



Summary of The 48 Laws of Power

Original book by Robert Greene

In *The 48 Laws of Power*, Robert Greene asserts that whether you like it or not, you're part of a never-ending game of power. You're either striving for and wielding power, or you're a pawn being played by someone more powerful than you. You choose your role.

This book is for those who prefer to be players rather than pawns. To turn you from an amateur into a master player, Greene has codified 48 laws of power based on historical examples of people who've excelled or failed at wielding power, with glorious or bloody results (or both). Some key principles you'll learn: use your enemies, keep others dependent on you, say as little as possible, take credit for others' work, and don't get your hands dirty. You can choose to apply or dismiss these rules - but you can't escape them.

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1-Page Summary

People can't stand to be powerless. Everyone wants power and is always trying to get more. Striving for and wielding power is a game everyone participates in, whether they want to or not. **You're either a power player or a pawn someone else is playing with.**

In *The 48 Laws of Power* Robert Greene contends that since you can't opt out of the game of power, you're better off becoming a master player by learning the rules and strategies practiced since ancient times.

He's codified 48 laws of power based on examples and writings going back 3,000 years of people who've excelled or failed at wielding power, with glorious or bloody results. Greene argues that following the 48 laws will generally increase your power, while failing to follow them will decrease it, or worse. He provides details on how to practice the laws, plus examples and analysis.

Many of the laws originated or were exemplified in the aristocratic courts of old Europe, where a bevy of courtiers jockeyed for influence around a powerful person. There were clear principles and rules of conduct that everyone knew, but applying them was a high art at which only a few succeeded, and not always for long.

Courtiers served the king while scheming to increase their power, defend it from others, and keep others from undermining or surpassing them. They appeared civilized and refined, but were ruthless and ambitious beneath the surface. At the same time they had to be subtle: Courtiers sought power by sucking up to the king, but if they got too obvious about it, their peers (who had the same goal) would turn on them.

Staying on top and increasing your power required strategy and tactics, **but at the heart of the game lay an essential skill — deception**, which was employed in myriad ways.

Since then, the game of power hasn't changed much, although it's gotten a bit less bloody (more heads roll figuratively than literally). To practice deception effectively requires an understanding of human behavior (your own and others'), the relentless study of the people around you, complete self-control, outward charm, adaptability, strategic thinking, and deviousness.

Here, then, are the 48 laws in brief (each is independent, so you don't need to follow them in sequence), along with Greene's warning of the seductive quality of power: it can consume your mind, and you might never see human behavior the same way again.

(Shortform note: We've grouped the laws into categories to clarify themes and make them easier to remember.)

Adopt a Power Mindset

Key takeaways: Be calculating and strategic, not emotional. Identify your goals and pursue them relentlessly.

Best example: Chinese Emperor Sung converted an enemy into an ally. Sung invited the enemy, King Shu, to his palace, where Shu thought he would be punished. After wining and dining him however, Sung sent Shu home with a package. When Shu opened it, he found evidence documenting his conspiracy against Sung. He realized he was being spared and became one of Sung's most loyal followers.

Law 2: Be Wary of Friends; Use Enemies: Keep a close eye on your friends — they get envious and will

undermine you. If you co-opt an enemy, he'll be more loyal than a friend because he'll try harder to prove himself worthy of your trust.

Law 10: Misery Is Contagious: Avoid It Like the Plague: Avoid miserable people. The perpetually miserable spread misery like an infection, and they'll drown you in it.

Law: 19: Know Your Victims: When attempting to deceive someone, know who you're dealing with, so you don't waste your time or stir up a hornets' nest in reaction.

Law 23: Focus Your Efforts: Focus your resources and energies where you'll have the most impact or get the most benefit. Otherwise you'll waste limited time and energy.

Law 29: Plan Through the End: Make detailed plans with a clear ending. Take into account all possible developments. Then don't be tempted from your path. Otherwise you risk being surprised and forced to react without time to think.

Law 35: Get the Timing Right: Anticipate the ebb and flow of power. Recognize when the time is right, and align yourself with the right side. Be patient and wait for your moment. Bad timing ends careers and ambitions.

Law 36: Ignore Small Problems: Sometimes it's better to ignore things because reacting can make small problems worse, make you look bad, and give your enemy attention.

Law 41: Chart Your Own Course: If you succeed a great leader or famous parent, find or create your own space to fill. Sharply separate from the past and set your own standards — or you'll be deemed a failure for not being a clone of your predecessor.

Law 48: Be Elusive: Be flexible, fluid, and unpredictable — formless — so your opponents can't get a fix on you and can't figure out how to respond.

Communicate Powerfully

Key takeaways: Show rather than tell. Attune yourself to others' emotions. Win the hearts of followers.

Best example: When Michelangelo was carving the famous statue of David, the mayor of Florence took a look and told him the nose was too big. Instead of arguing, Michelangelo gestured for the mayor to follow him up the scaffolding, where the artist pretended to be changing the nose. When he was done, the mayor pronounced it perfect. But Michelangelo hadn't changed it — he just changed the mayor's vantage point to a new one, from which it looked fine.

Law 4: Say as Little as Possible: Say little and be ambiguous, leaving the meaning to others to interpret. The less you say, the more intimidating and powerful you are.

Law 6: Attract Attention: Be outrageous or create an aura of mystery. Any attention — positive or negative — is better than being ignored. Attention brings you wealth.

Law 9: Don't Argue, Demonstrate: Demonstrate your point rather than arguing. Arguing rarely changes anyone's mind, but people believe what they see. They're also less likely to be offended.

Law 12: Disarm Others by Being Nice: Use honesty and generosity to disarm and distract others from your schemes. Even the most suspicious people respond to acts of kindness, leaving them vulnerable to manipulation.

Law 13: Show Others What's In It for Them: When you need help from someone in a position of power, appeal to their self-interest. They'll be glad to help if they'll get something in return, and you'll get what you want without seeming desperate or irritating.

Law 14: Seem Like a Friend, but Be a Spy: Be friendly, sympathetic, and interested to get people to reveal their deepest thoughts and feelings. When you know your opponent's secrets, you can predict his behavior and control him.

Law 25: Reinvent Yourself: Create a powerful image that stands out, rather than letting others define you. Change your appearance and emotions to suit the occasion. People who seem larger than life attract admiration and power.

Law 27: Create a Cult Following: Offer people something to believe in and someone to follow. Promise the world but keep it vague; whip up enthusiasm. People will respond out a desperate need for belonging. Followers line your pockets, and your opponents are afraid to rile them.

Law 32: Fulfill Others' Fantasies: Conjure up alluring fantasies in contrast to the gloomy realities of life, and people will flock to you. Spin the right tale and wealth and power will follow.

Law 37: Put on a Show: In addition to words, use visuals and symbols to underscore your power. What people see makes a greater impression on them than what they hear.

Law 43: Win Hearts and Minds: Win others' hearts and minds. Play on their emotions and weaknesses, and appeal to their self-interest. You'll have them eating out of your hand, and they'll be less likely to turn on you.

Law 44: Mirror Others' Emotions: Seduce people by mirroring their emotions and interests; create the illusion that you share their values. They'll be so grateful to be understood that they'll won't notice your ulterior motives.

Adopt Behaviors that Enhance Your Power

Key takeaways: Conceal your intentions. Ingratiate yourself to others, but benefit yourself under the surface.

Best example: Famous con man Victor Lustig pretended to be a count; he dressed expensively, but always wore an odd, attention-grabbing accessory. He hung around hotels acting in ways that got people buzzing. He was so interesting and distracting that people who got close to him didn't notice they were being robbed.

Law 1: Never Upstage the Boss: Ensure that those above you always feel superior. Go out of your way to make your bosses look better and feel smarter than anyone else. Everyone is insecure, but an insecure boss can retaliate more strongly than others can.

Law 3: Hide What You're Up To: Always hide your true intentions. Create a smoke screen.

If you keep people off balance and in the dark, they can't counter your efforts.

Law 5: Guard Your Reputation: Nurture and guard your reputation because reputation is integral to power. With a strong reputation, you can influence and intimidate others.

Law 7: Take Credit For Others' Work: Get others to do your work for you. Use their skill, time, and energy

to further your ambitions while taking full credit. You'll be admired for your efficiency.

Law 16: Don't Wear Out Your Welcome: Once you've become well-known, don't wear out your welcome. The more you're seen and heard from, the more you cheapen your brand.

Law 17: Be Unpredictable: Throw others off balance and unnerve them with random, unpredictable acts. You'll gain the upper hand.

Law 21: Make Others Feel Smarter: Make your intended victims feel as though they're smarter than you are, and they won't suspect you of having ulterior motives.

Law 24: Play by the Rules: Learn the rules of the society you're playing in, and follow them to avoid attracting unfavorable attention. This includes appearing like a team player and being careful about criticizing diplomatically.

Law 30: Make It Seem Easy: Make difficult feats seem effortless and you'll inspire awe in others and seem powerful. By contrast, when you make too much of your efforts, your achievement will seem less impressive and you'll lose respect.

Law 34: Act Like Royalty: Act like royalty and people will treat you that way. Project dignity and supreme confidence that you're destined for great things, and others will believe it.

Law 38: Go Along to Get Along: Don't make a show of being different, or people will think you look down on them, and will retaliate against you.

Take Decisive Action

Key takeaways: Be ruthless in crushing opponents and exploiting others' weaknesses.

Best example: In the 1500s, French regent Catherine de Medici controlled many ambitious men who threatened her power by playing to their insatiable passions for women. She created a so-called "flying squadron" of skilled mistresses who seduced them and reported their plans back to Catherine.

Law 8: Bait Your Enemy: Make your opponent come to you. When you force others to act, you're in control. Bait them, then attack.

Law 11: Be Needed: Make your superior dependent on you. The more she needs you, the more security and freedom you have to pursue your goals.

Law 15: Annihilate Your Enemy: Crush your enemy completely. If you leave even one ember smoldering, it will eventually ignite. You can't afford to be lenient.

Law 22: Surrender to Win: When you're weaker, surrender rather than fighting for the sake of honor. This gives you time to build strength and undermine your victor. You'll win in the end.

Law 28: Act Boldly: When you act, do so boldly — and if you make mistakes, correct them with even greater boldness. Boldness brings admiration and power.

Law 31: Set Up Phony Choices: To deceive people, seem to give them a meaningful choice. But sharply limit their options to a few that work in your favor regardless of which they choose. Your victims will feel in control, but you'll pull the strings.

Law 33: Use Others' Weaknesses: Everyone has a weakness, a hole in his armor. Find it, and it's leverage that you can use to your advantage.

Law 39: Rattle Your Opponents: Always stay calm and objective. When you get angry, you've lost control. But if you can make your enemies angry, you gain an advantage.

Law 40: Use Money As a Tool: Use money and generosity strategically to achieve your goals. Use gifts to build a reputation of generosity, and also to obligate people to you.

Law 42: Squelch the Troublemaker: Trouble in a group often starts with a single individual who stirs the pot. Stop them before others succumb to their influence.

Avoid These Potential Pitfalls

Key takeaways: Maintain the Laws of Power under stress. Don't take them too far to the extreme. Watch out for counter-reactions to your success.

Best example: In the late 15th century, Isabella, the ruler of a small city-state in Italy, surrounded by larger warring city-states, managed to preserve her territory's independence and stay out of others' wars. She did so by appearing open to overtures from other powers without accepting any, avoiding provocation, and by engaging in complicated negotiations and ruses.

Law 18: Don't Isolate Yourself: Never isolate yourself when under pressure. This cuts you off from information you need, and when real danger arises you won't see it coming.

Law 20: Don't Take Sides: Don't commit to any side or cause except yourself. By maintaining your independence, you remain in control — others will vie for your attention. You also have the ability to pit the sides against each other.

Law: 26: Don't Get Your Hands Dirty: You'll inevitably make mistakes or need to take care of unpleasant problems. But keep your hands clean by finding others to do the dirty work, and scapegoats to blame.

Law 45: Enact Changes Slowly: Talk change but move slowly. Evoke revered history and cloak your changes in familiar rituals. Too much change is unsettling and will spark backlash.

Law 46: Watch for Envy: To forestall or mitigate envy, admit to a flaw or weakness, emphasize the role of luck, or downplay your talents. If you don't recognize and nip envy in the bud, it will grow and the envious will work insidiously against you.

Law 47: Know When to Stop: When you've won, don't let emotions push you past your goal. The moment of victory is dangerous because if you press your luck, you'll blunder into something you haven't planned for.

Preface

Everyone wants power over people and events, and always tries to get more. No one likes feeling powerless.

But wielding power is a double-edged sword. It's a vital asset, but **appearing too power-hungry or being too blatant in using power could be fatal to you**, or at least to your ambitions and status. You must create a facade of appearing fair and decent, but behind it you must be cunning and ruthless.

