep bonding that comes from any form of love. You want to deliberately go in search of such moments, stimulate them if you can.

### **How to view your energy and health:**

- In general, you can safely push yourself beyond what you think are your physical limits by feeling excited and challenged by a project or endeavor.
- People get old and prematurely age by accepting physical limits to what they can do, making it a self-fulfilling cycle.

### **How to view other people:**

- You must try to get rid of the natural tendency to take what people do and say as something personally directed at you, particularly if what they say or do is unpleasant.

## **9: Confront Your Dark Side - The Law of Repression**

- People are rarely who they seem to be. Lurking beneath their polite, affable exterior is inevitably a dark, shadow side consisting of the insecurities and the aggressive, selfish impulses they repress and carefully conceal from public view. This dark side leaks out in behavior that will baffle and harm you.
- Learn to recognize the signs of the Shadow before they become toxic. See people's overt traits—toughness, saintliness, et cetera—as covering up the opposite quality. You must become aware of your own dark side. In being conscious of it you can control and channel the creative energies that lurk in your unconscious. By integrating the dark side into your personality, you will be a more complete human and will radiate an authenticity that will draw people to you.

### **The Dark Side**

- Your task as a student of human nature is to recognize and examine the dark side of your character. Once subjected to conscious scrutiny, it loses its destructive power.
- It might seem that only those who project continual strength and saintliness can become successful, but that is not at all the case. By playing a role to such an extent, by straining to live up to ideals that are not real, you will emit a phoniness that others pick up.

### **Keys to Human Nature**

- Most of us succeed in becoming a positive social animal, but at a price. We end up missing the intensity that we experienced in childhood, the full gamut of emotions, and even the creativity that came with this wilder energy.
- The Shadow wants to release some of the inner tension and come back to life.

The following are some of the most notable signs of such release.

- **Contradictory behavior.**
- **Emotional outbursts.**
- **Vehement denial.**
- **“Accidental” behavior.**
- **Overridealization.**

- **Projection:** This is by far the most common way of dealing with our Shadow, because it offers almost daily release. We cannot admit to ourselves certain desires—for sex, for money, for power, for superiority in some area—and so instead we project those desires onto others.

#### Deciphering the Shadow: Contradictory Behavior

- As a student of human nature, you must understand the reality: the emphatic trait generally rests on top of the opposite trait, distracting and concealing it from public view.

The following are seven of the most emphatic traits that you must learn to recognize and manage appropriately:

**The Tough Guy:** He projects a rough masculinity that is intended to intimidate.

**The Saint:** These people are paragons of goodness and purity. They support the best and most progressive causes.

- To distinguish between the real and the fake, ignore their words and the aura they project, focusing on their deeds and the details of their life.

**The Passive-Aggressive Charmer:** These types are amazingly nice and accommodating when you first meet them, so much so that you tend to let them into your life rather quickly.

- Then something ugly occurs—a blowup, some act of sabotage or betrayal—so unlike that nice, charming person you first befriended.

**The Fanatic:** You are impressed by their fervour, in support of whatever cause.

- But at the key moment when they could possibly deliver what they have promised, they unexpectedly slip up.

**The Rigid Rationalist:** All of us have irrational tendencies.

- True rationality should be sober and skeptical about its own power and not publicize itself.

**The Snob:** These types have a tremendous need to be different from others, to assert some form of superiority over the mass of mankind.

- Those who are truly original and different do not need to make a great show of it. In fact, they are often embarrassed by being so different and learn to appear more humble.

**The Extreme Entrepreneur:** At first glance these types seem to possess very positive qualities, especially for work. They maintain very high standards and pay exceptional attention to detail. They are willing to do much of the work themselves. If mixed with talent, this often leads to success early on in life.

- But underneath the façade the seeds of failure are taking root. This first appears in their inability to listen to others. They cannot take advice. They need no one.
- Often their outward show of self-reliance disguises a hidden desire to have others take care of them, to regress to the dependency of childhood.

#### The Integrated Human

- Conscious of our Shadow, we can control, channel, and integrate it.

The following are four clear and practical steps for achieving this.

#### See the Shadow.

- This is the most difficult step in the process. The Shadow is something we deny and repress.
- The best way to begin is to look for indirect signs, as indicated in the sections above.
- Look at your own emotional outbursts and moments of extreme touchiness.

### **Embrace the Shadow.**

- Your goal here must be not only complete acceptance of the Shadow but the desire to integrate it into your present personality.

### **Explore the Shadow.**

- Consider the Shadow as having depths that contain great creative energy. You want to explore these depths, which include more primitive forms of thinking and the darkest impulses that come out of our animal nature.
- We all have dreams, intuitions, and free associations of ideas, but we often refuse to pay attention to them or take them seriously. Instead you want to develop the habit of using this form of thought more often by having unstructured time in which you can play with ideas, widen the options you consider, and pay serious attention to what comes to you in less conscious states of mind.

### **Show the Shadow.**

- It would be wise to look at those who are successful in their field. Inevitably we will see that most of them are much less bound by these codes. They are generally more assertive and overtly ambitious. They care much less what others think of them. They flout the conventions openly and proudly. And they are not punished but greatly rewarded.
- Get in the habit in your daily life of asserting yourself more and compromising less. Do this under control and at opportune moments.
- Start caring less what people think of you. You will feel a tremendous sense of liberation.
- Realize that at times you must offend and even hurt people who block your path, who have ugly values, who unjustly criticize you. Use such moments of clear injustice to bring out your Shadow and show it proudly.
- Flout the very conventions that others follow so scrupulously. For centuries, and still to this day, gender roles represent the most powerful convention of all.

## **10: Beware the Fragile Ego - The Law of Envy**

- We humans are naturally compelled to compare ourselves with one another. We are continually measuring people's status, the levels of respect and attention they receive, and noticing any differences between what we have and what they have.
- For some of us, this need to compare serves as a spur to excel through our work. For others, it can turn into deep envy—feelings of inferiority and frustration that lead to covert attacks and sabotage.
- Nobody admits to acting out of envy. You must recognize the early warning signs—praise and bids for friendship that seem effusive and out of proportion; subtle digs at you under the guise of good-natured humor; apparent uneasiness with your success. It is most likely to crop up among friends or your peers in the same profession.
- Learn to deflect envy by drawing attention away from yourself. Develop your sense of self-worth from internal standards and not incessant comparisons.

