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## The 48 Laws of Power

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### Management

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### Take-Aways

- Always look good, always be stylish.
- Never trust anyone - enemies are more reliable than friends.
- Make everything seem easy.
- Draw attention to yourself.
- Use the weaknesses and pain points of others to control them.
- Plan thoroughly and never overreach your plan.
- Do not force people to do your will; seduce and induce them.
- Speak as little as possible because speaking too much is dangerous.
- Keep yourself at some distance to inspire respect.
- Play dumb, because if people think they are smarter than you they will make blunders.

## Recommendation

This book is amoral, hauntingly true and indispensable. It should be on the bookshelf of anyone who aspires to any level of success in any organization or profession. It should not gather dust but should be read regularly, according to a plan - one law a day, for example, absorbed slowly and contemplated deeply. Author Robert Greene draws on a rich variety of sources including books so threatening that they were banned by the ancient Chinese. He cites the memoirs of Machiavelli, various con men and many others who swept aside what ought to be in order to focus on what is. It might seem that anyone who follows all of these laws in their rich, narrative detail will turn out to be a very unpleasant person. That's probably not true. *getAbstract* suspects, in contrast, that the person who masters the laws of power will be extremely pleasant, with winning ways and a knack for likeability, yet awe-inspiring and in control - though not always obviously so. Doesn't that sound tempting?

## Summary

### The Ways of Power

The need for power is so fundamental, so essentially human, that when you feel you have no power over people or events, you are likely to be depressed. People who pretend to have no aspirations to power are either deceiving themselves or attempting to deceive others. Everyone wants power. The more they get, the more they want. Power is like a drug, but it does not weaken you. On the contrary, it makes you stronger.

*"The moment of victory is often the moment of greatest peril."*

Yet, it is considered somewhat impolite and vulgar, almost an outrage, to seek power forthrightly. Those who want power must seem to have no interest in it. Indeed, they must pretend to care only about others. The person who best projects an image of not caring for power will become the most powerful. It is paradoxical and, perhaps, unhealthy but you cannot honestly and straightforwardly pursue power. You must disguise your means and ends. This does not mean lying. Indeed, it is wrong to lie, not because lying is immoral, although according to moral codes it is, but rather because the risk of being exposed is too great. Power depends on trust. The known liar loses trust and, therefore, loses power. Duplicity is another matter. These laws may seem scandalously frank, but you can apply them without violating any of the strictures of public morality. In fact, that's the way to get the best results.

*"The mirror reflects reality, but it is also the perfect tool for deception: When you mirror your enemies, doing exactly as they do, they cannot figure out your strategy."*

### The Laws

1. Never eclipse your superiors – Always reinforce their comfortable sense of superiority. They are probably acutely aware of their defects and incompetence, and alert to any threat from below. If you make them look bad, they will crush you, stymie you and make you miserable. Prove your usefulness. Never outshine them.