You can learn to play the game of power by studying how it was played in the Old World aristocratic courts that surrounded a powerful person — the rules are much the same today. In those days everyone schemed for power. Underlings served a king or master, but at the same time sought their own power by sucking up. If they got too obvious about it, however, their peers (who had the same goal) would turn on them.

On the surface, everyone had to seem civilized and refined. So winning the king's favor required being subtle while also watching out for, and thwarting, others' scheming to oust you.

The key was to be indirect: Smile while stabbing your opponent in the back, and use charm and deception instead of overt power grabs. You also had to apply tactical thinking, subtle strategy, and vigilance — always planning several moves ahead.

The game of power is the same today. **You must appear fair and civilized, without applying those principles literally.** If you were to behave in a truly fair and democratic way, you'd be crushed by others who understand the reality of wielding power: Respect the niceties but do whatever is necessary to deceive and outmaneuver everyone else.

(As Niccolo Machiavelli said: "Any man who tries to be good all the time is bound to come to ruin among the great number who are not good.")

Those most successful at playing the game manipulate others to do their bidding without the others' recognizing it. And since they don't realize it, they don't resent or resist it.

Some people find the notion of consciously playing power games, even indirectly, off-putting — they see it as evil or immoral, a vestige of the past. But **whether you intentionally participate or not, you're still part of the game.**

Strategies of 'Non-Players'

In fact, **those claiming the loudest to be anti-power are often highly skilled players.** You can easily spot them by the strategies they use to disguise their manipulations, including:

- **Presenting their supposed weakness and lack of power as a moral virtue.** If you were truly powerless, however, you wouldn't publicize the fact. Making a show of weakness is in fact a power strategy.
- **Advocating equality in everything.** To tout your moral superiority, you claim everyone should be treated the same way. But in reality you must treat people differently because some people do some things better than others. Ignoring differences would mean boosting the less skillful and suppressing those who excel, which no one really does. In fact, you're probably using another power play: manipulating people by (unequally) choosing whom to reward.
- **Espousing honesty and straightforwardness.** Making a show of honesty is often a power strategy

for deceiving others — they can be lulled into complacency by a gesture of seeming honesty and then fooled in a big way. Besides, however virtuous it might make you feel, being honest as a matter of policy is usually counterproductive. Honesty often stings and offends others, some of whom will retaliate. And anyway, no one believes anybody else is completely objective or acting without hidden motives, which is correct.

- **Acting naive to counter accusations that you're after power.** Appearing naive can be a means of deceit. Those who make a big deal about their innocence are the least innocent. Even genuine naivete is deceptive. Children may be naïve but use it to control those around them. And innocent people still engage in power games, although badly.

Supposed non-players flaunt their morality and sense of justice. But since all people yearn for power and are always trying to get it, they're just throwing up these "virtues" as a smokescreen to distract others from their own power plays. Virtue-signallers are skilled power players (sometimes unconsciously skilled) who particularly resent being called out on their tactics.

Become an Expert Player

There's no point in trying to opt out of the power game. You'll only end up with less power and you'll be miserable. Rather than resisting the inevitable or feeling guilty, **it's better to be a master player of the power game.**

The better you are at dealing with power, the better a person you become. You'll give others pleasure and make them feel better about themselves. In addition, they'll want to be around you (we like to bask in the glow of powerful people) and will come to depend on your abilities. By mastering the 48 Laws, you'll spare others the pain of playing the game badly by taking control from them.

In order to apply the laws of power successfully, you must view the world in a different way. You'll need to learn some overarching skills and mindsets that won't come naturally:

Master Your Emotions

This is the most important skill because emotions interfere with reason — if you can't view a situation objectively, you can't prepare for it and respond to it in a controlled way.

Responding emotionally is a mistake that will cost you more than the momentary satisfaction of venting. Anger is the most destructive emotional response because it blinds you the most. It also escalates situations and strengthens your opponent's resolve. It's better to keep an opponent off guard by pretending to be friendly than by revealing your anger. Love can also be dangerous — it can blind you to the self-serving behavior of those closest to you.

Controlling your emotions doesn't mean repressing them, however. Just be careful in expressing them — and don't let them affect your plans and strategies.

View the Past and Future Objectively

Viewing the past and future dispassionately enables you to better handle danger from any direction.

Study the past to educate yourself. Don't look at the past while remembering pain or bearing grudges — forget those things because they eat at you and cloud reason.

First, learn from past power players — winners and losers. Also, learn from your own experience, and from

your past actions and those of your friends. Analyze your mistakes in light of the 48 Laws: Each time you learn a lesson, vow never to repeat the mistake. This will help you break the patterns of the past.

As for the future, **imagine and anticipate problems before they arise**. Nothing should catch you by surprise. Instead of imagining your plan's fruition, figure out every possible outcome and pitfall and plan for it. **The farther you see ahead, the more powerful you become.**

Change to Suit the Occasion

Have many masks, and choose the one that fits the occasion. Learn to disassociate from yourself. Be many different people. Make your face changeable; work to conceal your intentions.

This tool of deception is your most important weapon because all human interaction requires deception on some level; it distinguishes us from animals. Craftiness was revered in Greek mythology.

Be Patient

Patience will protect you from making foolish or catastrophic mistakes. It's a sign of strength, whereas showing impatience makes you look weak. Rest assured that good things will come if you bide your time and see several steps into the future.

Forget Good and Evil

View circumstances neutrally rather than as good or evil. Power is amoral. It's a game. When engaged in a game of strategy, **judge others by the effect of their actions, not by their intentions**. Judge their strategy and power by what you can see and intuit; don't get caught up in making moral judgments.

Don't take anything personally — it's a game. Play with a strategy and calmly note your opponent's moves, their outcomes, and the circumstances. Don't be distracted by anything else.

Important note: What you *don't* do, and *don't* allow yourself to be pulled into, are as important as what you do.

Calculate Cost

Gauge everything by what it costs you. You may achieve your goal, but first know the price. Apply this standard to everything, including whether to collaborate with other people or come to their aid. Life is short, and your opportunities and energy are limited. Time is a cost. Don't waste valuable time or mental energy on others' issues.

Study and Understand People

Power is a social game — be a psychologist and look for the motivations behind people's actions so you can learn how to push their buttons. When you understand someone's hidden motives you can take advantage of them through deception and manipulation.

Key principle: Never trust anyone totally — carefully study everyone, including your friends and loved ones.

Pursue Power Indirectly

Conceal your strategy: Plan and implement your moves subtly and quietly, so you won't be caught out or give your opponent a chance to preempt you. Also, by being indirect, you can appear to be epitome of decency while pulling the strings behind the scenes.

How to Use This Book

This book is a guide to the art of deception. The 48 Laws are based on writings going back 3,000 years of people who have excelled at the game of power. The laws of power reflect their accumulated wisdom. Observing the laws will usually increase your power, while violating or failing to observe them will erode it.

A quick reading will allow you to evaluate your past actions and get more control over the present. A careful reading may prompt bigger changes. You can also read it for entertainment, but beware that it's easy to become consumed with the possibilities. Also, don't be frivolous: The gods of power reward those who study it, but punish those who fail to approach it seriously.

(Shortform note: In our summary, we've kept all 48 laws instead of combining or omitting them. While this causes a longer summary, each law has unique aspects, and condensing further for the sake of brevity could omit relevant points.)

Law 1: Never Upstage the Boss

The Law of Power: Ensure that those above you always feel superior. But don't overdo it when trying to impress or please them, or you'll inadvertently make them feel insecure and you'll suffer the backlash. Go out of your way to make your bosses look better and feel smarter than anyone else.

Principles

When it comes to power, eclipsing the boss is a particularly dangerous mistake. People in power need to feel secure in their position, superior to others in intelligence and charisma, and deserving of their perks. When they feel insecure, they lash out.

Whenever you demonstrate your talents you provoke resentment and envy (manifestations of insecurity) in others, whether they're bosses, subordinates or peers. Of course, you can't spend your life worrying about everyone's petty jealousies, but you need to pay special attention to your approach with superiors because of their greater ability to harm you. They can make heads roll, although not as literally as did kings of the past.

To avoid rocking a superior's boat, **don't try to win his approval by showing off your gifts and talents.** He may seem appreciative but at the first opportunity he'll replace you with someone less talented and less threatening. He won't admit the real reason — that you've undermined his sense of security — but will find another reason to get rid of you.

That's what happened to Nicolas Fouquet, King Louis XIV's finance minister. Fouquet tried to ingratiate himself with the king by staging a huge, lavish party at his newly completed chateau to honor the king. It was such a great party that people couldn't stop talking about it, which made the king feel he'd been outdone. He had Fouquet arrested the next day on a trumped up charge and imprisoned for the rest of his life. The king also replaced him with someone whose parties were always dull, and he built his own chateau using the designers and landscapers that Fouquet had used.

Not much has changed since the time of Louis XIV, in terms of bosses needing to feel and appear superior.

Two Caveats

You can unintentionally outshine your boss just by being yourself (especially if he or she is extremely insecure and not very appealing). Your natural talents, just by virtue of their existence, may make the boss look inferior.

- **Response:** If you can't help being superior, try to avoid extremely insecure leaders, or find a way to disguise your good qualities when around them. That way, you remain in control instead of being a target of their insecurity.

Don't think that because the boss likes you, you can do anything you want to. If you take your status for granted and let favors go to your head, you'll overstep and the boss will feel undermined.

- **Response:** Maintain a sense of limits. Never forget your place or feel you've earned your privileges.

Use Flattery

Make a point of flattering your boss, but be discreet. For instance, if you're more intelligent, seem to be

the opposite. Act naïve, making it seem like you need her expertise. Make harmless mistakes that will give you the chance to ask for her help. Bosses like to share the gift of their experience. If your ideas are better, attribute them to the boss in a public way.

Putting the Law to Work

In the early 1600s, Italian astronomer and mathematician Galileo took care to avoid eclipsing his bosses, the wealthy Medici family, whose members included popes, queens, and a string of dukes. As Galileo's patrons, the Medicis provided vital support for his research. Flattery was also central to his strategy.

When he discovered the four moons of Jupiter, Galileo used his discovery as a way to honor the Medicis' greatness. He told a story based in mythology that described the four moons as representing the four Medici sons revolving around Jupiter, which represented their father, Cosimo II, the grand duke of Tuscany.

Galileo ensured the Medicis would feel and be seen as more important than his discovery, and thus not be threatened by it, by associating them with the stars' brightness. As a result, Cosimo II made Galileo his official court philosopher and mathematician with a salary.

Exceptions to the Law

If your superior is a fading star, you don't need to be afraid of outshining her. Don't be merciful either — she didn't achieve *her* power by being merciful. Gauge her strength:

- If she's weak, quietly hasten her downfall; outdo her at key moments.
- If she's about to topple, just let it happen or you'll look like you're piling on.
- If your superior's status is strong, but you know you're better, wait patiently. Power naturally ebbs and flows. Your boss will fall eventually, and if you play your cards right, you'll outlast her.

Law 2: Be Wary of Friends, Use Enemies

The Law of Power: Keep a close eye on your friends — they easily become envious and resentful, and will undermine you. In contrast, if you promote an enemy, he'll be more loyal than a friend in an effort to prove himself. So use your enemies. If you lack enemies, you should create some.

Principles

We instinctively turn to friends when we need help, but you should think twice about doing this because **you don't know your friends as well as you think you do.**

Friends often agree with whatever you say to avoid an argument. Also, when you're friends, you cover up negative qualities so as not to offend the other person. As a result, you never know for certain how a friend truly feels.

When you're in a position of power, beware of hiring a friend. Hiring friends weakens you because your friend is rarely the one who can help you the most. You need skill and competence more than friendship. Also, friendly feelings can get in the way of what needs to be done.

If you hire a friend, you'll discover the qualities he or she has kept hidden. In addition, your act of kindness will unbalance the relationship. Receiving a favor from you may begin to feel burdensome; people want to feel they've earned their way. Their resentment will surface slowly – in flashes of honesty, envy, and bitterness. If you try to mend the relationship with more favors, you'll make matters worse.

Enemies can be more useful than friends when you can co-opt them. The key to choosing which ones is gauging who is best able to further your interests. When you can overcome past grievances and enlist an enemy in your service, he can be a great resource.

Other uses for enemies include:

- Keeping you on your toes: **Without enemies, you get lazy. An enemy at your heels keeps you alert and focused.** Thus, it's better to maintain some enemies as enemies rather than converting them into allies.
- Enhancing your reputation among followers: **You can use enemies to portray yourself as a fighter** for the people.

In any case, don't worry about having open opposition. **You're better off with a declared opponent (whom you can possibly convert) than with hidden enemies.**

Putting the Law to Work

Here are some examples of leaders turning enemies into allies:

- Talleyrand, Napoleon's foreign minister, needed an ally to help him thwart Napoleon when he decided his boss was leading France to ruin. He turned to Fouché, the head of the secret police who had previously tried to assassinate him. Talleyrand knew Fouché would work to prove himself, and they shared a mutual self-interest in undercutting Napoleon. While they didn't succeed against Napoleon at the time, they developed a relationship that proved to be profitable later.

