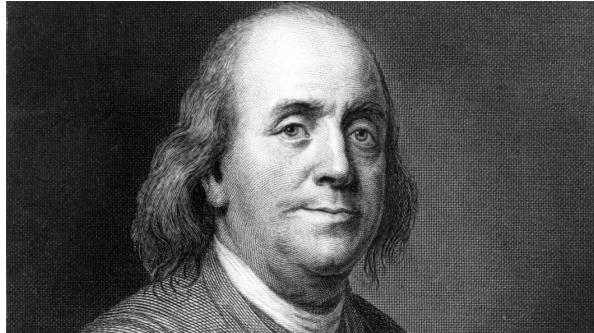


This 300-Year-Old System Will Help You Become the Best Version of Yourself

By Jayme Hoffman.

How do you become the best version of yourself?



How do you become the best version of yourself?

This question inspired 20-year-old Benjamin Franklin to create the 13-virtue character development system. Benjamin's 13 virtues helped him succeed in politics, invention, music, business, science and diplomacy.

A few of his accomplishments...

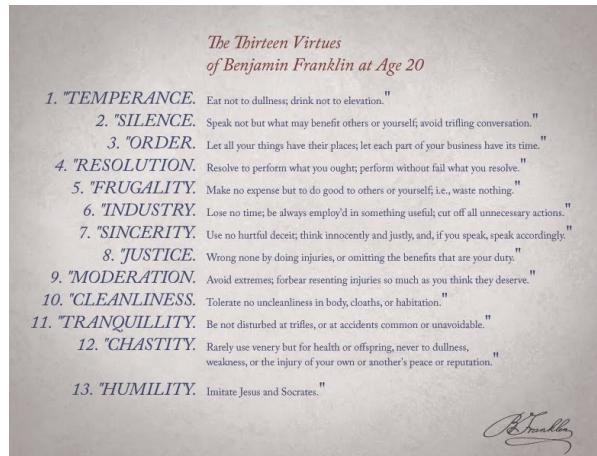
- **Politics:** contributed to America's independence and is referred to as "*the only President of the United States who was never President of the United States.*"
- **Invention:** invented the lighting rod, bifocals, long-arm, Franklin stove and political cartoons.
- **Business:** created multiple successful newspapers and the wildly popular Poor Richard's Almanack.

I discovered the 13-virtue system 3 years ago while reading Walter Isaacson's "Benjamin Franklin: An American Life." Benjamin's stories inspired me to try out the system and strive for improvement in all the aspects of my life.

Here are the 13 virtues and what I've learned after 3 years of practice.

Benjamin practiced his 13 virtues daily by carrying around a ledger and placing a dot on the virtue he failed to live up to for that day.

He focused on one specific virtue each week by placing it at the top of his ledger. Focusing on one virtue each week meant that Benjamin would practice each virtue four times per year (52/13=4).



1. Practicing virtues makes you better in ways you never imagined.

Do you understand the humility in touchdowns? Can you keep calm when all are losing their heads? Do you proactively learn or reactively distract yourself?

The routine of practicing each virtue forces you to think about the most important areas of life that we often take for granted.

Here are some thoughts and quotes I picked up...

Humility

Humility is scoring a touchdown and walking off the field thinking, that was my job. It's the foundation of all other virtues. You cannot improve without it.

Proactive

Proactive people focus on preparing, reactive people focus on repairing.

Proactive media is researching/learning. Reactive media is browsing.

End in mind (Goals)

You can't accomplish anything without having an end in mind.

Tranquility (or Zen)

Most of your troubles are solved by living in the now. Mark Twain said it best — "My life has been filled with terrible misfortune most of which never happened"

Focus

Knowing what you want (goals) is half the battle. Removing the unimportant is the other half.

Inquisitiveness

Curiosity is the gateway to learning.

“Questions are little holes in your mind where answers fit.” — C. Christensen

Courage

Courage and grit do not exist without fear.

— *Fear: unpleasant anticipation of pain.*

— *Courage: doing something that frightens you.*

— *Grit: being courageous for long periods.*

Moderation

Moderation is balance.

It's much easier to abstain than to moderate.

Silence

The quieter you are, the more you can hear, listen and learn.

Always think before you speak.

Communication

“*Good communication is like a pencil: it has to have a point.*” — *Maybe Twain*

Patience

Patience is all about trust.

It's not waiting passively — it's the calmness during gritty times.

Reflection

Reflection is recognizing hindsight.

It's connecting the dots looking backward.

The unexamined life is not worth living. — *Socrates*

2. Change the virtues you practice to fit your life.

You don't have to practice the same 13 virtues that Benjamin Franklin did.