### **Fatal Friends**

- Understand: Envy occurs most commonly and painfully among friends.

### **Keys to Human Nature**

- Your task as a student of human nature is to transform yourself into a master decoder of envy.

## Signs of Envy

You want to look for combinations or repetitions of the following signs, a pattern, before moving to alert mode.

### **Microexpressions.**

- Tell suspected enviers some good news about yourself—a promotion, a new and exciting love interest, a book contract. You will notice a very quick expression of disappointment.
- Equally, tell them some misfortune of yours and notice the uncontrollable microexpression of joy in your pain, what is commonly known as *schadenfreude*.

### **Poisonous praise.**

### **Backbiting.**

- Gossip is a frequent cover for envy, a convenient way to vent it by sharing malicious rumours and stories.

### **The push and pull.**

- Criticism of you that seems sincere but not directly related to anything you have actually done is usually a strong sign of envy.

## Envier Types

The following are five common varieties of enviers, how they tend to disguise themselves, and their particular forms of attack.

### **The Leveler.**

- When you first meet them, levelers can seem rather entertaining and interesting. They tend to have a wicked sense of humor. They are good at putting down those who are powerful and deflating the pretentious.
- But where they differ from people with genuine empathy for underdogs is that levelers cannot recognize or appreciate excellence in almost anyone, except those who are dead. They have fragile egos.

### **The Self-Entitled Slacker.**

- In the world today many people rightfully feel entitled to have success and the good things in life, but they usually understand that this will require sacrifice and hard work. Some people, however, feel they deserve attention and many rewards in life as if these are naturally due to them.
- Be extra careful in the work environment with those who like to maintain their position through charm and being political, rather than by getting things done.

### **The Status Fiend.**

- As social animals we humans are very sensitive to our rank and position within any group.
- You will notice such fiends by the questions they ask about how much money you make, whether you own your home, what kind of neighborhood it's in, whether you occasionally fly business class, and all of the other petty things that they can use as points of comparison.

### **The Attacher.**

- In any court-like environment of power, you will inevitably find people who are drawn to those who are successful or powerful, not out of admiration but out of secret envy. They find a way to attach themselves as friends or assistants.
- These types have a trait that is quite common to all enviers: they lack a clear sense of purpose in their life.

### **The Insecure Master.**

- For some people, reaching a high position validates their self-opinion and boosts their self-esteem. But there are some who are more anxious.
- Holding a high position tends to increase their insecurities, which they are careful to conceal.
- Pay attention to those above you for signs of insecurity and envy. They will inevitably have a track record of firing people for strange reasons.

### Envy Triggers

- The most common trigger is a sudden change in your status, which alters your relationship to friends and peers.
- The best you can do in such situations is to have some self-deprecating humour and to not rub people's faces in your success, which, after all, might contain some elements of luck.

### Beyond Envy

- What we must aspire to is to slowly transform our comparing inclination into something positive, productive, and prosocial. The following are five simple exercises to help you in achieving this.

The following are five simple exercises to help you in achieving this.

### **Move closer to what you envy.**

### **Engage in downward comparisons.**

- You normally focus on those who seem to have more than you, but it would be wiser to look at those who have less.
- This should stimulate not only empathy for the many who have less but also greater gratitude for what you actually possess. Such gratitude is the best antidote to envy.

### **Practice *Mitfreude*.**

- Instead of merely congratulating people on their good fortune, something easy to do and easily forgotten, you must instead actively try to feel their joy, as a form of empathy.

### **Transmute envy into emulation.**

- Instead of wanting to hurt or steal from the person who has achieved more, we should desire to raise ourselves up to his or her level.
- Having a sense of purpose, a feel for your calling in life, is a great way to immunize yourself against envy. You are focused on your own life and plans, which are clear and invigorating.

### **Admire human greatness.**

- It is worth cultivating moments in life in which we feel immense satisfaction and happiness divorced from our own success or achievements. This happens commonly when we find ourselves in a beautiful landscape—the mountains, the sea, a forest.
- We do not feel the prying, comparing eyes of others, the need to have more attention or to



assert ourselves. We are simply in awe of what we see, and it is intensely therapeutic.

## 11: Know Your Limits - The Law of Grandiosity

- We humans have a deep need to think highly of ourselves. If that opinion of our goodness, greatness, and brilliance diverges enough from reality, we become grandiose. We imagine our superiority.
- Often a small measure of success will elevate our natural grandiosity to even more dangerous levels. Our high self-opinion has now been confirmed by events. We forget the role that luck may have played in the success, or the contributions of others.
- Losing contact with reality, we make irrational decisions. That is why our success often does not last. Look for the signs of elevated grandiosity in yourself and in others—overbearing certainty in the positive outcome of your plans; excessive touchiness if criticized; a disdain for any form of authority.
- Counteract the pull of grandiosity by maintaining a realistic assessment of yourself and your limits. Tie any feelings of greatness to your work, your achievements, and your contributions to society.

### The Success Delusion

- Understand: Any success that we have in life inevitably depends on some good luck, timing, the contributions of others, the teachers who helped us along the way, the whims of the public in need of something new. Our tendency is to forget all of this and imagine that any success stems from our superior self.
- Your task is the following: After any kind of success, analyze the components. See the element of luck that is inevitably there, as well as the role that other people, including mentors, played in your good fortune. This will neutralize the tendency to inflate your powers. Remind yourself that with success comes complacency, as attention becomes more important than the work and old strategies are repeated.

### Keys to Human Nature

- You must see the signs of the disease in yourself and learn not only how to control your grandiose tendencies but also how to channel this energy into something productive.
- We find increasing numbers of people who have little or no respect for authority or experts of any kind, no matter the experts' level of training and experience, which they themselves lack.
- Technology gives us the impression that everything in life can be as fast and simple as the information we can glean online.
- You can measure the levels of grandiosity in people in several simple ways. For instance, notice how people respond to criticism of them or their work.
- If people are successful, notice how they act in more private moments. Are they able to relax and laugh at themselves, letting go of their public mask, or have they so overidentified with their powerful public image that it carries over into their private life?
- Grandiose people are generally big talkers.
- Higher grandiose types generally display low levels of empathy. They are not good listeners.