- Secretary of State Henry Kissinger made a policy of co-opting those who disagreed with him. When some anti-war activists plotted to kidnap him, he won them over when he secretly met with them and shared his plans for getting U.S. troops out of Vietnam. Colleagues often commented that Kissinger got along better with his enemies than his friends.
- Chinese Emperor Sung, converted an enemy into an ally by doing something unexpected. The enemy, King Shu, had conspired to oust him. Sung invited him to the royal palace, where Shu thought he would be punished. After wining and dining him however, Sung sent Shu home with a package. When Shu opened it, he found evidence documenting his conspiracy against Sung. He realized he was being spared and became one of Sung's most loyal followers.

Exceptions to the Law

Although it's important to focus on converting your enemies to your service, there are some tasks for which a friend can be more useful.

For instance, when you need someone to do dirty work, your friends are often willing to take risks for you. And they're convenient fall guys if something goes wrong. Of course, since you'll end up losing a friend, choose someone close to you but not too important as your potential scapegoat.

Law 3: Hide What You're Up To

The Law of Power: Always hide your true intentions. If you keep people off balance and in the dark, they can't counter your efforts. Send them down the wrong path with a red herring or create a smokescreen and by the time they realize what you're up to, it will be too late for them to interfere.

Part 1: Use Decoys and Red Herrings

Sub-law: To deceive people about your real intentions, take preemptive action to mislead by using decoys and red herrings. Use tools such as fake sincerity, ambiguity, and lures — and people won't be able to differentiate the genuine from the false to see your goal.

Principles

Many people wear their feelings on their sleeve. And when it comes to plans and intentions, they're quick to tell all at the slightest provocation.

People tend to be “open books” because talking about feelings and intentions comes naturally. Watching your mouth — monitoring and controlling what you say — takes effort. In addition, they believe honesty and openness will win people over.

However, honesty has distinct downsides:

- Rather than being an appealing characteristic, honesty is likely to offend people. It's often better to tell people what they want to hear rather than the less flattering truth.
- If you're totally honest and open, people won't respect or fear you because you'll be predictable (to wield power, you need others' respect and fear).

In contrast, you can gain and maintain the upper hand by hiding your intentions. Fortunately, hiding your intentions is easy because it's human nature to trust appearances; the alternative of doubting the reality of what you see and hear — imagining there's always something else behind it — is too exhausting.

So **present a decoy or red herring** — something phony that's intended to attract attention and thus mislead — and **people will take the appearance for reality, and won't notice what you're really doing**.

For instance, you can divert attention from your true goals by making it look as though you support an idea or cause you previously opposed publicly. Most people will believe you had a true change of heart because people don't usually change sides frivolously.

Conversely, you can pretend to want something you're not actually interested in, and your opponents will be confused and miscalculate.

In 1711 the Duke of Marlborough, head of the English army, wanted to destroy a French fort because it blocked the route he wanted to use to invade France. His decoy was to capture the fort and add some soldiers, to make it look like he wanted to maintain and strengthen the fort. The French attacked and he let them recapture it. When they had it back, *they* destroyed it to keep it out of the duke's hands. Once it was gone, the duke marched easily into France.

Try False Sincerity

Besides broadcasting a fake goal, you can use false sincerity as a red herring to throw people off the scent. People are likely to mistake it for honesty, because they trust appearances and want to believe others are honest. Appearing to believe what you say adds authority to your words.

For example, Iago destroyed Othello by appearing to be deeply concerned about Desdemona's supposed infidelity. Othello trusted his false sincerity. Don't overdo your fake sincerity, however, or you'll arouse suspicions.

To make it even more effective, publicly stress the importance of being honest as a social value. Underscore your supposed honesty by revealing something seemingly personal (but fake or irrelevant) once in a while.

Putting Decoys to Work

Otto von Bismarck, as a deputy in the Prussian parliament, succeeded in his aim of going to war by using a decoy.

In the mid-1800s, the country debated unifying many states into one, and/or going to war against Austria, which was trying to keep Germany divided and weak. King Frederick William IV, and his ministers opposed war, preferring to appease Austria. But Prince William and most Prussians favored it.

Bismarck also favored war, as everyone knew. But he thought it was the wrong time to fight — Germany needed time to strengthen its army. So to distract Austria and others from his true goal he gave a speech against war and even praised Austria.

Everyone was confused, but war was averted for the moment, and the king made him a cabinet minister, which positioned him to start strengthening the army and developing political allies. Eventually Bismarck became Prussian premier, and led the country to defeat Austria and unify Germany.

Part 2: Use Smokescreens

Sub-law: An effective way to deceive people is to hide your intentions behind a comfortable and familiar facade — a smokescreen that you create. One of the most effective smokescreens is assuming a bland expression and manner. It lulls your target into complacency and he doesn't notice he's heading into a trap.

Principles

You might expect skillful deceivers to be charismatic people who use elaborate stories to mislead. But the best deceivers create a mild, low-key front.

Use familiar scenarios and actions — a smokescreen — to lull your targets into complacency and trust. Once you get the sucker's attention with something familiar, he won't notice the real deception. It works because people can focus on only one thing at a time. They don't suspect that the innocuous person they're dealing with is setting them up for a fall.

By contrast, a decoy is set up to attract your attention in an obvious way, as opposed to the way a smokescreen essentially lulls you to sleep or into a state of inattention.

The simplest form of smokescreen is a blank facial expression.

For example, in negotiations, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger used a monotonous voice, blank expression, and repetition of details to lull those he negotiated with — then suddenly he would unveil a list of forceful demands, catching them off guard and intimidating them.

Smokescreens can be employed several ways, using psychological weaknesses to achieve distraction and misdirection:

1) Make a seemingly noble gesture: People like noble gestures — they create good feelings all around. People want to believe they're genuine, and miss the fact that a noble gesture can conceal other purposes.

For example, the creation of the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., in 1937 looked like a noble gesture by wealthy people who donated their paintings.

However, there was more to it. An art dealer, Joseph Duveen, helped create the museum by getting Andrew Mellon to donate his collection to it; other donors followed. But in reality Duveen was solving another problem. He was having trouble selling more paintings because rich buyers were running out of display space in their mansions. Getting others to donate their paintings was a smokescreen to solve Duveen's problem by clearing wall space for more purchases from him. The donations also reduced the number of paintings on the market, which pushed up prices.

2) Create a pattern that serves as a smokescreen. Do a series of things that convince your target you're going in a particular direction. Psychologically, people expect behavior to follow patterns; when they identify a pattern, they feel comfortable anticipating the next step. Then you catch them off guard by breaking the pattern (which achieves your real purpose). You've lulled them into expecting the opposite of what you're really intending.

For example, In 1878, robber baron Jay Gould intended to take over the telegraph company Western Union. He succeeded by first creating a pattern of events that served as a smoke screen, distracting attention from his purpose. He created a company that competed with Western Union, so the bigger company's directors bought him out. Gould then started another competing company and Western Union bought out that one too. He'd set up a now-familiar pattern of seeming to want payoffs, and Western Union directors were caught off guard when he launched his successful takeover bid.

3) Exploit the human tendency to mistake appearance for reality. Seem to blend into a group. If you do it well, you won't arouse suspicions and can use your cover to pursue your real purpose. For example, during the Cold War, British civil servants went undetected as they passed secrets to the Soviets. It worked because they fit seamlessly into the old-boy establishment. Blending in is a time-honored smokescreen for spying.

Creating a bland persona and making yourself inconspicuous requires patience and restraint (you have to suppress the urge to brag or stand out in any way). But your inscrutability creates an impression of power.

Putting Smokescreens to Work #1

Joseph Weil, an early 1900s con artist known as The Yellow Kid, used a purported business deal to lure Chicago businessman Sam Geezil into an elaborate trap. Geezil thought he was participating in a deal in which he would buy property from a group of wealthy men at a low price, then resell it at a high price and split the proceeds with his supposed co-conspirator, Weil.

As the “deal” was being wrapped up at a meeting with the wealthy property owners, Weil introduced his real purpose — a scheme to defraud Geezil by getting him to bet the money he was using to buy the property on a boxing match, which Weil would fix. The match was indeed fixed, but in a different way — the boxer who was supposed to win took a supposedly errant punch and didn’t get up. Fearing that the boxer had been killed and not wanting to be implicated in a crime, Geezil fled the scene, leaving his money behind. But Weil had faked the boxer’s death, and he and the others kept Geezil’s money.

The purported business deal was the smokescreen to distract Geezil’s attention and lull him into complacency.

Putting Smokescreens to Work #2

In the 1920s, a young Ethiopian leader, Haile Selassie, used apparent innocence to disarm a military leader who conspired against him.

He invited the military leader Balcha to a banquet. Balcha brought along his army, which he parked outside the capital before proceeding to the banquet with 600 elite soldiers. Selassie was charming and deferential, and Balcha thought he could be easily deposed.

However, when Balcha headed back to his camp to plan Selassie’s ouster, he discovered his troops were gone. While Selassie had distracted Balcha with the banquet, Selassie’s troops surrounded Balcha’s army. They bought up the weapons with gold, and Balcha’s forces scattered. Balcha surrendered and agreed to enter a monastery.

Exceptions to the Law

Diversiónary tactics don’t work if you’re already known to be a deceiver. The more success you’ve had in the past, the harder it is to continue disguising your intentions. To overcome this hurdle, admit your past behavior and pretend to be repentant. You may be admired for your candidness, and you can continue your deceptions

Diversiónary tactics don’t always have to be subtle — occasionally a conspicuous gesture is effective. For example, the charlatans of 17th- and 18th-century Europe put on huge circus-type shows, using humor and entertainment to distract from their purpose, which was to sell quack potions and elixirs.

However, spectacles have limits: Eventually the public catches on to the purpose. And so when they’d worn out their welcome, the charlatans moved on to the next town. By contrast, you can employ the mild-mannered demeanor to deceive people indefinitely.

Law 4: Say as Little as Possible

The Law of Power: The less you say, the more intimidating and powerful you are. When you do speak, make it vague and ambiguous, leaving the meaning to others to interpret. They'll be frustrated and obsessed with trying to figure you out.

Principles

In the power game, appearance is everything. When you say little you come across as powerful, intimidating, and mysterious. Keep these principles in mind:

- **When you're silent, you make other people uncomfortable.** Because they dislike uncertainty, people want to know what you're thinking. When you control your words, they can't figure out what you mean or intend.
- **Short answers and silence make people feel defensive.** They quickly try to fill the silence, and in the process reveal motivations and weaknesses — information you can use. Later they'll obsess over every word you said and its potential implications. The inordinate attention they give to your brief comments adds to your power.
- In most instances, **the less you say, the more important and profound it seems**, and the more mysterious you are. For example, Andy Warhol found that he had more power when he said little and kept his comments vague and ambiguous. Sometimes he made purposely meaningless comments. Interviewers struggled to interpret what he meant, believing it was profound. He learned from fellow artist Marcel Duchamp that the less he said about his work, the more people talked about it and the more desirable it became.
- Besides creating an impression of great import, **saying little avoids the risk of saying something foolish, which can be costly.** For instance in the early 1800s a Russian rebel named Ryleyev talked too much and paid for it with his life. Nicholas I had sentenced him to death, but at the moment he was being hanged the rope broke. Believing he'd be pardoned, as usually happened in such cases, he yelled to the crowd that Russia couldn't get anything right, even rope. Instead of pardoning him, Nicholas responded, "Let's prove the contrary," and Ryleyev was hanged the next day with a rope that held.

Putting the Law to Work

King Louis XIV used brevity and silence to maintain power.

When his underlings had an issue to present to him, they first debated it among themselves and then chose two ministers or nobles to make the case before him, with one person speaking for each side. Louis XIV listened in silence.

The silence was an act to keep everyone off balance. No one knew where he stood and they couldn't anticipate how he'd react. Nor could anyone deceive him by saying what he wanted to hear, because nobody knew what that was. In their nervousness people tended to ramble, revealing information Louis could later use against them.

At the end of each presentation, the king said merely, "I shall see." He didn't discuss the issue with anyone, or even announce a decision. People had to wait to see the results of his decisions. His

silence kept everyone around him in fear and under his control.

By contrast, Coriolanus, a military hero of ancient Rome, couldn't shut up. After winning many battles, he ran for political office. He impressed people at his rallies by displaying his battle scars, and they paid little attention to his words. His election seemed assured until election day when he held a huge rally in the forum, bragging about himself and claiming victory before the vote. People didn't like that and he lost the election.