2. Do not trust allies, but understand the utility of enemies – Friends will betray you out of envy. They have a regrettable tendency to expect too much of you because of your friendship and to become demanding nuisances. Don't hire or appoint friends. Hire enemies. The enemy whom you forgive will always feel that he has to prove his loyalty. If you have no enemies, get to work making a few good ones.
3. Don't tip your hand – If people don't know what goal you are seeking, they cannot defend against you. Keep your intentions secret. Move behind a smokescreen.
4. Spare your words – The powerful seldom speak. The more you talk, the more you expose yourself, and then, the more familiar you become. The more familiar you become, the less awesome you seem. Speak sparingly.
5. Protect your reputation – Reputation can defend you in any attack, but it is useless once damaged. Never tolerate or ignore any threat of a blemish to your reputation.
6. Make yourself the center of attention – People judge on the basis of what they see. They do not know what they don't see. Forget toiling in obscurity. The only reward for that will be more toil and more obscurity. Make a spectacle of yourself.
7. Take credit for others' work – Admittedly, it's not nice to take all the credit for other people's work, but it is very effective and you would be a fool to do otherwise. You will seem like a miracle of speed and competence, and no one will remember those who made your success possible, so they can't threaten you.
8. Lure people – When you make other people move first, you are in control. Power means being in control. Never act first; never go to the other person's turf. Make adversaries come to you. Bait them, entice them, seduce them, but draw them to you.
9. Win by deeds not by debate – Instead of arguing (which creates losers who bear grudges), win by acting. Don't argue. Instead, demonstrate that you are right by your deeds.
10. Shun losers; unhappiness and bad luck are contagious – The drowning man drags his rescuers under. Avoid losers. Hang with winners. Shun the poor, the unlucky, the unloved and the unhappy.
11. Make people need you – It is good to have people depend on you. Keep them dependent. Then, you are in control. Never teach them so much they can get by without you or compete with you. Keep a secret or two that maintains your power.
12. Tell part of the truth and be tactically generous – When you are honest and generous, people relax and begin to trust you. Then they are vulnerable and effectively in your power. Seem generous and honest. Give people gifts. Remember the story of the Trojan Horse: it worked admirably well.
13. When you ask for help, let people know what's in it for them – Do not expect altruism. When people are altruistic (rare), you are in their debt. Usually, people will not want to help you for your sake. To get their support, appeal to their self-interest. If something will benefit them, exaggerate shamelessly; they will hasten to your aid.
14. Seem to be a friend to gather intelligence – Draw people out. Ask oblique questions. Get them to reveal themselves. Disarm rivals by seeming to be a friend.
15. Destroy your enemy – When you fight, do not leave your enemy alive to fight another day. Annihilate your enemies. Destroy them utterly. Even a small spark can start a forest fire. Drown every smoldering ember.
16. Absent yourself to inspire awe – When people see you too much, they do not respect you. Stay out of sight to inspire awe and perhaps fear. Scarce things are valuable.

17. Be unpredictable to inspire fear – If you are unpredictable, people will exhaust themselves trying to figure you out. In extreme cases, volatile changes of mood, temper or plan can empower you as a tyrant, allowing you to terrorize underlings.
18. Do not withdraw totally because isolation has its perils – It is one thing to make yourself scarce, another to hide behind the castle walls. You cannot trust anyone to bring you accurate information, so you cannot stay completely out of sight. Be out and about enough to know what is up.
19. Know with whom you deal; give no offense to the powerful – Be able to read people. Know what power and what friends your antagonists command. Make no assumptions. People often pretend to be what they are not, and may nourish a slight for years until they have a chance to repay it.
20. Make no promises – You are your only commitment. Avoid inseparable allies. As Washington advised, avoid entangling alliances.
21. Play dumb – There's no point looking smarter than people. It puts them on their guard. Disarm your victims by making them feel smartest. They like it, and it makes them shed all suspicion and fear, so you can manipulate them as you please.
22. Surrender to gain power – If you are weaker than your opponent, forget staging a good fight for glory. Surrender on terms that let you keep as much power as possible. Wait for your opponent to make a false step, and strike from the dark, unsuspected.
23. Focus your strength – Pick one point and bring all your forces to bear on it. Do not disperse your energy or power. Cultivate one powerful mentor or patron assiduously.
24. Be courtly – The courtier is adept at intrigue, manipulation, image, flattery, flirtation and conversation. The perfect courtier looks good and manages to assemble power without seeming to grasp. To control even the king, be the perfect courtier.
25. Re-invent yourself – Don't be what other people try to compel you to be. Carve out your own attention-getting identity. Be interesting, never dull. Be dramatic; have signature gestures, deeds, even costumes, so people always know who you are.
26. Don't get your hands dirty – Use someone else to do any dirty work. Then, find someone else to take the blame. Scapegoats and cats'-paws have their uses.
27. Exploit people's needs to build your cult – People want to believe. It hardly matters what or whom they believe. Offer them something to trust, someone to follow. Speak inspiringly and imply great promises, but spare the specifics so no one can charge you with not performing. Have your disciples sacrifice for you. They will empower you.
28. Act boldly – Never be timid. Take bold, decisive action. Any doubt on your part will impede you and increase the probability of failure. Never fail in public. The missteps of the bold are forgiven; the stumbles of the timid are not.
29. Plan everything – Leave nothing to chance. Plan every step, including the last step, and the one after that. Many have lost the fruit of their scheming by neglecting to plan the conclusion. As a result, the credit, money or power went to someone else.
30. Look as if everything you do is easy – Never show effort. Never break a sweat. Magicians conceal their stage apparatus and so should you. Amaze others with the ease of your accomplishment. Especially when you have run as far as you possibly can and are about to faint, seem to be full of energy and ready for another course.