### The Grandiose Leader

The following are six common illusions they like to create.

#### **I am destined.**

- Grandiose leaders often try to give the impression that they were somehow destined for greatness.

### **I'm the common man/woman.**

- In some cases grandiose leaders may have risen from the lower classes, but in general they either come from relatively privileged backgrounds or because of their success have lived removed from the cares of everyday people for quite some time.
- The trick grandiose leaders play is to place the emphasis on their cultural tastes, not on the actual class they come from.

### **I rewrite the rules.**

- Grandiose leaders will often rely on their intuitions, disregarding the need for focus groups or any form of scientific feedback.

### **I have the golden touch.**

- Will try to create the legend that they have never really failed. If there were failures or setbacks in their career, it was always the fault of others who betrayed them.
- Related to this is the belief that they can easily transfer their skills—a movie executive can become a theme park designer, a businessman can become the leader of a nation.

### **I'm invulnerable.**

#### Practical Grandiosity

The problem is not with the energy itself, which can be used to fuel our ambitions, but with the direction it takes.

Although the precise way to channel the energy will depend on your field and skill level, the following are five basic principles that are essential for attaining the high level of fulfillment that can come from this reality-based form of grandiosity.

#### **Come to terms with your grandiose needs.**

- You must admit to yourself that you do want to feel important and be the center of attention.

#### **Concentrate the energy.**

- You want to get into the habit of focusing deeply and completely on a single project or problem.
- You will want to break this down into mini steps and goals along the way.
- You want the goal to be relatively simple to reach, and within a time frame of months and not years.
- Your objective here is to enter a state of flow.

#### **Maintain a dialogue with reality.**

- Now you must actively search for feedback and criticism from people you respect or from your natural audience.

#### **Seek out calibrated challenges.**

- Your goal with practical grandiosity is to continually look for challenges just above your skill level.

#### **Let loose your grandiose energy.**

- Once you have tamed this energy, made it serve your ambitions and goals, you should feel safe to let it loose upon occasion.

- What this means is that you occasionally allow yourself to entertain ideas or projects that represent greater challenges than you have considered in the past.

## 12: Reconnect to the Masculine or Feminine Within You - The Law of Gender Rigidity

- All of us have masculine and feminine qualities—some of this is genetic, and some of it comes from the profound influence of the parent of the opposite sex. But in the need to present a consistent identity in society, we tend to repress these qualities, overidentifying with the masculine or feminine role expected of us. And we pay a price for this. We lose valuable dimensions to our character.
- You must become aware of these lost masculine or feminine traits and slowly reconnect to them, unleashing creative powers in the process. You will become more fluid in your thinking.

### The Authentic Gender

- Understand: Your task is to let go of the rigidity that takes hold of you as you overidentify with the expected gender role. Power lies in exploring that middle range between the masculine and the feminine, in playing against people's expectations.

### Keys to Human Nature

- Your third task is to look inward, to see those feminine or masculine qualities that are repressed and undeveloped within you. You will catch glimpses of your anima or animus in your relationships with the opposite sex. That assertiveness you desire to see in a man, or empathy in a woman, is something you need to develop within yourself, bringing out that feminine or masculine undertone.

### Gender Projection-Types

Below you will find six of the more common types of gender projections. You must use this knowledge in three ways: First, you must recognize in yourself any tendency toward one of these forms of projection. This will help you understand something profound about your earliest years and make it much easier for you to withdraw your projections on other people.

Second, you must use this as an invaluable tool for gaining access to the unconscious of other people, to seeing their anima and animus in action.

And finally, you must be attentive to how others will project onto you their needs and fantasies.

**The Devilish Romantic:** For the woman in this scenario, the man who fascinates her—often older and successful—might seem like a rake, the type who cannot help but chase after young women. But he is also romantic.

- But somehow he is not as strong, masculine, or romantic as she had imagined. He is a bit self-absorbed.

**The Elusive Woman of Perfection:** He thinks he has found the ideal woman. She will give him what he's been missing in his prior relationships, whether that's some wildness, some comfort and compassion, or a creative spark.

- Although he has had few actual encounters with the woman in question, he can imagine all kinds of positive experiences with her.
- What they really need is to find and interact with a real woman, accept her inevitable flaws, and give more of themselves.

**The Lovable Rebel:** For the woman who is drawn to this type, the man who intrigues her has a

noticeable disdain for authority. He is a nonconformist.

- Unlike the Devilish Romantic, this man will often be young and not so successful.
- If a relationship does ensue, however, she will see a totally different side to him. He can't hold down a good job, not because he's a rebel but because he's lazy and ineffectual.

**The Fallen Woman:** To the man in question, the woman who fascinates him seems so different from those he has known. Perhaps she comes from a different culture or social class.

- Men of this type often had strong mother figures in their childhood. They became good, obedient boys, excellent students at school. Consciously they are attracted to well-educated women, to those who seem good and perfect. But unconsciously they are drawn to women who are imperfect, bad, of dubious character.
- They project onto such women weakness and vulnerability.
- Men who engage in this kind of projection need to develop the less conventional sides of their character. They need to move outside their comfort zone and try new experiences on their own. They require more challenges, and even a bit of danger that will help loosen them up. Perhaps they need to take more risks at work. They also need to develop the more physical and sensual side of their character.

**The Superior Man:** He seems brilliant, skilled, strong, and stable. He radiates confidence and power. He could be a high-powered businessman, a professor, an artist, a guru.

**The Woman to Worship Him:** He's driven and ambitious, but his life is hard. It's a harsh, unforgiving world out there, and it's not easy to find any comfort. He feels something missing in his life. Then along comes a woman who is attentive to him, warm, and engaging. She seems to admire him. He feels overwhelmingly drawn to her and her energy.

- He tends to drive himself too hard. He must learn to comfort and soothe himself, to withdraw from time to time and be satisfied with his accomplishments. He needs to be able to care for himself. This will drastically improve his relationships. He will give more, instead of waiting to be adored and taken care of.

The Original Man/Woman

- Understand: The return to your original nature contains elemental power. By relating more to the natural feminine or masculine parts within you, you will unleash energy that has been repressed; your mind will recover its natural fluidity; you will understand and relate better to those of the opposite sex; and by ridding yourself of the defensiveness you have in relation to your gender role, you will feel secure in who you are.
- But what is truly needed in the modern world is to see the masculine and the feminine as completely equal in potential reasoning power and strength of action, but in different ways.