Exceptions to the Law

There are times when silence isn't the best course:

- **It can make people suspicious**, and in the case of your superiors, it can make them feel insecure. An ambiguous comment can be misinterpreted to your detriment.
- **Sometimes it's smarter to play the court jester**, and make yourself seem foolish and harmless despite being smarter than the king. No one suspects you of having an agenda.
- **You may want to use words as a smokescreen to hide your intentions**. You can distract your target by talking, and make them less suspicious of you.

Law 5: Guard Your Reputation

The Law of Power: Reputation is integral to power. With a strong reputation you can influence and intimidate others. Beware of attacks on your reputation and squelch them immediately. Meanwhile, undermine your opponents' reputations.

Principles

You can never really understand another person. But to interact with others, we have to try, so we judge people by what we can see — their appearances. This includes style, words/gestures, and behavior. **Your appearance is an integral part of your reputation.**

Reputation is something you need to carefully create and maintain. When you control how the world judges you, you have power. You can intimidate and influence others by reputation alone, which is why you must build and guard your reputation ferociously.

When establishing your reputation, focus first on one memorable quality — for instance craftiness, effectiveness, or generosity. People should associate you with this trait and talk about you. You should demonstrate it to as many people as possible, so that your reputation spreads. The trait on which your reputation is based serves as a calling card, announcing your arrival and predisposing others to be influenced by you.

A strong reputation exaggerates your strengths, intimidates, and inspires respect. Your goals may be accomplished before you say or do anything. For example, during World War II, the German General Rommel's reputation for deviousness intimidated everyone. Even when British tanks greatly outnumbered his forces, cities would evacuate when they heard he was approaching.

Your past successes seem to predict future successes.

- For instance, Henry Kissinger's success at shuttle diplomacy was based in large measure on his reputation for forging agreements in the most difficult circumstances. Agreement was assured as soon as he got involved in negotiations.
- Similarly, Casanova's reputation for seduction made future seductions easier — women were curious about what they'd heard and wanted to find out for themselves what made him so appealing.

If you have an unflattering or negative reputation you can improve it by associating with someone of the opposite reputation. For instance, if you're dishonest, insinuate yourself with an honest person if possible.

- As another example, when P.T. Barnum wanted to change his reputation for promoting low-brow entertainment, he arranged an American tour for a high-class European singer, Jenny Lind.

Protect your reputation fiercely, anticipating and deflecting any attacks. However, don't be defensive when under attack because you'll look insecure and desperate.

Attacking someone else's reputation can be beneficial, especially if you attack someone more powerful than you are. The more powerful person has more to lose in an exchange, and if your reputation is negligible you present only a small target.

You have to be clever in how you go about it, however — you don't want to look petty or harm your own reputation in the process. For example, Thomas Edison became jealous of Nikola Tesla, and sought to ruin his reputation by making alternating current (AC) appear to be unsafe. Edison was a proponent of direct current (DC) instead. He did some gruesome demonstrations electrocuting household pets with AC current, and even participated in the botched electrocution of a NY state prison inmate. He ended up hurting his own reputation (at least temporarily) more than Tesla's and had to back off.

When you have a solid reputation you can subtly undermine your opponent's with ridicule or satire, the way a lion toys with a mouse.

Putting the Law to Work

The story of Chinese General Liang illustrates the power of a strong reputation. At a time when China was split into three warring kingdoms. General Liang of the Shu kingdom had sent his army to a faraway post, while he himself rested in a small city with only a few soldiers. Suddenly he received word that an opponent, General Yi, was approaching with a huge force.

Liang ordered his few men to take down their flags and open the gates. He donned a Taoist robe and sat on a prominent wall, singing and playing a lute. When the forces arrived, Yi recognized Liang and ordered a retreat because he knew of Liang's reputation as a deceiver (his nickname was Sleeping Dragon), and feared he was walking into a trap. The power of Liang's reputation alone saved him.

When You Lack a Reputation

By contrast, the young P.T. Barnum didn't have much of a reputation in 1841. To establish credentials as a showman, he decided to buy the American Museum in Manhattan and turn it into a collection of oddities that would make him famous. The museum's board agreed to sell it to Barnum, but then reneged on the deal, selling it instead to Peale's Museum, which had a strong reputation compared to Barnum's.

Barnum decided that since he lacked a reputation his only recourse was to ruin Peale's reputation. He launched a derogatory letter-writing campaign calling Peale's finances into question, which caused the American Museum to again renege on a deal and to sell to Barnum.

Peale and Barnum then began attacking each other. Since Peale stressed its scientific exhibits in contrast to Barnum's low-brow entertainment, Barnum in turn attacked Peale's popular hypnotism program by debunking hypnotism. He put a little girl into a bogus trance, which was so ludicrous that audiences didn't believe claims of hypnotism anymore and Peale's exhibit suffered. He bolstered his reputation for showmanship in the process, and Peale never recovered.

Barnum used two different tactics to ruin Peale's reputation:

- He spread doubts about the museum's stability. Creating doubt by spreading rumors puts your opponents in a bind: They can deny them, but suspicions will linger, or they can ignore the rumors, which will gain momentum because they haven't been refuted.
- Once Barnum had developed a reputation for himself, he ridiculed Peale's reputation through the fake hypnotism demonstration. Ridiculing an opponent hurts him and also creates attention for you, which boosts your reputation.

Exceptions to the Law

There are no exceptions to the need to develop and maintain a strong reputation.

Law 6: Attract Attention

The Law of Power: We judge everyone and everything by appearances; what we can't see doesn't count. Make sure you stand out from the crowd. Portray yourself as larger, more mysterious, and more exciting than anyone around you.

Part 1: Be Scandalous

Sub-law: Attract attention by being controversial and outrageous. Welcome scandal. Don't differentiate between positive and negative attention — it all enhances your power.

Principles

Attracting attention doesn't come naturally to many people. You have to learn how to do it. **Start by associating your name and reputation with something that makes you stand out from others.** It could be a clothing style, hair style, mannerism, or quirk that gets you noticed and talked about.

It doesn't matter whether your image or appearance is controversial — any kind of attention is good. P.T. Barnum welcomed attacks and didn't bother defending himself. He cultivated an image as a huckster.

Society relishes those who are larger than life, who stand out from the crowd. So don't hesitate to adopt qualities that draw attention. **It's better to be controversial and be attacked than ignored.** No matter what your profession is, you'll benefit from being a showman.

For example, Thomas Edison sought attention by making a big display when introducing an invention. Besides staging exciting exhibits with electricity, he gave fantastical talks about future inventions, such as machines that could photograph people's thoughts. He ensured that he got more attention than his rival Nikola Tesla, who may have been smarter but was less famous.

If you're stuck in a position with little visibility, you can get attention by attacking someone more famous or powerful than you. For instance, a young Roman servant drew attention to his poetry when he wrote a series of poems mocking the pope. Your attack could even be slanderous. Just ease off when you get the public's attention because such attacks can get old fast.

Once you've grabbed the spotlight, you have to keep changing your methods or people will take you for granted and stop paying attention to you, or be distracted by someone new. This requires creativity.

- For example, the artist Pablo Picasso kept himself in the public eye by defying expectations. When people began associating his work with particular styles, he switched to a completely different style. People like to be able to predict what others will do, which makes them feel superior. By defying expectations, you hold their attention and gain respect.

Putting the Law to Work

P.T. Barnum learned a lesson about the value of notoriety when his first boss, who operated a circus, had him wear a black suit and stroll through town before the performance. People mistook Barnum for an infamous reverend recently acquitted of murder and soon formed a mob around Barnum and started attacking him. To prove who he was Barnum finally convinced the mob to follow him to the circus. Barnum's boss revealed that he'd set Barnum up, and the circus was packed that night, with

everyone talking about the joke.

Over the years Barnum used similar schemes, starting rumors about his performers being fraudulent to draw audiences to his events. He also understood how doing something unusual or interesting drew people's attention. To get people to visit his museum, he paid a man to walk up and down the streets and through the museum, randomly setting down and picking up bricks. People followed the man into the museum to see what he was doing.

When trying to generate attention for the first time, welcome negative attention. P.T. Barnum wrote letters to newspapers attacking his own work to keep his name in the public eye. Attention, good or bad, was the secret of his success.

Part 2: Be Mysterious

Sub-law: People are attracted to those who seem mysterious, so cultivate an air of mystery. Be vague about what you're doing or plan to do. Don't show all your cards and you'll create an atmosphere of anticipation — people will pay attention to see what you do next. Use mystery to deceive, enthrall, and intimidate.

Principles

In ancient times, when the world seemed frightening and inexplicable, people invented gods and myths to explain diseases, natural wonders, disasters, and other things they couldn't understand. Today, we explain natural phenomena with science and reason, but **people still crave the inexplicable and mysterious**. People gravitate to enigmas. They have drawing power because they're open to interpretation, imagination, and awe, unlike our mostly familiar and predictable world.

You can attract attention the same way, by being inscrutable. You don't need to be extraordinary to create a sense of mystery about yourself — you can succeed while being more subtle, making mystery part of your mien.

By practicing silence and restraint, making occasional ambiguous remarks, being purposely inconsistent, and appearing eccentric, you'll project an aura of mystery, which others will build up by trying to interpret what you say and do.

Con artists attract people by seeming mysterious, then distract them while fleecing them. For example, a stylish swindler, Victor Lustig, pretended to be a count; he dressed expensively, but always wore an odd accessory. He hung around hotels acting in ways that got people buzzing. He was so interesting and distracting that people who got close to him didn't notice they were being robbed.

Some benefits of seeming mysterious include:

- **An element of mystery can make you appear brilliant and profound**, even if you're average or mediocre. For example, Mata Hari, the famed dancer, wasn't a great beauty or an extraordinary dancer, but she enthralled her audiences because she seemed exotic and kept changing her background story.
- **You have the upper hand when you force others to try and figure you out.** It puts them on the defensive.
- **You can inspire fear because people are unnerved by uncertainty and things they don't understand.**
- **Mystery draws attention and gives you an intimidating presence as a leader.** Example: Mao

Tse-tung mystified everyone, including his wife, by being unpredictable and contradicting himself. People felt they had to pay attention because no one knew what he might do next.

If you can't be mysterious all the time, create enigmas. **Do something periodically that doesn't jibe with others' perceptions and expectations of you**, to keep them on edge and focused on you.

Putting the Law to Work #1

Hannibal famously created a mystery that enabled his army was to escape a trap. Hannibal's army had become boxed in between some swampland, the sea, and the mountains, which the Romans occupied.

One night, as Roman sentries looked down, they saw thousands of lights heading toward them, which they thought were reinforcements. Soon fire and noise broke out below and the sentries fled. The next day they saw that Hannibal had escaped.

He had created the puzzle of lights and noise by tying torches to the oxen carrying his supplies. The animals soon stampeded, making noise and setting fires everywhere. As Hannibal demonstrated, when you find yourself in a tight spot, if you do something that can't be readily understood or explained, you'll provoke fear and confusion.

Putting the Law to Work #2

In the early 1900s, a young dancer Mata Hari became a sensation in Europe. She claimed to be from the Far East and danced while wrapped in veils that she periodically removed. She varied her music (Hindu, Javanese) and changed the colors of her outfits. She told different stories about her background and the origin of her dances.

She succeeded as a dancer, not because of beauty or skill, but because of the mystery she created with her stories, music, and costumes, which she continually changed. People didn't know what to expect. Their fascination made her wealthy and powerful, at least for a time.

Eventually her reputation for deception caught up with her — near the end of World War I, she was falsely accused and eventually executed as a spy. During the trial it was revealed that her name was Margaretha Zelle and she was Dutch.

Exceptions to the Law

Although you want to attract as much attention as possible, you need to **evolve your tactics as you succeed so you don't bore the public**. Also, don't build your sense of mystery to the point where it seems threatening; it should seem like a game.

Occasionally, you need to restrain your attention-seeking impulses in order to avoid competing with superiors (for instance, when you're in the presence of royalty). Knowing when to seek versus avoid the spotlight is an art.

Lola Montez, a mistress and adviser to the king of Bavaria, went too far when she broke custom by entering

the theater lavishly dressed and taking her seat later than the queen did. After that, no one wanted to be seen with her and she was ignored.

Appearing to crave attention too desperately is a sign of insecurity, which undercuts power.

Law 7: Take Credit For Others' Work

The Law of Power: Get others to do your work for you. Use their skill, time, and energy to further your ambitions while taking full credit. You'll be admired for your efficiency and accomplishments, while your helpers will be forgotten.

Principles

You waste time and energy when you do things others could do for you, or have already done. And when you take advantage of others' efforts, and take credit for them, you come off as powerful and amazingly productive.

You can take advantage of others in two ways:

- You can wait and watch while they do the work, and then just take it from them.
- You can actively enlist others to work for you and take credit for their accomplishments.