31. You have to deal the cards to control the game – You must seem to allow others some freedom of choice, but always invisibly control the boundaries of their choices. Give them choices that make you better off no matter which alternative they pick.
32. Seem to offer what people have dreamed of and longed for – Never make people face the ugly truth. Give them the dreams they want and they will give you power.
33. Learn what hurts and use it – Everyone has a weakness, vulnerability, insecurity, need or sensitivity. Learn it and exploit it. Inflict or relieve pain as serves your purpose.
34. Play the king and people will treat you royally – Carry yourself like a king. Respect and value yourself. Other people will regard you as you regard yourself.
35. Timing is everything – The right act at the wrong time is the wrong act. The wrong act at the right time is the right act. Timing is everything. Part of appearing confident is the virtue of patience. Never seem hurried, harried or at loose ends. Behave as if everything is going your way and will work out in your favor.
36. Despise what is beyond your reach – Like Aesop's fox and the sour grapes, if you cannot reach a coveted prize, despise it. If you acknowledge a problem or a problem person, you empower the problem or the troublemaker. If you seem to ignore and disdain what others covet or fear, you will seem superior, and they will be in awe.
37. Be spectacular – Do not hide your light. Use symbols, grand gestures, dramatic words and staging to highlight yourself and draw attention.
38. Think what you please, but act like the crowd – There is no advantage in playing the eccentric or the fool. If you seem to run too much against the current of the times and against the customary practice, people will distrust and despise you. Show your inventiveness and originality only to those with whom you are intimate.
39. Make a splash and you'll fill your net with fish – Never get angry. Never give vent to strong emotions. Make your enemies do that. When they strike in anger, they will strike inaccurately, opening themselves to your patient, well-planned counter attack.
40. Don't look for a free lunch; disdain it – Anything that seems free is not. Something worth having is worth the price. Pay your own way; carry your own weight. Owe nothing. Do not rely on the generosity of others; make others rely on yours.
41. Don't try to fill the shoes of the great – If the shoes don't fit you, you'll stumble and look like a presumptuous fool. If the one who preceded you in a post was great, you will work in a shadow. Strike out on your own; show movement in a new direction.
42. Strike the shepherd to scatter the sheep – If the group is restive or truculent, look for the troublemaker. Often, a single malcontent can poison a whole community. Strike that one person and you will destroy an entire movement.
43. Win hearts and minds – Do not force people to do your will. They resent force and nurture dreams of revenge. Win them by guile, flattery and craft. Let them think they are following their own will and hearts. Then they will serve you out of love, and hope only to serve you more.
44. Enrage people by mirroring them – Do what your enemies do. Force them to face themselves. They will see themselves and they will not see you. You will enrage them, disarm them and defeat them.
45. Talk about reform but make changes slowly – People love to talk about change, but they hate to change. If you come to power, do not make big changes quickly. Talk up reform, inspire dreams of change, but make only small changes and work patiently.

46. Never look perfect – If you look too good, people will try to destroy you out of envy. Claim some fault so slight it is almost a virtue, but acknowledge it as a fault.
47. When you reach your goal, stop – Many have lost the prize by being too greedy or arrogant. Don't overreach. When you achieve your victory, you have reached the end of your plan. Stop. Do not go farther until you have made a new plan.
48. Be protean – If you have no shape, people cannot find your center and cannot attack you. Be fluid. Adjust to every circumstance. Like water, adapt to every vessel.

## About the Author

**Robert Greene** has a degree in classical studies and has been an editor at *Esquire* and other magazines.



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