**Masculine and feminine styles of thinking:**

- Masculine thinking tends toward focusing on what separates phenomena from one another and categorizing them. It looks for contrasts between things to better label them. It wants to take things apart, like a machine, and analyze the separate parts that go into the whole. Its thought process is linear, figuring out the sequence of steps that goes into an event.
- The masculine way of thinking tends to prefer specialization, to dig deep into something specific.
- Feminine thinking orients itself differently. It likes to focus on the whole, how the parts connect to one another, the overall gestalt. In looking at a group of people, it wants to see how they relate to one another.
- As opposed to specialization, it is more interested in how different fields or forms of knowledge

can connect to one another.

- Almost all people will lean more toward one style of thinking. What you want for yourself is to create balance by leaning more in the other direction.

#### **Masculine and feminine styles of action:**

- When it comes to taking action, the masculine tendency is to move forward, explore the situation, attack, and vanquish.
- When confronted with a problem or the need to take action, the feminine style often prefers to first withdraw from the immediate situation and contemplate more deeply the options.
- For those with the aggressive, masculine inclination, balance would come from training yourself to step back before taking any action.
- For those with the feminine style, it is best to accustom yourself to various degrees of conflict and confrontation, so that any avoidance of it is strategic and not out of fear.

#### **Masculine and feminine styles of self-assessment and learning:**

- In general, men will overestimate their abilities and display confidence in their skills that are often not warranted by circumstances.
- For women, it is the opposite: When there is failure, they tend to blame themselves and look inward. If there is success, they are more prone to look at the role of others in helping them.
- For those with the masculine style, when it comes to learning and improving yourself, it is best to reverse the order—to look inward when you make mistakes and to look outward when you have success.
- Weakness comes from the inability to ask questions and to learn. Lower your self-opinion. You are not as great or skilled as you imagine. This will spur you to *actually* improve yourself.

#### **Masculine and feminine styles of relating to people and leadership:**

- The masculine style is to require a leader, and to either aspire to that role or gain power by being the most loyal follower.
- The feminine style is more about maintaining the group spirit and keeping the relationships smoothed out, with fewer differences among individuals.
- For those with the masculine style, it is important to enlarge your concept of leadership.
- Some of the greatest male leaders in history, however, managed to retain and develop their empathy.

### **13: Advance with a Sense of Purpose - The Law of Aimlessness**

- Unlike animals, with their instincts to guide them past dangers, we humans have to rely upon our conscious decisions. We do the best we can when it comes to our career path and handling the inevitable setbacks in life. But in the back of our minds we can sense an overall lack of direction, as we are pulled this way and that way by our moods and by the opinions of others. How did we end up in this job, in this place? Such drifting can lead to dead ends.
- The way to avoid such a fate is to develop a sense of purpose, discovering our calling in life and using such knowledge to guide us in our decisions. We come to know ourselves more deeply—our tastes and inclinations. We trust ourselves, knowing which battles and detours to avoid. Even our moments of doubt, even our failures have a purpose—to toughen us up. With such energy and direction, our actions have unstoppable force.

#### **The Voice**

- The moments in which we feel clarity and purpose are fleeting. To soothe the pain from our aimlessness, we might enmesh ourselves in various addictions, pursue new forms of pleasure, or give ourselves over to some cause that interests us for a few months or weeks.

- The only solution to the dilemma is King's solution—to find a higher sense of purpose, a mission that will provide us our own direction, not that of our parents, friends, or peers. This mission is intimately connected to our individuality, to what makes us unique.

## Keys to Human Nature

- Both paths, however, tend to lead to some problems further down the road. In the first case, trying so many things out, we never really develop solid skills in one particular area.
- In the second case, the career we committed to in our twenties might begin to feel a bit lifeless in our thirties. We chose it for practical purposes, and it has little connection to what actually interests us in life.
- **Understand:** This feeling of being lost and confused is not anyone's fault. It is a natural reaction to having been born into times of great change and chaos.
- Each human individual is radically unique. This uniqueness is inscribed in us in three ways—the one-of-a-kind configuration of our DNA, the particular way our brains are wired, and our experiences as we go through life, experiences that are unlike any other's.
- To tap into the guidance system, we must make the connection to our uniqueness as strong as possible, and learn to trust that voice.
- We can say something similar about your life: operating with a high sense of purpose is a force multiplier. All of your decisions and actions have greater power behind them because they are guided by a central idea and purpose.
- Your task as a student of human nature is twofold: First, you must become aware of the primary role that a sense of purpose plays in human life.
- Your second task is to find *your* sense of purpose and elevate it by making the connection to it as deep as possible.

## Strategies for Developing a High Sense of Purpose

### **Discover your calling in life.**

- You begin this strategy by looking for signs of primal inclinations in your earliest years, when they were often the clearest.
- What you are looking for is moments in which you were unusually fascinated by a particular subject, or certain objects, or specific activities and forms of play.

### **Use resistance and negative spurs.**

- The key to success in any field is first developing skills in various areas, which you can later combine in unique and creative ways.

### **Absorb purposeful energy.**

- Try to find and associate with those who have a high sense of purpose.
- Do not settle for virtual associations or mentors. They will not have the same effect.

### **Create a ladder of descending goals.**

- Operating with long-term goals will bring you tremendous clarity and resolve.
- To manage such anxiety, you must create a ladder of smaller goals along the way, reaching down to the present.

### **Lose yourself in the work.**

- To offset this tedium, you need to have moments of flow in which your mind becomes so deeply immersed in the work that you are transported beyond your ego.

- You must plan on giving yourself uninterrupted time with the work—as many hours in the day as possible, and as many days in the week.
- The emphasis must be on the work, never on yourself or the desire for recognition.

### The Lure of False Purposes

Here are five of the most common forms of false purposes that have appealed to humans since the beginning of civilization.

#### **The pursuit of pleasure.**

#### **Causes and cults.**

#### **Money and success.**

- In the long run this philosophy often yields the most impractical of results.
- Concentrate on maintaining a high sense of purpose, and the success will flow to you naturally.