Vultures are an example of taking from others: **Vultures know that if they wait long enough, another animal will always do the work of providing dinner.** People often do the same thing, circling like vultures waiting for the opportunity to feed on others' success or creativity. You can't change this by complaining — you're better off becoming a vulture yourself.

Francisco Pizarro exemplified the first method of taking from others after they've done the work. He was a soldier in the army of the explorer Balboa, who discovered the Incan empire in Peru. After Balboa spent many years searching for it and finally found it, Pizarro turned on Balboa and helped get him executed for treason so he could take the riches and credit for himself.

The artist Peter Paul Rubens used the second method: actively enlisting others to do your work. When he received more requests for paintings than he could fulfill, he hired many skilled painters with various specialties and set up a production line, in which multiple paintings could be worked on at the same time. Clients were impressed that he could do so many paintings in a short time.

When you take credit for a large amount of work by others, people think you have amazing ability. By contrast if you try to do all the work yourself, you won't accomplish much, or others will take advantage of *your* efforts. Be a user of others' efforts instead.

You can also use the efforts of people who came before you. Why reinvent the wheel? Isaac Newton exploited the discoveries of ancient scientists and made them seem to be his own new discoveries. Shakespeare used plots from ancient writers such as Plutarch, and today people copy Shakespeare's plots.

Putting the Law to Work

Thomas Edison hired and repeatedly took credit for the work of a brilliant Serbian scientist, Nikola Tesla. For instance, he offered Tesla \$50,000 to redesign Edison's dynamo, a steam-powered engine that produced direct electric current. When Tesla succeeded, Edison reneged on his promise while taking credit for the improvement.

Later, when Edison refused to support (and actually sabotaged) his research on alternating current, Tesla went to work for Westinghouse, where he got cheated out of credit for his work and payment of

royalties again.

Tesla exhausted himself trying to do things on his own, while Edison took the opposite tack — identifying trends and opportunities and then hiring others to do the work, which he then claimed.

Be a vulture yourself. Don't waste your energy and burn out, when you can simply wait for the right moment, then take others' lunch.

Exceptions to the Law

It's not always smart to take credit for others' work.

- If you haven't already established a strong reputation, you'll appear to be grasping for credit and crudely pushing someone else out of the spotlight.
- Most important, you have to be careful not to upstage a boss by being greedy for credit.

For example, while Henry Kissinger's talents were the reason for the success of President Nixon's historic visit to China, he let Nixon bask in the success. He knew how to play the game, taking credit for the work of those under him, while giving the boss credit for his own work.

Law 8: Bait Your Enemy

The Law of Power: Make your opponent come to you. When you force others to act, you're in control. Bait them, then attack.

Principles

Many people achieve power through aggression, but it has a downside. As you continue to use aggression as your main tactic you have to launch attacks in all directions at a growing number of enemies. This becomes tiring.

At this point, you're no longer in complete control — you're reacting to your enemies without calculating the consequences, rather than planning several moves ahead.

Power comes from acting effectively, not simply aggressively. Often, it's more effective to lay traps, then wait for them to work. You win for the long term (the war) rather than the short term (the battle).

Instead of reacting to your opponents, maintain the initiative by making them react to you — this keeps them on the defensive. Put another way, **when you make people come to you, you're in control of the situation.**

To accomplish this, you must:

- Control your emotions; don't act out of anger.
- Take advantage of others' tendency to react emotionally when you pressure them or bait them.

Making others come to you is a more powerful tool than aggression. For example, Talleyrand baited Napoleon with the chance to escape his exile on the island of Elba and return to power in France. (More details below.)

Making another person come to you also depletes his energy. In the early 1900s, Japan lured the Russian navy to attack by spreading a rumor that Russia could easily wipe out Japan's fleet. However, the Russian fleet had to make a long trip around the southern tip of Africa to get there, which was exhausting. Japan spread a second false rumor – that it was launching a counterattack — which meant Russian forces had to be on constant alert, further tiring them. When they finally arrived, Japan crushed them.

By making your opponent come to you, you also force him to operate on your turf, which makes him nervous and defensive. In negotiations, always require others to come to you, or to a place you choose, to keep them off balance.

If you're subtle and manipulative about the way you lure others to you, they may feel they're in control, although they aren't. The key is the attractiveness of your trap, which roils your opponent's emotions so he doesn't see what's really happening.

The greedier someone is, the more susceptible they are to your bait. For instance, the robber baron Daniel Drew played on others' greed to subtly manipulate stock prices. He would stride through his club near Wall Street, heading for the stock exchange. He'd pull out his bandanna and in the process drop a piece of paper bearing a note about a particular stock. When he left, others would grab the paper and buy or sell the stock, pushing the price in the direction Drew wanted.

Putting the Law to Work

In 1814 the powers of Europe banished Napoleon to the island of Elba and celebrated his fallen empire, but they still feared him because they hadn't sent him far enough away, and they knew he was clever enough to retake power. However, his former minister, Talleyrand, wasn't concerned — he quietly planned to purposely lure Napoleon back to France, where he could be permanently defeated.

Napoleon fell for the trap. Talleyrand set up a plan that allowed Napoleon to escape the island and return to France. The French people supported him and the government soldiers sent to stop him changed sides. He resumed the throne, but with France bankrupt, the people were miserable and the military was weak. As Talleyrand anticipated, Napoleon didn't last long — he took the country to war and was defeated at the Battle of Waterloo, and exiled to a more distant island from which he couldn't escape.

Talleyrand had the power of the upper hand because he planned carefully, bided his time, and set a successful trap for Napoleon.

Exceptions to the Law

Rather than always holding back and letting others chase you, sudden aggression can be effective in specific instances. When you suddenly attack, your opponent has to react quickly, without time to think or mobilize a strong response. He may make mistakes. Further, surprise attacks are frightening and demoralizing.

This is the opposite of holding back and getting your enemy to come to you, but it works the same way: You force your opponent to respond to you; you're in control.

Which tactic you use — waiting/luring or attacking — depends on the circumstances. If you and your enemy are equally strong, luring him to you will help deplete his strength. If your enemy is weak, launching a quick attack is better than giving him time to get stronger.

Law 9: Don't Argue, Demonstrate

The Law of Power: Arguing your point rarely changes anyone's mind — even when you appear to win, you lose because you stir up resentment. A far better way of getting others to agree with you is to demonstrate your point without saying anything. People believe what they can see.

Principles

When you argue with someone, even if they seem to agree with you, you can never be certain they really do.

They may politely assent, while secretly resenting you. Or your choice of words may have offended them. In any case, people distrust words because they know you'll say anything, including offering bogus sources and statistics, to bolster your case.

Demonstrating your point is more effective and powerful. Your target can see the evidence in front of her — there are no words to be misinterpreted. British architect Sir Christopher Wren knew the power of demonstration over argument. When he built a town hall for the city of Westminster, the mayor worried that the second floor would fall on his office below. Wren knew this was impossible, but instead of arguing he installed two more columns and the mayor was satisfied. Years later, workers on a high scaffold discovered that the columns weren't touching the ceiling.

When you demonstrate rather than arguing, you don't make your opponents defensive, and they're more open to seeing what you want them to see, and thus to agreeing with you.

Putting the Law to Work

Michelangelo understood the power of demonstrating a point. When he was carving the famous statue of David, the mayor of Florence took a look and told him the nose was too big. Michelangelo knew it only looked that way from the mayor's perspective, but he didn't argue. Instead he gestured for the mayor to follow him up the scaffolding, where the artist pretended to be changing the nose. After a few minutes, he stood back and the mayor pronounced it perfect. But Michelangelo hadn't changed it — he just changed the mayor's vantage point, from which it looked fine.

Michelangelo knew that arguing with the mayor, who was a patron and a superior, would offend him and jeopardize future commissions. He won his point without arguing and without offending.

Exceptions to the Law

There's one time when arguing is the right strategy — when you've been caught in a lie and need to distract others from your deception. In that case, argue strenuously and with conviction. The more emotional you get, the more likely people are to believe you.

The aristocratic con artist Count Victor Lustig practiced this technique. He scammed many people by selling a box that he claimed was a money-making machine. Usually, when it didn't work, people were too embarrassed to report they'd been swindled.

But one victim, a sheriff, confronted Lustig. Lustig argued vehemently, with a lot of baffling terminology, that the sheriff must have damaged the box or used it incorrectly. He offered to give the sheriff back his money, plus written instructions, and promised to visit the sheriff and examine the box. Lustig handed over a hundred hundred-dollar bills and the sheriff departed satisfied. Later, however, he was arrested and convicted for passing counterfeit notes. Lustig won the argument and never heard from the sheriff again.

Law 10: Misery Is Contagious — Avoid It Like the Plague

The Law of Power: People who are perpetually miserable spread misery like an infection, and they'll drown you in it. Avoid these people like the plague. Conversely, if you associate with happy people, you'll share in the good fortune they attract and spread. Seek them out.

Principles

People who are hurt by circumstances beyond their control deserve sympathy and help. But others bring unhappiness on themselves and spread it to those around them by their destructive acts and influence on others. You can't change or improve them — they will change you by afflicting you with their problems.

People are highly susceptible to the emotions and pathologies of those they spend time with.

Chronically miserable and unstable people have the greatest influence because of their intensity. Because they paint themselves as victims, it can take you a while to see that they cause their own problems. By the time you realize this, these infectors have sucked you in.

When your goal is power, those you associate with can make or break you. If you associate with infectors, you'll waste time extricating yourself, and others will lose respect for you due to guilt by association.

One of the most damaging types of infectors is the person who is perpetually dissatisfied and aggrieved.

Cassius, who conspired against Caesar, is an example of a miserable person. He couldn't stand anyone more talented and accomplished than he. His dissatisfaction and hatred of Caesar infected Brutus (who likely would have waited to ascend the throne). The result was one of the great tragedies of history.

The only way to fight this type of infection is by removing it, although often that remedy comes too late because, again, you've already been pulled in to the person's web.

The best way to protect yourself is by paying close attention to the people you surround yourself with, so you see any ominous signs. Start by considering their effects on others, rather than on who/what they blame for their problems.

Watch for these **characteristics of infectors**:

- They bring misery on themselves and others.
- They exude discontent.
- They have tumultuous histories.
- They've left behind a trail of failed relationships.
- They've had unstable careers.
- They have a charisma that overwhelms people, especially their ability to reason.

Whatever you do, don't feel sorry for them — you'll entangle yourself in trying to help. While you're beside yourself with frustration, they'll carry on unchanged.

At the other end of the spectrum, **there are people who attract happiness and spread it. Do everything you can to associate with these people**, so you share in the positive vibes and good fortune they

attract.

Happiness and success aren't the only positive qualities you should seek out. Any positive quality of someone else — friendliness, charm, creativity, generosity, etc. — can infect you in a good way.

Although Talleyrand was a conniver, he had other traits that made people want to be around him and they rubbed off on others: he was gracious, charming, and witty. Napoleon, who was a rough peasant, recognized this and kept Talleyrand around, hoping to absorb some of his charm.

You can do the same thing: **Strive to associate with people who have traits and qualities you lack.** If you're moody, hang out with cheerful people; if you're cheap, associate with generous people.

However, always avoid people with the same character flaws as yours — they'll reinforce your worst traits. Make associating with positive people a rule you live by, and you won't need a therapist.

Putting the Law to Work

Lola Montez, a charismatic courtesan in the 1800s, left a wake of human destruction in Europe. Originally from Ireland (her real name was Marie Gilbert), she went to Paris to be a dancer. She wasn't good at it, but drew attention from men who tried to help her, married her, and shared their fortunes. They always ended up ruined while she moved on.

Here's a chronicle of her exploits:

- First, she insinuated herself into the life of a French newspaper owner. He gave up his social standing, married her, his fortunes declined, he lost his friends over Lola, and his life fell apart. Another man challenged him to a duel and he lost.
- Lola moved on to Munich where she seduced King Ludwig of Bavaria and became his mistress. She was nasty and outrageous in public and Bavarians hated her (and started turning on the king because of her). She inserted herself in politics and fought with the king's ministers. Riots and protests broke out. The king finally sent her away (with a big payoff), but it was too late for his reputation and he was forced to abdicate.
- Lola moved to England and married a young army officer, but they didn't get along and she slashed him with a knife before finally leaving him. He lost his army position, was ostracized from English society, and moved to Portugal, where he lived in poverty until he died in a boating accident.
- Finally, she moved to California, had another failed relationship, and turned to God. She toured the country lecturing on religion while dressed in white. She died two years later at age 43.

The various men in Lola's life made the mistake of trying to help her and ended up destroying themselves. She couldn't be helped, but infected everyone around her (including the entire country of Bavaria). When you suspect you've met someone like this, run immediately.

Exceptions to the Law

There are no exceptions to this law — there's no benefit from associating with people who spread misery. And only good will come to you from associating with people of positive attributes.

Exercise: Who's Influencing You?