Benjamin Franklin wasn't the first person to define and practice a set of virtues. — The Samurai practiced “[The Bushido Code](#)” or seven virtues. Aristotle introduced and practiced [12 virtues](#).

You should practice the virtues you value most.

Benjamin Franklin	Bushido Code	Aristotle
Temperance	Justice/Restitude	Courage
Silence	Courage	Temperance
Order	Benevolence/Mercy	Liberality
Resolution	Respect	Magnificence
Frugality	Honesty	Price
Industry	Honor	Honor
Sincerity	Loyalty	Good Temper
Justice		Friendliness
Moderation		Truthfulness
Cleanliness		Wit
Tranquility		Friendship
Chastity		Justice
Humility		

Figure 1: I changed the virtues I practice immediately after my first 13 weeks. The virtues I replaced aren't unimportant. I just felt like there are other virtues I wanted to spend more time on. [\[Image Source\]](#)

- **Tranquility:** I changed tranquility to Zen because it's easier to practice.

- **Order:** I changed Order to End in mind because it's clearer.
- **Inquisitive:** I added inquisitive and believe this is one of the most important virtues in my life.
- **Proactive:** I added proactive because it's important to take responsibility for your life.
- **Courage:** I added courage because you can't grow without doing things that scare you.
- **Empathy:** I added empathy to get better at treating people how they want to be treated.
- **Communication:** I added communication because I think it's important to be able to get a message across.
- **Reflection:** I added reflection because I think it's important to live an examined life.

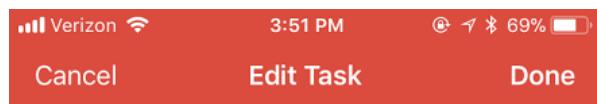
3. Practice your virtues with modern software tools.

Benjamin Franklin tracked and practiced his virtues using a [notebook](#).

I initially tried to keep track of everything in a mole-skin notebook. I'm not a big user of pen and paper. I often forgot to think about the virtue and the notebook turned into a bunch of app/product sketches. Switching from paper to software helped me remember and practice each virtue consistently. Here's how I use each app.

I use the todo app, Todoist to track habits on a daily basis and to remind myself to practice a new virtue each week. Here's how it works.

1. Create a project for the virtues. Mine is titled “13.”
2. Create a new task for each virtue. I put a “13 -” in front of each virtue so that I know the difference among my main todo list.
3. Set a daily reminder for the main virtue you practice for the week. Mine is set every day at 7 am. The virtue you're practicing for the week will show up in your inbox (*main todo list*) each morning.
4. Create an extra task for “New virtue” and add a reminder for every Sunday. This reminds you to start a new virtue for the following week.



I use the note-taking app, [dropbox paper](#) to track notes, links, lessons and quotes for each virtue. You could also use [iA Writer](#), [Bear](#) or [Evernote](#).

- I keep a master note of all the virtues with a todo list for each one. I often discover lessons, links and books relevant to virtues I'm not focused on for that week. I add all these things as tasks for that specific virtue. I revisit the tasks when I'm focused on that virtue for the week.

- I have a note for each virtue that includes descriptions, definitions, quotes and links. I use my daily 7 am alarm to spend 15–30 minutes reading and writing about each virtue. I put everything I find in this note.

13 Virtues

End in Mind

Always start everything with the end in mind. What is the goal / habits?

Todo

- <https://journal.thriveglobal.com/the-best-strategy-for-kicking-bad-habits-is-simpler-than-you-may-think-d752f3be6ca4>
- Living for long-term vs. short-term
<https://beardedcolonel.co.uk/blog/rockefellers-6-personal-traits-success/>
- What / how to compound
- http://www.lifehack.org/608970/warren-buffett-says-most-people-end-up-being-average-because-they-dont-keep-this-list?ref=sidebar_related
- Invert

fell far short of it, yet I was, by the endeavour, a better and a happier man than I otherwise should have been if I had not attempted it.

—Benjamin Franklin

I'll spend the rest of my life practicing a set of virtues and will never come close to mastering a single one. I don't think you can master a virtue and I don't think that's the point.

The 13-character development system is about **the process** of striving for perfection. Practice this system, not for the destination, but for the change it will require getting there.

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4. Never settle with where you are in life but understand that you'll never master a virtue.

Here's what Benjamin Franklin wrote 60 years after he created and practiced the 13-virtue system.

Tho' I never arrived at the perfection I had been so ambitious of obtaining, but

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<https://medium.com/the-mission/this-300-year-old-system-will-help-you-become-the-best-version-of-yourself-1c0d3601ae68>.