#### **Attention.**

- As with money and success, we have a much greater chance of attracting attention by developing a high sense of purpose and creating work that will naturally draw people to it.

#### **Cynicism.**

## **14: Resist the Downward Pull of the Group - The Law of Conformity**

- We have a side to our character that we are generally unaware of—our social personality, the different person we become when we operate in groups of people. In the group setting, we unconsciously imitate what others are saying and doing. We think differently, more concerned with fitting in and believing what others believe. We feel different emotions, infected by the group mood. We are more prone to taking risks, to acting irrationally, because everyone else is. This social personality can come to dominate who we are. Listening so much to others and conforming our behavior to them, we slowly lose a sense of our uniqueness and the ability to think for ourselves. The only solution is to develop self-awareness and a superior understanding of the changes that occur in us in groups. With such intelligence, we can become superior social actors, able to outwardly fit in and cooperate with others on a high level, while retaining our independence and rationality.

### An Experiment in Human Nature

- We inevitably feel the need for status and recognition, so let's not deny it. Instead, let's cultivate such status and recognition through our excellent work. We must accept our need to belong to the group and prove our loyalty, but let's do it in more positive ways—by questioning group decisions that will harm it in the long run, by supplying divergent opinions, by steering the group in a more rational direction, gently and strategically. Let's use the viral nature of emotions in the group but play on a different set of emotions: by staying calm and patient, by focusing on results and cooperating with others to get practical things done, we can begin to spread this spirit throughout the group.

### The Individual Effect

#### **The desire to fit in.**

- In the long run, it is much better to confront your conformity to the group ethos, so that you can become aware of it as it happens and control the process to some degree.

### **The need to perform.**

- In the group setting, we are always performing.

### **Emotional contagion.**

- Certain emotions are more contagious than others, anxiety and fear being the strongest of all.

### **Hypercertainty.**

- Whenever you feel unusually certain and excited about a plan or idea, you must step back and gauge whether it is a viral group effect operating on you.

## Group Dynamics

### **Group culture.**

- Better to be aware and realize that the larger the group and the more established the culture over time, the more likely it will control you than the other way around.

### **Group rules and codes.**

- When you are new to a group, you must pay extra attention to these tacit codes.

### **The group court.**

- Learn to downplay your successes, to listen (or seem to listen) deeply to the ideas of others, strategically giving them credit and praise in meetings, paying attention to *their* insecurities.

### **Group factions.**

## Understand

- First, you must become a consummate observer of yourself as you interact with groups of any size.
- Your goal must be to lower your permeability by raising your self-esteem. If you feel strong and confident about what makes you unique—your tastes, your values, your own experience—you can more easily resist the group effect.
- Become a consummate consumer of the groups you belong to or interact with.

## The Court and Its Courtiers

The following are several of the more common types you will find.

**The Intriguer:** These individuals can be particularly difficult to recognize. They seem intensely loyal to the boss and to the group. No one works harder or is more ruthlessly efficient.

- Behind the scenes they are continually intriguing to amass more power.

**The Stirrer:** This type is generally riddled with insecurities but adept at disguising them from those in the court.

- If a rebellion of some sort suddenly erupts within the court, you can be sure they had a finger in it.

**The Gatekeeper:** The goal of the game for these types is gaining exclusive access to leaders, monopolizing the flow of information to them.



- Recognize them early on by their shameless sycophancy toward the boss.

**The Shadow Enabler:** These people enable others (usually leaders) to act on their Shadow impulses. They often serve as the fall guy if what they advocated, or acted on, becomes public. Maintain a polite distance.

#### **The Court Jester:**

- These types fall into such roles because secretly they have a fear of responsibility and a dread of failing.
- Never take their existence as a sign that you can freely imitate their behavior.

**The Mirrorer:** These types are often among the most successful courtiers of all, because they are capable of playing the double game to the hilt—they are adept at charming leaders and fellow courtiers, maintaining a broad base of support.

- This is a role you might want to consider playing in the court because of the power it brings, but to pull it off you will have to be a great reader of people, sensitive to their nonverbal cues.

**The Favorite and the Punching Bag:** These two types occupy the highest and lowest rungs of the court.

- Try to avoid being lured into taking this position. Make your power dependent on your accomplishments and your usefulness, not on the friendly feelings people have for you.
- Within the ruthless environment of the court, try to befriend the Punching Bag, showing a different way of behaving and taking the fun out of this cruel game.

#### **The Reality Group**

- What creates a functional, healthy dynamic is the ability of the group to maintain a tight relationship to reality.
- The healthy group puts primary emphasis on the work itself, on getting the most out of its resources and adapting to all of the inevitable changes. Not wasting time on endless political games, such a group can accomplish ten times more than the dysfunctional variety.

The following are five key strategies for achieving this, all of which should be put into practice.

#### **Instill a collective sense of purpose.**

- This purpose is not vague or implied but clearly stated and publicized.

#### **Assemble the right team of lieutenants.**

- You do not base your selection on people's charm, and never hire friends.
- You select for this team people who have skills that you lack, each individual with their particular strengths.
- You also want this team of lieutenants to be diverse in temperament, background, and ideas.

#### **Let information and ideas flow freely.**

- To achieve this, you want to encourage frank discussion up and down the line, with members trusting that they can do so. You listen to your foot soldiers.
- Extend this open communication to the ability for the group to criticize itself and its performance, particularly after any mistakes or failures.

#### **Infect the group with productive emotions.**

- As part of this strategy, always keep the group focused on completing concrete tasks, which will naturally ground and calm them.
- Infect the group with a sense of resolution that emanates from you. You are not upset by setbacks; you keep advancing and working on problems. You are persistent.
- Periodically change up routines, surprise the group with something new or challenging.
- Most important, showing a lack of fear and an overall openness to new ideas will have the most therapeutic effect of all.

### **Forge a battle-tested group.**

- Give various members some relatively challenging tasks or shorter deadlines than usual, and see how they respond.
- In the end, you want a group that has been through a few wars, dealt with them reasonably well, and now is battle-tested. They do not wilt at the sign of new obstacles and in fact welcome them.