Miserable, destructive people spread misery wherever they go. If you try to help them, you end up worse off, and the miserable people never change.

Think about the people close to you. Is there someone who's always miserable and leaves misery in her wake? Is there someone you always feel happy being around? How have these people affected you?

Do the majority of people around you fit more into one category than the other? How could you change this?

How can you mitigate the negative effects of the miserable person/people?

Think of someone positive in your life. How can you spend more time with this person? What qualities do they have that you could adopt?

Law 11: Be Needed

The Law of Power: The more that a superior needs you, the more security and freedom you have to pursue your goals, so make him dependent on you. Never let superiors think they can get along without you.

Principles

A big part of exercising power is getting people to do what you want them to do. You can force them in some way, but the best outcome is when they do your bidding willingly. To accomplish this, you make them dependent on you.

This works with people at all levels but is especially beneficial when the person doing your bidding is a superior and you **function as the so-called power behind the throne**. Make yourself indispensable to him, become so involved in every aspect of his work that getting rid of you would leave him with huge problems. Then you have the upper hand and can get your way.

People often think that being powerful means being independent, but power requires relationships — with allies, dupes, enemies, and superiors. A completely independent person has freedom but not power. When others are dependent on you, however, you have the independence to pursue your goals.

Otto von Bismarck served two weak Prussian kings, Frederick and his brother William, who both needed him desperately; they ceded authority to him and did whatever he told them to do because he'd made it clear that if they didn't he'd leave them in the lurch.

Make yourself so indispensable that your superior is afraid to tempt fate and find out what her life would be like without you. One way to achieve this kind of position is to **have an irreplaceable skill or talent**.

One of Michelangelo's patrons was the pope, and although they argued constantly the pope never fired him — Michelangelo was such an immensely talented artist that he could easily find another patron, but the pope knew he'd never find another Michelangelo.

Try to create a similar situation, in which you could easily take your talent elsewhere but your boss couldn't easily find someone of equal caliber to replace you. If you don't have that kind of irreplaceable knowledge or skill, you can fake it — but you're more powerful if you have the real thing, and others' dependence on you is real.

It can be just as effective to make your boss indirectly dependent on you, by being a link in a chain of dependence. For instance, Columbia Pictures couldn't get rid of a screenwriter, John Howard Lawson, when he was targeted as a supposed Communist in the 1950s witch-hunt — because Lawson was Humphrey Bogart's writer and Bogart was the film company's star.

There are two ways to ply your talent that will keep your superior in your debt. One is to focus on one extraordinary skill as Michelangelo did. The other is to apply your talents broadly.

For instance, Henry Kissinger and Richard Nixon didn't like each other, but Nixon kept Kissinger as secretary of state because Kissinger was enmeshed in virtually all aspects of the administration. He had allies in all departments and his knowledge and involvement in operations was so extensive that without him, Nixon's policies and plans could have unraveled. However, having a single extraordinary skill gives you more power because it's more transportable.

Another way to make others dependent on you is to know their secrets. Intelligence chiefs from ancient times to J. Edgar Hoover knew secrets that made them untouchable. The downside was that they lived in a world of such paranoia that they could never rest easily.

Final point: **Don't expect to be loved by your boss for your indispensable services.** She's more likely to resent or fear you. Fear is better than love in terms of providing job security because it's controllable.

Putting the Law to Work

Ensure that you're truly indispensable — don't take it for granted. Be constantly vigilant — at any time someone could appear who could replace you. They may be more appealing to your boss if they're less costly or less threatening.

For example, many of the great military leaders of Renaissance Italy were surprised to end up imprisoned or executed after heroic service. The reason was that their success became threatening to their superiors, and they were replaceable with younger, cheaper mercenaries.

However, Otto von Bismarck made sure he could not be replaced. When he joined the Prussian parliament in the 1800s, he immediately aligned himself with the weak king, Frederick. Most people align themselves with powerful people, but it's difficult to create a mutual dependence with a strong person.

Bismarck first built up trust by supporting and defending the king against critics and opponents. Frederick rewarded him with a promotion to minister, which Bismarck used to get the king to build up the military and stand up to opponents. He did the same with Frederick's successor, William, pushing him to be stronger and more decisive. William didn't like Bismarck but grew dependent on him, even making him prime minister. Bismarck got whatever he wanted by threatening to resign. Eventually, he manipulated the king into making him emperor.

Like Bismarck, make sure you're the only one who can do what you do, and intertwine yourself in your superior's business to the point that he can't possibly get rid of you.

Exceptions to the Law

When others are dependent on you, you're somewhat dependent on them in turn. The only way to be fully independent is to remove those above you. You could stand alone like a J.P. Morgan or John D. Rockefeller, having crushed your competition, but you'd pay a price. You'd be isolated and would generate resentment and create enemies. Total independence is usually short-lived and often fatal.

Rather than looking for exceptions to the law, you're better off creating a mutual dependence — you'll have less pressure and your superior will do your bidding.

Law 12: Disarm Others By Being Nice

The Law of Power: You can use honesty and generosity to disarm and distract others from your schemes. It works because even the most suspicious people respond emotionally, like a child, to acts of kindness.

Principles

Deception and distraction go hand in hand. Distracting people gives you time to set up your trap or scheme to deceive them without its being noticed.

One of the most effective methods of distraction is to **surprise them with honesty or generosity**. This approach disarms people by allaying suspicions and bringing out their inner child — they respond with eager, childlike gratitude.

The Chinese called this practice “giving before you take” — the gift distracts your victim while you do the taking. The gift can be anything including a physical gift, an act of kindness, a favor, or a seemingly honest admission.

It can be used to create an immediate distraction from what you’re doing, or to soften someone up for future actions or requests.

For your first meeting with someone, **start with selective honesty. If someone believes you’re honest from the outset, it takes a lot to dislodge that belief**, which gives you time to get your plans in place. You can turn this into a reputation for honesty with a series of small acts.

The con man Victor Lustig ingratiated himself with gangster Al Capone by appearing to be honest. Capone, who was accustomed to dealing with dishonest people, was caught off guard by Lustig’s unexpected honesty, which softened Capone up for Lustig’s real swindle. (More below.)

Generosity is another effective tool of distraction. No one, including even the most suspicious or cynical people (remember the Trojan horse?), can resist a gift.

Gifts — whether physical gifts or calculated acts of kindness — win hearts. They play on people’s emotions, turning even a hardened gangster like Capone into a grateful child. Just make sure you’re projecting a convincing sincerity. If people see through it, you’ll lose their trust forever.

Putting the Law to Work

Not many people would have tried to swindle Al Capone. But the notorious con man Victor Lustig succeeded because he understood human nature, and knew that even a gangster has human emotions.

Since Capone operated in an environment of distrust and scheming, Lustig made a show of committing a seemingly honest act, in order to distract him.

He requested \$50,000 from Capone, promising to double it in sixty days. Lustig put the money in a safe-deposit box and did nothing with it. He later returned the original amount in full, with profuse apologies to Capone for failing to increase it. Capone was impressed with Lustig’s honesty in returning the money, and immediately gave \$5,000 back to him as a reward (which is what Lustig

wanted in the first place).

Al Capone, like everyone else, was susceptible to an unexpected act of goodwill. While trying to con an Al Capone might not be advisable for the inexperienced, the incident shows the power of selective honesty as a means to an end.

Exceptions to the Law

Fake generosity or honesty won't fool anyone when you already have a reputation for deceit. In this case, admit to what you are: a scoundrel. Embrace your reputation for dishonesty.

For example, Talleyrand, who was a well-known deceiver, made a point of telling stories and making random comments that everyone knew were lies. Lying blatantly, as opposed to subtly, confused people enough to obscure what he was really up to.

The con artist Victor Lustig was about to sell the Eiffel Tower to an industrialist. Lustig had convinced the man that he represented the French government that was auctioning it off for scrap metal. A last-minute doubt stopped the industrialist from handing over his money. Lustig sensed this, and to put the man at ease, he flaunted his dishonesty by asking for a bribe. By acting dishonest (as many government officials were known to be), Lustig appeared genuine and his scheme succeeded. In his career, he actually "sold" the Eiffel Tower twice.

In a strange way, you can honestly use your dishonesty as a cover for your schemes.

Law 13: Show Others What's in It for Them

The Law of Power: When you need help from someone in a position of power, don't talk about your needs or something you did for them in the past. Instead, appeal to their self-interest. They'll be glad to help if they'll get something important to them in return.

Principles

Achieving power often requires seeking help from people above you. But you can't just blurt out what you want — there's an art to asking.

To succeed in getting what you want, you have to focus not on your desires, but on those of the other person. She probably couldn't care less about your needs, and if you focus on them, she'll view you as desperate or as an annoyance.

Also, don't make the mistake of basing your appeal on such irrelevant things as your loyalty, friendship, or favors you've done for the other person in the past.

In order to show how fulfilling your request benefits the other person, **you need to understand what motivates her and what matters to her**. Put yourself in the other person's place, and see things as she would. Does she have ambitions or enemies you could help to address? Look for the ways you can help fulfill her needs or further her goals.

Here's an example of ignoring versus appealing to another's interests. In the 16th century, while Portugal was trying to build trade relations with Japan, Portuguese missionaries also tried to convert the Japanese to Catholicism, in which they had no interest. The proselytizing irritated the Japanese emperor, which affected trade negotiations. When the Dutch began to arrive in Japan to set up trade relations, instead of spreading religion they offered something the Japanese found valuable — expertise with firearms and navigation. The emperor lost no time in evicting the Portuguese and dealing exclusively with the Dutch.

Putting the Law to Work

When making a request of someone powerful, your appeals to justice, reciprocity, or gratitude will likely work against you, when your target understands only self-interest and ruling by force.

Stefano di Poggio learned this to his detriment. When Castruccio, the ruler of an Italian city, was away at war, a conflict broke out between his family and a rival family, the Poggios, who wanted to oust him. Stefano di Poggio intervened and stopped the conflict. For this act, he appealed to Castruccio to spare him and his family any punishment. He expected Castruccio to be grateful that he'd stopped fighting. Castruccio invited the Poggio family to the palace to talk. When they came, he imprisoned and executed them.

No one is obligated to be grateful; **telling a superior that he should be grateful to you or that he owes you something suggests you're a burden he should get rid of**.

Here's a contrasting example where an appeal to self-interest paid off. The island of Corcyra was close to war with the Greek city-state of Corinth. Representatives of Corcyra and Corinth both appealed to Athens to take their side.

The representative from Corinth gave an impassioned speech, citing things Corinth had done for Athens in the past, and the importance of showing gratitude toward friends. The representative from the island acknowledged Corcyra hadn't done anything for Athens and had even allied with Athens' enemies in the past. What he could offer going forward, however, was an alliance of naval forces — Corcyra's navy was nearly as strong as Athens' navy and together they could challenge Athens' rival Sparta. After a debate, the Athenians voted overwhelmingly to side with Corcyra.

The representative from Corinth erred in trying to lay a guilt trip on Athens by invoking the past. He also failed to suggest any benefit to Athens of a future alliance with Corinth. In the end, pragmatism and self-interest win.

Exceptions to the Law

A few people may be insulted by appeals to their self-interest because they like to think of themselves as altruistic. They feel good about themselves and feel superior to you when they can be charitable or magnanimous. They don't need any help from you other than a chance to feel — and be viewed publicly as — beneficent and superior. Fine — give them the opportunity to be magnanimous.

Exercise: Appeal to Self-Interest

Getting something you want usually requires seeking help from others. But to get what you want, you need to appeal to others' self interest. They'll be more willing to help if they have something to gain.

Think of something you want to accomplish at work or in an organization. Whose help do you need to get it done?

What kinds of values and interests motivate them? What do they want?

How would helping you be in their interest? What would they gain? (Use the above answers to make your case.)

Law 14: Seem like a Friend, But Be a Spy

The Law of Power: Collecting information through spying is essential to wielding power. When you know your opponent's secrets, you can predict his behavior and control him. You can enlist spies to gather intelligence for you, but it's better to be a spy yourself. Adopt a friendly manner and you'll get people to spill their plans and weaknesses.

Principles

To wield power you need to understand others: their intentions, goals, and ambitions, as well as secrets, weaknesses, and ulterior motives. This knowledge enables you to predict what they'll do in the future.

However, most people won't intentionally tell you these things; you need a way to ferret out the information without their knowing it.

There are two ways you can do this:

1) Use spies: Using others (for instance, people who work for your target) as spies is useful but risky. You'll get information, but you can't control your spies. They may inadvertently give you away, get things wrong, or start working against you.

2) Be a spy yourself: Be friendly and listen. It's easy and effective to pose as a friend while collecting information. Say little while getting others to do the talking — and listen.

Here are some additional tips:

Especially pay attention at social gatherings. People's guards are down, they're drinking, and they're trying to be friendly. Say little while showing great interest in others, and they'll talk freely. People will interpret your interest as friendship, and you'll build allies as well as learning secrets.