## **15: Make Them Want to Follow You - The Law of Fickleness**

- Although styles of leadership change with the times, one constant remains: people are always ambivalent about those in power. They want to be led but also to feel free; they want to be protected and enjoy prosperity without making sacrifices.
- When you are the leader of a group, people are continually prepared to turn on you the moment you seem weak or experience a setback. Do not succumb to the prejudices of the times, imagining that what you need to do to gain their loyalty is to seem to be their equal or their friend; people will doubt your strength, become suspicious of your motives, and respond with hidden contempt.
- Authority is the delicate art of creating the appearance of power, legitimacy, and fairness while getting people to identify with you as a leader who is in their service. If you want to lead, you must master this art from early on in your life. Once you have gained people's trust, they will stand by you as their leader, no matter the bad circumstances.

### **The Entitlement Curse**

- Understand: Whatever the cause, it infects all of us, and we must see this sense of entitlement as a curse. It makes us ignore the reality—people have no inherent reason to trust or respect us just because of who we are.
- It makes us lazy and contented with the slightest idea or the first draft of our work.

### **Keys to Human Nature**

- First and foremost, we must understand the fundamental task of any leader—to provide a far-reaching vision, to see the global picture, to work for the greater good of the group and maintain its unity.
- We have to avoid ever seeming petty, self-serving, or indecisive.
- Based on this vision, we must set practical goals and guide the group toward them.
- At the same time, however, we must see leadership as a dynamic relationship we have with those being led. We have to understand that our slightest gesture has an unconscious effect on individuals.
- And so we must pay great attention to our attitude, to the tone that we set. We need to attune ourselves to the shifting moods of the members of the group.
- This empathy, however, must never mean becoming needlessly soft and pliant to the group's will.
- First, you must make yourself a consummate observer of the phenomenon of authority, using as a measuring device the degree of influence people wield without the use of force or

motivational speeches.

- You want to determine the source of their authority or lack of it. You want to discern moments when their authority waxes or wanes, and figure out why.
- You want to develop some of the habits and strategies (see the next section) that will serve you well in projecting authority.
- You must not fall for the counterproductive prejudices of the times we live in, in which the very concept of authority is often misunderstood and despised.
- This disdain for authority and leadership has filtered its way throughout our culture. We no longer recognize authority in the arts. Everyone is a legitimate critic, and standards should be personal—nobody's taste or judgment should be seen as superior.
- All of these ideas and values have unintended consequences. Without authority in the arts, there is nothing to rebel against, no prior movement to overturn, no deep thinking to assimilate and later even reject. There is only an amorphous world of trends that flicker away with increasing speed.
- Without parents as authority figures, we cannot go through the critical stage of rebellion in adolescence, in which we reject their ideas and discover our own identity. We grow up lost, constantly searching outside ourselves for that identity.
- Without teachers and masters whom we acknowledge as superior and worthy of respect, we cannot learn from their experience and wisdom, perhaps even seeking later on to surpass them with new and better ideas.

### Strategies for Establishing Authority

- The authority you establish must emerge naturally from your character, from the particular strengths you possess.

### **Find your authority style: Authenticity.**

- Another archetype would be the *Founder*. These are the ones who establish a new order in politics or business. They generally have a keen sense of trends and a great aversion to the status quo. They are unconventional and independent minded. Their greatest joy is to tinker and invent something new.

### **Focus outwardly: the Attitude.**

- First, you hone your listening skills, absorbing yourself in the words and nonverbal cues of others.
- Second, you dedicate yourself to earning people's respect.
- You earn their respect by respecting their individual needs and by proving that you are working for the greater good.
- Third, you consider being a leader a tremendous responsibility, the welfare of the group hanging on your every decision. What drives you is not getting attention but bringing about the best results possible for the most people.

### **Cultivate the third eye: the Vision.**

- As early in life as possible, you train yourself to disconnect from the emotions roiling the group. You force yourself to raise your vision, to imagine the larger picture.
- Once you have your vision, you then slowly work backward to the present, creating a reasonable and flexible way to reach your goal.
- As the leader, you must be seen working as hard as or even harder than everyone else. You set the highest standards for yourself. You are consistent and accountable. If there are sacrifices that need to be made, you are the first to make them for the good of the group.

### **Lead from the front: the Tone.**

- Begin this early on in your career by developing the highest possible standards for your own work.

### **Stir conflicting emotions: the Aura.**

- Learn to balance presence and absence. If you are too present and familiar, always available and visible, you seem too banal.
- Keep in mind that talking too much is a type of overpresence that grates and reveals weakness. Silence is a form of absence and withdrawal that draws attention; it spells self-control and power; when you do talk, it has a greater effect.

### **Never appear to take, always to give: the Taboo.**

- You must avoid overpromising to people.

### **Rejuvenate your authority: Adaptability.**

#### The Inner Authority

- You have a responsibility to contribute to the culture and times you live in.
- To serve this higher purpose, you must cultivate what is unique about you.
- Work every day on improving those skills that mesh with your unique spirit and purpose.
- In a world full of endless distractions, you must focus and prioritize.
- You must adhere to the highest standards in your work.
- To maintain such standards, you must develop self-discipline and the proper work habits. You must pay great attention to the details in your work and place a premium value on effort.
- Keep in mind that your life is short, that it could end any day. You must have a sense of urgency to make the most of this limited time.
- When it comes to operating with this inner authority, we can consider Leonardo da Vinci our model. His motto in life was *ostinato rigore*, "relentless rigor."

## **16: See the Hostility Behind the Friendly Façade - The Law of Aggression**

- On the surface, the people around you appear so polite and civilized. But beneath the mask, they are inevitably dealing with frustrations.
- You must transform yourself into a superior observer of people's unsatisfied aggressive desires, paying extra attention to the chronic aggressors and passive aggressors in our midst. You must recognize the signs—the past patterns of behavior, the obsessive need to control everything in their environment—that indicate the dangerous types. They depend on making you emotional—afraid, angry—and unable to think straight. Do not give them this power.
- When it comes to your own aggressive energy, learn to tame and channel it for productive purposes—standing up for yourself, attacking problems with relentless energy, realizing great ambitions.

#### The Sophisticated Aggressor

- When it comes to taking action against aggressors, you must be as sophisticated and crafty as they are. Do not try to fight with them directly. They are too relentless, and they usually have enough power to overwhelm you in direct confrontation. You must outwit them, finding unexpected angles of attack.
- Threaten to expose the hypocrisy in their narrative or the past dirty deeds they have tried to keep hidden from the public. Make it seem that a battle with you will be costlier than they had imagined, that you are also willing to play a little dirty, but only in defense.

## The Source of Human Aggression

- You need to analyze how you handle your assertive energy. A way to judge yourself is to see how you handle moments of frustration and uncertainty, situations in which you have less control.
- Your goal is not to repress this assertive energy but to become aware of it as it drives you forward and to channel it productively.
- Your second task is to make yourself a master observer of aggression in the people around you.
- Look for some telltale signs. First, if they have an unusually high number of enemies whom they have accumulated over the years, there must be a good reason, and not the one they tell you.
- Pay close attention to how they justify their actions in the world. Aggressors will tend to present themselves as crusaders, as some form of genius who cannot help the way they behave.
- The other myth, more prevalent today, is that we may have been violent and aggressive in the past, but that we are currently evolving beyond this, becoming more tolerant, enlightened, and guided by our better angels. But the signs of human aggression are just as prevalent in our era as in the past.

## Passive Aggression—Its Strategies and How to Counter Them

- The key to defending ourselves against passive aggressors is to recognize what they are up to as early as possible.

The following are the most common strategies employed by such aggressors, and ways to counter them.

### **The Subtle-Superiority Strategy:**

- If this is chronic behavior, you must not get angry or display overt irritation—passive aggressors thrive on getting a rise out of you. Instead, stay calm and subtly mirror their behavior, calling attention to what they are doing, and inducing some shame if possible.

### **The Sympathy Strategy:**

- To deal with the manipulation involved here you need some distance, and this is not easy.

### **The Dependency Strategy:**

- In general, be wary about people's promises and never completely rely on them. With those who fail to deliver, it is more likely a pattern, and it is best to have nothing more to do with them.

### **The Insinuating-Doubt Strategy:**

- The best counter is to show that their insinuations have no effect on you. You remain calm. You "agree" with their faint praise, and perhaps you return it in kind.

### **The Blame-Shifter Strategy:**

- Be calm and even fair, accepting some of the blame for the problem, if that seems right. Realize that it is very difficult to get such types to reflect on their behavior and change it; they are too hypersensitive for this.

### **The Passive-Tyrant Strategy:**

- The only real counter is to quit and recuperate.

## Controlled Aggression

- We are born with a powerful energy that is distinctly human. We can call it willpower, assertiveness, or even aggression, but it is mixed with our intelligence and cleverness.

The following are four potentially positive elements of this energy that we can discipline and use, improving what evolution has bestowed on us.

#### **Ambition:**

- Tamping down your youthful ambitions is a sign that you don't like or respect yourself; you no longer believe you deserve to have the power and recognition you once dreamed about.
- What you must do is embrace that childish part of you, revisit your earliest ambitions, adapt them to your current reality, and make them as specific as possible.
- The more clearly you see what you want, the likelier you are to realize it.

#### **Persistence:**

- What you must understand is the following: almost nothing in the world can resist persistent human energy.
- The trick is to want something badly enough that nothing will stop you or dull your energy.

#### **Fearlessness:**

- Timidity is a quality we generally acquire. It is a function of our mounting fears as we get older and a loss of confidence in our powers to get what we want.
- The key is to first convince yourself that you deserve good and better things in life.

#### **Anger:**

- What makes anger toxic is the degree to which it is disconnected from reality.
- You must do the opposite. Your anger is directed at very specific individuals and forces. You analyze the emotion—are you certain that your frustration does not stem from your own inadequacies? Do you really understand the cause of the anger and what it should be directed at?

### **17: Seize the Historical Moment - The Law of Generational Myopia**

- You are born into a generation that defines who you are more than you can imagine. Your generation wants to separate itself from the previous one and set a new tone for the world.
- Your task is to understand as deeply as possible this powerful influence on who you are and how you see the world. Knowing in depth the spirit of your generation and the times you live in, you will be better able to exploit the zeitgeist. You will be the one to anticipate and set the trends that your generation hungers for.

#### **The Rising Tide**

- This power is a function of vision, of looking at events from a different angle, through a fresh framework. You ignore the clichéd interpretations that others will inevitably spout when facing changes. You drop the mental habits and past ways of looking at things that can cloud your vision. You stop the tendency to moralize, to judge what is happening. You simply want to see things as they are.
- First and foremost, you must be able to *feel* the change in the collective mood, to *sense* how people are diverging from the past.
- Once you feel the spirit, you can begin to analyze what is behind it.

#### **Keys to Human Nature**

- We shall call this knowledge *generational awareness*. To attain it, first we must understand the actual profound effect that our generation has on how we view the world, and second we must understand the larger generational patterns that shape history and recognize where our time period fits into the overall scheme.

## Generational Patterns

- The first generation is that of the revolutionaries who make a radical break with the past, establishing new values but also creating some chaos in the struggle to do so.
- Then along comes a second generation that craves some order.
- Those of the third generation—having little direct connection to the founders of the revolution—feel less passionate about it. They are pragmatists. They want to solve problems and make life as comfortable as possible.
- Along comes the fourth generation, which feels that society has lost its vitality, but they are not sure what should replace it. They begin to question the values they have inherited, some becoming quite cynical.
- We notice that generations seem capable only of reacting and moving in an opposing direction to the previous generation.
- Your second task is to create a kind of personality profile of your generation, so that you can understand its spirit in the present and exploit it. Keep in mind that there are always nuances and exceptions. What you are looking for is common traits that signal an overall spirit.
- You can begin this by looking at the decisive events that occurred in the years before you entered the work world and that played a large role in shaping this personality.
- Try to map out the ramifications of these decisive events. Pay particular attention to the effect they may have had on the pattern of socialization that will characterize your generation.
- If the event was a major crisis of some sort, that will tend to make those of your generation band together for comfort and security, valuing the team and feelings of love, and allergic to confrontation.
- A period of stability and nonevents will make you gravitate toward others for adventure, for group experimentation, sometimes bordering on the reckless.
- In general, you will tend to notice a socializing style of your peers, most evident in your twenties.
- Pay close attention to the heroes and icons of a generation, those who act out the qualities that others secretly wish they had as well. They are often the types who gain celebrity in youth culture—the rebels, the successful entrepreneurs, the gurus, the activists. These indicate emerging new values. Similarly, look at the trends and fads that suddenly sweep through your generation, for instance the sudden popularity of digital currencies.
- Like an individual, any generation will tend to have an unconscious, shadow side to its personality.
- A good sign of this can be found in the particular style of humor that each generation tends to forge. In humor people release their frustrations and express their inhibitions.
- Your third task, then, is to expand this knowledge to something broader, first trying to piece together what could be considered the zeitgeist.