Don't be too obvious in probing for information, however, or you'll arouse suspicions. Use friendly chatter.

- France's foreign minister, Talleyrand, was said to be an excellent conversationalist. He was gracious and witty, but enigmatic. While he concealed his true thoughts, he cajoled others to share theirs at social gatherings and in parlor games he would organize.

Set traps. You can say untrue things and then watch for people's reactions, which can tell you what you want to know.

- At diplomatic events, Talleyrand used the technique of appearing to blurt out a secret to see who would react. For instance, he might comment that the czar of Russia was about to arrest a top general. Based on the diplomats' reactions, he learned who had the greatest interest in the potential weakening of the Russian army. Someone once commented that Talleyrand would in effect fire a pistol into the air to see who would leap out the window.

Pretend to share confidences. When you offer a fake confidence, pretending to bare your soul, others will respond with real confidences. Another conversational trick is to strongly disagree with or contradict someone — they'll get agitated and say more than they intended to.

The information you gather from spying is power because it enables you to predict how others will act in

the future, and you can plan accordingly.

Putting the Law to Work

The knowledge you get from spying makes you seem all-powerful, and others can't resist you.

Joseph Duveen, the most successful art dealer of the early 1900s, was a master at using knowledge gained through spying to enrich himself. He had a monopoly on selling art to millionaire collectors, but he didn't have Andrew Mellon as a client and set out to remedy that.

He secretly began paying several of Mellon's staff for information on Mellon's tastes, ambitions, and habits, as well as his travel plans. Once he knew what made Mellon tick, he set up accidental meetings, showing up where he knew Mellon would be. Duveen showcased his charm and knowledge of art, and pretended to share Mellon's tastes. He even rearranged his personal gallery to reflect Mellon's tastes and then invited him over to see it. Mellon loved the collection, admired Duveen's taste, and soon became his most lucrative client.

Exceptions to the Law

While you're spying on others, they're going to be spying on you. This gives you an opportunity to plant false information and control the game.

For instance, in 1944 as the Germans attacked London with rocket-bombs, the bombs began missing their targets by wide margins. The Germans were setting their targets with the help of spies planted in Britain — but the British replaced them with their own agents, who fed the Germans bad information.

Spying gives you a third eye, while planting false information knocks out one of the eyes of the person spying on you.

Law 15: Annihilate Your Enemy

The Law of Power: Crush your enemy completely. If you leave even one ember smoldering, it will eventually ignite. You can't afford to be lenient.

Principles

History is replete with examples of leaders who defeated their enemies but left them alive out of mercy. Of course the opponent always bided his time, becoming ever more resentful and determined, until he was strong enough to seek revenge.

Your enemies feel nothing but animosity for you, and want to eliminate you. The only way to have security and peace is to do to them what they would do to you. When you get the upper hand, don't hesitate to deliver the final blow. This doesn't necessarily mean killing them, but at minimum neutralizing them by totally eliminating their ability to fight back. In the old days, banishment often worked.

For instance, in the 1930s, Chiang Kai-shek had almost decimated Mao Tse-tung's Communists, so he turned his attention to the invading Japanese instead. But over ten years, the Communists recovered and eventually routed Chiang's army, forcing him to flee to Taiwan.

You need to control your enemies totally — don't go halfway with them or give them any options whatsoever. **Don't negotiate — negotiation will undercut your victory. For your security, you must crush them.**

Putting the Law to Work

Empress Wu of China enjoyed a forty-year reign, one of the longest in Chinese history, because she ruthlessly crushed every rival without exception.

Starting with her rise to power as a concubine of the emperor, she smothered her own child to cast suspicion on another concubine, so that woman was executed. She poisoned a niece and a son, and had another son exiled. She had a son declared unfit to serve when the emperor died, leaving only her youngest son, whom she controlled, to become emperor. Every time there was a coup attempt, she had everybody executed.

She claimed to be a divine descendant of Buddha and eventually had herself named divine emperor. By the time she got the job, there was no one left in the dynasty. She ruled capably until age 80, when finally forced to abdicate.

Exceptions to the Law

On rare occasions, when you have your opponents on the ropes it may make sense to let them self-destruct rather than crushing them. Defeat and humiliation may be so demoralizing that there's no possibility of recovery, or they may have permanently damaged or exhausted themselves.

However, leniency can embitter or even embolden an enemy, so you're almost always better off crushing them.

Law 16: Don't Wear Out Your Welcome

The Law of Power: Once you've become well-known and admired, don't wear out your welcome. The more you're seen and heard from after a certain point, the more you cheapen your brand. People will lose interest and respect for you. But if you make yourself scarce for a while, you'll renew people's respect and appreciation.

Principles

In wielding power, both presence and absence are key concepts. With a strong presence, you attract attention and overshadow everyone else. But if you overdo it and become ubiquitous, people will stop paying attention to you and you'll lose respect and power. This is where absence comes in. **You can preserve and enhance your status by withdrawing at the right moment, just before people start getting tired of you.**

The cycle of seduction and love works this way. When your lover begins taking you for granted, pull away for a while without explanation. Your absence regenerates the person's desire for you, and when you return he or she cherishes and respects you again. Similarly, novelists J.D. Salinger and Thomas Pynchon stirred endless fascination and interest by disappearing from the public eye.

The principle of absence or scarcity is integral to economics. When something is hard to get, it has high value. The art dealer Joseph Duveen boosted the value of paintings by making them scarce — he bought entire collections and stored them to get them off the market and increase prices. You can apply the principle to your own skills as well. **Ensure that what you have to offer is unique, so it has high value.**

At some point, nearly everyone in the limelight overstays their welcome, and the respect people have for them plummets. Knowing when to retire is key. If you do it at the right time, you'll continue to be respected. For instance, the actress Greta Garbo retired in her mid-thirties, preferring to leave the stage before fans got tired of her.

Make yourself less accessible to enhance your value in others' minds.

Putting the Law to Work

In the eighth century B.C., a man named Deioces wanted to be named ruler of Medea (the country resisted choosing a leader because of a bad history under a monarchy). So first, Deioces built a reputation as a man who could settle disputes fairly, and people soon flocked to him for judgments, which kept the society functional and peaceful. Suddenly he announced he was tired of it and retired from public life. Chaos ensued, so people clamored for him to return even to the point of setting up a monarchy for him. He became king, but continued to employ the concept of scarcity. He isolated himself and communicated with people only on his schedule and terms. He engendered great respect and ruled with god-like status for fifty-three years.

Exceptions to the Law

Making yourself scarce periodically only works if you've already achieved power and respect. If you step

away before people know and respect you, they'll just forget you.

For instance, withdrawing from a lover only works if you've achieved such a presence that she's reminded of you constantly while you're gone, for instance when she hears a song or eats at a restaurant you liked. Before you can be missed, you have to be seen and appreciated.

Law 17: Be Unpredictable

The Law of Power: Because people crave predictability and a sense of control, you can throw others off balance and even terrify them with random, unpredictable acts. While your opponents are stressing themselves out by trying to explain and anticipate what you're doing, you can achieve your objectives almost unnoticed.

Principles

Unpredictable, sudden events like tornadoes and flash floods terrify people, leaving them in fear of the next one. You can have a similar effect on people by being unpredictable.

We want other people to be predictable, and we ourselves follow patterns and routines, out of laziness, a preference for comfort, or a desire to keep the peace. Animals follow patterns as well, which allows us to hunt them successfully.

But unpredictability is an important tool for wielding power — **by suddenly doing something no one expected you create fear and confusion**, which keeps others off balance, allowing you room to maneuver. It may also prompt them to make mistakes.

You can use this tactic effectively even if you are the underdog. For instance, during the Civil War General Stonewall Jackson confused and stymied the much larger Union forces that were marching on Richmond, by repeatedly moving north and then back south again. In response, Union General George McCellan slowed his forces, while trying to figure out what was going on, which gave the South time to reinforce Richmond. This turned certain defeat into a draw.

Jackson used this tactic repeatedly with great success. When you're outgunned, be unpredictable. Or use the tactic in more typical day-to-day situations — you'll intimidate people and keep them on the defensive with random, inexplicable acts.

Besides unsettling people, you'll draw attention and get people talking, as they try to understand your motives. When you're unpredictable, you generate not only fear but also respect.

Putting the Law to Work

In 1972 chess great Bobby Fischer so unnerved Russian champion Boris Spassky with unpredictability, that Spassky had a meltdown and left without completing the match in Reykjavik, Iceland.

Identifying patterns, and understanding and predicting an opponent's moves, is particularly important in chess, and Spassky was a master at it, but when these skills failed to work with Fischer, he fell apart.

Among other things, Fischer, arrived late to the games, complained loudly and constantly about everything, behaved erratically, and made inexplicably poor moves, even losing the first game for seemingly foolish reasons. He forfeited the second game for not showing up on time.

Spassky became convinced that Fischer had hypnotized him, drugged the orange juice, or had altered the chairs in some way. Then he started complaining of hallucinations, finally resigning from the

match.

Fischer defeated Spassky by keeping him in a state of confusion and, ultimately, terror.

Exceptions to the Law

Occasionally, it's better to be predictable. For instance, **you can use predictable actions as a smoke screen**. People become complacent when you behave as expected and don't notice what you're really doing.

If you've been predictable for a while and then do something completely different, people may be so surprised that they don't believe what they see. Muhammad Ali used this tactic to defeat George Foreman in 1974. Foreman expected him to dance around to wear him out as Ali typically did. Ali announced he would go on the attack instead but Foreman didn't believe it. Foreman was shocked that Ali came out punching, and he responded with wild punches and wore himself out. With a sudden right cross, Ali knocked him out.

When you're in a subordinate position, being unpredictable can upset your boss and prompt closer supervision, or an unfavorable performance review. You can come across as indecisive or as someone who keeps things stirred up, and your boss won't trust you. So use this tactic wisely.

Law 18: Don't Isolate Yourself

The Law of Power: Never isolate yourself when you come under pressure. This just cuts you off from information you need and people who could help you, and when real danger arises you won't see it coming. Instead, make a point of being outgoing. Contact with others increases your power.

Principles

It can be tempting to isolate yourself when you feel pressured or threatened. But this is a mistake.

Most military commanders understand the risk of isolating yourself behind walls to ward off danger. First, doing so makes you an easy target — everyone knows where you are. Your enemies can lay siege and turn your fortress into a prison. You're relying on limited information from an ever smaller group of people. Also, you're cut off from outside help and intelligence about what's going on beyond your walls. Such isolation typically ends in defeat.

Isolation is as bad a personal strategy as it is a military strategy. **Maintaining power requires social interaction.** You need to be the center of all activity and aware of everything and everyone revolving around you.

When faced with threats, resist the urge to isolate yourself. Be more outgoing, connecting with old allies and creating new ones. You'll be able to keep tabs on what's going on and can respond effectively. The more you get around and interact in different circles of people, the more difficult it will be to keep secrets from you. And the more contact you have with others, the less likely you are to lose your sense of proportion and become obsessed.

The French minister Talleyrand always kept an ear to the ground, even associating with unsavory characters to gather information. He survived numerous crises by anticipating developments and making connections with whoever took over. Similarly, kings and queens knew they couldn't afford to lose touch with the masses or there'd be rebellion.

Keep circulating and you'll keep people from plotting behind your back, and you'll be far more elusive to enemies than you'd be behind a wall.

Putting the Law to Work

Louis XIV's predecessors to the throne had been victims of civil war and conflicts instigated by their nobles. So he made sure to keep track of everyone and everything around him.

From the design of the palace of Versailles with the king's bed at the center, to his daily ritual requiring his family, courtiers, and government officials to check in with him (around 100 people), Louis XIV made himself the center of activity. He was always looking around, observing everything, including anyone who failed to show up at his meals and other events. Because of the constant togetherness, nothing escaped the king's notice. By keeping court activity revolving around him, Louis XIV managed to maintain peace for fifty years.

Exceptions to the Law

The only time you might benefit from isolation is when you need space to think and gain perspective, undistracted by what's going on around you. For instance, Machiavelli wrote *The Prince* while in exile; other prisoners with time on their hands have been known to produce well-received books. Just make sure your isolation is only temporary, before it becomes quicksand.

Law 19: Know Your Victim

The Law of Power: There are many different kinds of people, and each will react differently to attempts to deceive them. You need to know who you're dealing with and avoid the types who will waste your time or exact revenge.

Principles of Application

In your quest for power, you can't treat everyone the same way. There are many different types of people, and **you need to be able to recognize which type you're dealing with and respond appropriately.**

Here are the five most dangerous types, most of whom you should avoid dealing with because it's either a waste of time or it will come back and bite you.