## Strategies for Exploiting the Spirit of the Times

### **Push against the past.**

- Use the past and its values or ideas as something to push against with great force, using any anger you might feel to help in this. Make your break with the past as sharp and clear as possible.

### **Adapt the past to the present spirit.**

- Once you identify the essence of the zeitgeist, it is often a wise strategy to find some analogous moment or period in history.

### **Resurrect the spirit of childhood.**

- You must use this strategy only if you feel a particularly powerful connection to your childhood.

### **Create the new social configuration.**

- You will always gain great power by forging some new way of interacting that appeals to your generation.

### **Subvert the spirit.**

- If the spirit of the times is like a tide or a stream, better to find a way to gently redirect it, instead of fighting its direction.

### **Keep adapting.**

- What you want is to modernize your spirit, to possibly adopt some of the values and ideas of the younger generation that appeal to you, gaining a new and wider audience by blending your experience and perspective with the changes going on, making yourself into an unusual and appealing hybrid.

### **The Human Beyond Time and Death**

- Here's how we could apply this active approach to four elemental aspects of time.

### **The phases of life:**

- Aging has a psychological component and can be a self-fulfilling prophecy—we tell ourselves we are slowing down and cannot do or attempt as much as we did in past, and as we act on these thoughts, we intensify the aging process, which makes us depressed and prone to slow down even more.

### **Present generations:**

- Your goal here is to be *less* a product of the times and to gain the ability to transform your relationship to your generation. A key way of doing this is through active associations with people of different generations.

### **Past generations:**

- You must radically alter your own relationship to history, bringing it back to life within you.
- Make use of the excellent books written in the last hundred years to help you gain a feel for daily life in particular periods (for example, *Everyday Life in Ancient Rome* by Lionel Casson or *The Waning of the Middle Ages* by Johan Huizinga).
- The novels of F. Scott Fitzgerald will give you a much livelier connection to the Jazz Age than any scholarly book on the subject. Drop any tendencies to judge or moralize.

### **The future:**

- We can understand our effect on the future most clearly in our relationship to our children, or to those young people we influence in some way as teachers or mentors. This influence will last years after we are gone. But our work, what we create and contribute to society, can exert even greater power and can become part of a conscious strategy to communicate with those of the future and influence them.



## 18: Meditate on Our Common Mortality - The Law of Death Denial

- Most of us spend our lives avoiding the thought of death. Instead, the inevitability of death should be continually on our minds.
- Understanding the shortness of life fills us with a sense of purpose and urgency to realize our goals. Training ourselves to confront and accept this reality makes it easier to manage the inevitable setbacks, separations, and crises in life. It gives us a sense of proportion, of what really matters in this brief existence of ours.
- Most people continually look for ways to separate themselves from others and feel superior. Instead, we must see the mortality in everyone, how it equalizes and connects us all. By becoming deeply aware of our mortality, we intensify our experience of every aspect of life.

### The Bullet in the Side

- We must focus hard on the uncertainty that death represents—it could come tomorrow, as could other adversity or separation. We must stop postponing our awareness.
- In doing so, we set a much different course for our lives. Making death a familiar presence, we understand how short life is and what really should matter to us.

### Keys to Human Nature

- The *paradoxical death effect*—these moments and encounters have the paradoxical result of making us feel more awake and alive.

### A Philosophy of Life Through Death

The following are five key strategies, with appropriate exercises, to help us achieve this.

#### **Make the awareness visceral.**

- We must begin by meditating on our death and seeking to convert it into something more real and physical.
- We can use our imagination in this as well, by envisioning the day our death arrives, where we might be, how it might come. We must make this as vivid as possible.
- We can also try to look at the world as if we were seeing things for the last time—the people around us, the everyday sights and sounds, the hum of the traffic, the sound of the birds, the view outside our window.

#### **Awaken to the shortness of life.**

- Then, if a deadline is forced upon us on a particular project, that dreamlike relationship to time is shattered and for some mysterious reason we find the focus to get done in days what would have taken weeks or months.
- Let the awareness of the shortness of life clarify our daily actions. We have goals to reach, projects to get done, relationships to improve.

#### **See the mortality in everyone.**

- Let us look at the pedestrians in any busy city and realize that in ninety years it is likely that none of them will be alive, including us.

#### **Embrace all pain and adversity.**

- The other choice available to us is to commit ourselves to what Friedrich Nietzsche called *amor fati* ("love of fate"): "My formula for greatness in a human being is *amor fati*: that one wants nothing to be other than it is, not in the future, not in the past, not in all eternity. Not merely to

endure that which happens of necessity . . . but to *love* it.”

- Our task is to accept these moments, and even embrace them, not for the pain but for the opportunities to learn and strengthen ourselves. In doing so, we affirm life itself, accepting all of its possibilities. And at the core of this is our complete acceptance of death.
- Why complain over this or that, when in fact we see such events as occurring for a reason and ultimately enlightening us?
- Why feel envy for what others have, when we possess something far greater—the ultimate approach to the harsh realities of life?

### **Open the mind to the Sublime.**

- The Sublime is anything that exceeds our capacity for words or concepts by being too large, too vast, too dark and mysterious. Feeling the Sublime is the perfect antidote to our complacency and to the petty concerns of daily life that can consume us and leave us feeling rather empty.
- When we look up at the night sky, we can let our minds try to fathom the infinity of space and the overwhelming smallness of our planet, lost in all the darkness.
- "Let us rid death of its strangeness, come to know it, get used to it. Let us have nothing on our minds as often as death...He who has learned how to die has unlearned how to be a slave. Knowing how to die frees us from all subjection and constraint." —Michel de Montaigne

Want to get my latest book notes? Subscribe to my newsletter to get one email a week with new book notes, blog posts, and favorite articles.

**First Name**

**Email Address**

Submit