- **Oversensitive and egotistical:** Overreacts, often violently and disproportionately, to any perceived slight.
- **Insecure and fragile:** Lets hurt feelings simmer, then attacks with small cuts that eventually add up.
- **Pathologically suspicious:** Imagines everyone is after him. Like Stalin, genuinely unhinged but easy to fool. You can get him to turn against others, but take care that he doesn't target you.
- **Cold and calculating:** Doesn't show anger when offended, but calculates the right moment for revenge and waits for it. He's a snake — crush him rather than injuring him.
- **Slow-witted or literal:** Lacks the intelligence and imagination (to envision potential rewards) to fall for a scheme. You'll waste time trying to fool him. Test him by telling a joke to see if he gets it, or reacts literally. If the latter, move on to someone else.

To wield power it's essential to be able to read people and know who you're dealing with. If you don't understand your targets — choosing the wrong person or doing the wrong thing — you'll waste time at best. At worst, you bring trouble on yourself, for instance, by insulting people when you think you're flattering them, or by triggering their insecurity.

Before dealing with someone, do your research. Never trust your instincts, or trust appearances. People can easily hide their true nature.

Putting the Law to Work

Here are just a few of the many examples of people who underestimated or failed to understand their opponents.

- **Oversensitive and egotistical:** A powerful shah who had a huge empire dissed Genghis Khan by ignoring his offers of an alliance, and was destroyed. His mistake was assuming that Genghis Khan was weaker than he, and he rejected his overtures with insults. Khan turned out to be both sensitive to insults and extremely powerful.
- **Oversensitive and egotistical:** In 1910 there was a con artist ring operating out of Denver, led by Joe Furey. Furey suckered a Texas rancher into giving up a fortune. But unlike most suckers in Furey's experience, he didn't just slink away quietly in embarrassment. He set out to take down Furey and the entire con artist ring, a feat that took him five years and great expense. Furey didn't understand that he was dealing with an insecure man who wouldn't

tolerate offense.

- **Literal:** Because he was a simple man who took things literally, Henry Ford stymied a consortium of art dealers who tried to sell him a collection of 1,000 paintings. To whet his appetite for the works, the dealers created a beautiful book of the paintings, which they presented to Ford as a gift. His response was to question why he should buy the paintings, when he had a book that depicted them so beautifully. Because the dealers hadn't done their homework, they wasted their time and money dealing with an immovable target.

Exceptions to the Law

There's no exception to the need to understand people before you deal with them.

Law 20: Don't Take Sides

The Law of Power: Don't commit to any side or cause except yourself. By maintaining your independence, you remain in control — others will vying for your attention, and you can play one side against another.

Part 1: Be Courted by Everyone

Sub-law: Stay aloof and don't commit yourself, and you'll gain power and attention as people try to win you over. Give them hope, but nothing more.

Principles

You'll get respect if you refuse to commit to a person or group. You'll be powerful because you're unattainable by either side. **The more independent you appear to be, the more people will want you on their side.** Desire is contagious — when people see that someone else is desired, they want to get in on the action too.

However, if you commit, you'll instantly lose your luster — you'll no longer be desired and sought after.

When people are courting your support, they'll use many tactics, including gifts and favors, to create a sense of obligation. Accept the gifts if you want to, but don't feel or accept any obligation.

Don't offend anyone or appear to be averse to commitment. **Focus instead on keeping others excited and interested in you and hoping for alliance.** Play the game for your own advantage.

For example, during the 1968 presidential election, Henry Kissinger secured a promise of a high-level administration post from both the Republican, Richard Nixon, and the Democrat, Hubert Humphrey. In return, he gave the Nixon camp information on the Paris peace talks about Vietnam; and he gave Humphrey's team inside information on Nixon.

When he joined the Nixon administration, he was careful not to seem overly loyal to Nixon. He avoided being tainted by Watergate, and went on to serve under the next president.

By holding back, you retain the ability to play one side against another to get something you want. As secretary of state, Kissinger wanted a detente between the U.S. and Soviet Union. So he courted China — this brought the Soviets to the negotiating table because they feared isolation if the U.S. and China developed a relationship.

Putting the Law to Work

When Queen Elizabeth I assumed the English throne in 1558, she came under great pressure to marry and produce heirs. She received all kinds of advice and many suitors, who she allowed to court her, but she never chose anyone.

Elizabeth refused to commit because she knew marriage in her position would lead to untold problems. Marrying someone from another nation could pull her into conflicts, rivalries, and wars. Her husband would become the de facto ruler, and might try to eliminate her. By maintaining her independence, she retained her power and desirability, and ruled the country through a long period of peace.

Part: 2: Stay Above the Fray

Sub-law: Don't let people drag you into their petty fights and squabbles. Seem interested and supportive, but find a way to remain neutral; let others do the fighting while you stand back. When they tire, they'll be ripe for the picking.

Principles

People will constantly try to pull you into their quarrels and conflicts. If you succumb, their problems will consume your time and energy. Don't succumb — there's nothing in it for you; the conflict will just keep growing.

However, you don't want to offend people, so seem interested, listen, and even make gestures of seeming support. But **don't get involved emotionally or otherwise**. By refusing to commit, you preserve your autonomy and initiative. You can make your own choices rather than reacting defensively to developments in someone's else's fight.

Further, if you let others exhaust themselves, **you may be able to capitalize on their exhaustion**, or position yourself to benefit when one side starts losing. You can also play mediator, and look out for your own interests. You can appear to take one side, encouraging the other side to come up with a better offer. Or seem to take both sides, and play them against each other. While you may be tempted to side with the apparently stronger party, you can't be sure who will win. Preserve your flexibility.

While getting along with all sides for as long as possible has great advantages, dropping the supportive stance and publicly declaring your independence is the best course if you're striving to build respect.

As president, George Washington refused to ally the young country with France because he wanted to establish autonomy so that European nations treated the United States as an equal power.

Putting the Law to Work

In the late 15th century, Isabella, the ruler of a small city-state in Italy, surrounded by larger warring city-states, managed to preserve her territory's independence and stay out of others' wars by appearing open to overtures from other powers without accepting any, avoiding provocation, and by engaging in complicated negotiations and ruses. She employed her personal charm, flattery, and strategic skills, and while other entities and leaders rose and fell around her, Isabella's territory, Mantua, remained intact for a century after her death.

Exceptions to the Law

You can go too far with both parts of the law: making others court you, and staying above the fray.

Various parties could gang up on you, if your manipulations become too obvious. Also, if you string too many people along for too long, they'll lose interest in you. At that point, you may want to commit to a side, but don't get emotionally involved, and keep open the option to back out anytime.

Exercise: Avoid Taking Sides

In your daily life and work, there are often situations in which people want your support or want you to take sides. Often, however, you're better off politely avoiding commitment.

Think of a situation where you were pressed or felt forced to take sides. What did you do?

How did people treat you after you took sides?

How might things have played out differently had you delayed or not taken sides?

Law 21: Make Others Feel Smarter

The Law of Power: Make your intended victims feel as though they're smarter than you are, and they won't suspect you of having ulterior motives.

Principles

Because nobody likes feeling stupid, be careful to avoid insulting another person's intelligence inadvertently. Going a step further, you can exploit this human vanity to succeed in your schemes.

If you make other people feel smarter than you, by making yourself out to be naive or slow-witted by comparison, **they'll let down their guard and fail to be suspicious of your motives.**

The Prussian minister Bismarck used this tactic to get Count Blome of Austria to sign a treaty beneficial to Prussia but against the interests of Austria. The night before the negotiations started, Bismarck challenged Blome to a round of his favorite card game, quinze. He played recklessly and made rash comments and blunders, which lulled Blome into thinking he didn't need to worry about anything devious being in the treaty. He signed it the next day without reading the fine print, at which point Bismarck exulted that he'd never expected an Austrian to sign such a treaty.

Making others feel smarter than you by appearing to be subservient and naive can also help you advance in the ranks, if you're starting in a low position. You won't seem threatening to anyone, and you'll be promoted. At the least, you'll be left alone to pursue your own interests unnoticed.

Besides downplaying your intelligence, you can do the same with other qualities to lull people into complacency. For instance, make people feel they are more sophisticated or have better taste. They'll like having you around to make them feel better about themselves, and you'll have the space to develop your schemes.

Putting the Law to Work

In the late 1800s two San Francisco con artists swindled a group of wealthy New York businessmen and financiers into buying a fake diamond mine from them for a large amount of money.

They seeded the mine with real diamonds and other jewels, and had inspectors evaluate and authenticate the supposed mine. But what tilted the scheme in their favor was the fact that they came off as bumbling, naive rubes who'd stumbled on a fortune and didn't know where to turn. The businessmen felt superior, and never suspected them of having the intelligence and capability to pull off a sophisticated scam. Further, after several influential businessmen had signed off on the deal, no one in the financial world wanted to impugn their intelligence.

The con artists got away with the money, and the reputation of at least one of the businessmen were damaged beyond repair.

Exceptions to the Law

One circumstance in which you shouldn't downplay your intelligence is the beginning of your career or

climb to power. You'll want to make it known to the higher-ups that you're smarter than any competitors. However, be careful not to overdo it, or you'll become a threat.

You can also cover up a deception by emphasizing your intelligence and authority. For instance, the art dealer Joseph Duveen distracted a potential buyer from the fact that a painting might be fraudulent by intimidating the target with his expertise.

Law 22: Surrender to Win

The Law of Power: Surrendering can be a tool of power. When you're weaker, surrender rather than fighting for the sake of honor. This gives you time to build strength and undermine your victor, while you wait for his power to weaken. You'll win in the end.

Principles

It may seem counterintuitive, but **surrendering to your opponents can be the best course because it puts you in a position of control.**

People typically overreact to opponents' actions, which escalates their problems. Your first instinct will be to respond to aggression with greater aggression. But your enemy will step up his aggression in turn. If you're the weaker party, you'll be decimated.

A wiser and more effective tactic is to surrender, to turn the other cheek. That halts your opponent's aggression and confuses her, while giving you the upper hand. While your opponent is lulled into thinking she's defeated you, **you now have the space to build your strength, discover your enemy's weaknesses, and plan revenge.**

On the surface, you appear compliant, but inwardly you're standing firm. It requires self-control to play dead long enough to make your opponent think she's defeated you. If you get up too soon, you'll ruin the charade and end up suffering.

Sometimes when overpowered by an enemy, it's tempting to run. But eventually he'll catch up with you and crush you. Instead stay close enough to strike when you're ready.

- In ancient China, a king, Goujian, lost a battle to the ruler of Wu. Rather than fleeing, he gave the victor his riches and went to work in Wu's stables, where he could watch and learn how to defeat him in the future. Eventually he was allowed to return home, and when the kingdom of Wu was undermined by drought and infighting, Goujian attacked and won easily.

Power fluctuates. The person on top today will eventually fall. Surrender often puts you in the best position to benefit when the crash inevitably comes.

Putting the Law to Work

The German Writer Bertolt Brecht, a communist, fled to the U.S. to work in the film industry when Hitler rose to power. He wrote anticapitalist screenplays, which was fine until the 1950s, when the House Un-American Activities Committee began its Hollywood witch-hunts. Other writers were angry and confrontational when they appeared before the committee, and ended up suffering for it, unable to continue their work.

Brecht, however, was polite and deferential, but gave ambiguous answers. Although his English was quite good, he brought an interpreter who was able to confuse the committee about the meaning of his writings, which appeared to vary depending on whether you read them in German or English. After only an hour, the committee dismissed him, thanking him for his cooperation and proclaiming him an example to other witnesses. Brecht was thus free to continue his work.

By appearing to respect and surrender to the committee's authority, Brecht made its members feel important while at the same time subtly mocking their ignorance of his work.

Exceptions to the Law

Some might argue that there are situations or causes that call for martyrdom rather than surrender. Maybe your enemy won't quit. Maybe you want to inspire future followers. But you wouldn't be alive to enjoy the rewards. You're better off waiting for the tide to turn in your favor, and you'll be alive to take advantage of it.

Law 23: Focus Your Efforts

The Law of Power: Conserve your resources and energies by focusing them where you'll get the most benefit. Concentrate on mining the richest mine rather than a whole string of mines.

Principles

People often feel distracted and pulled in many directions, which undercuts their energy and effectiveness at whatever they're trying to accomplish. The key is to prioritize your goals and concentrate on the most important ones.

The same is true when it comes to wielding power: **Concentrate single-mindedly on your key goal** and you'll achieve it because your efforts and resources won't be diluted.

When Casanova was imprisoned, he focused single-mindedly on escape. Even when he was moved to a new cell after months of secretly digging, he didn't give up but persevered and finally escaped.

Whether you hold a position of power or are striving for power, you'll need assistance from people more powerful than you. If you concentrate your efforts on wooing your best prospect rather than appealing to a host of potential allies, your chances of success will be greater, and you'll save energy and resources.

The scientist Nikola Tesla tried to stay independent rather than seeking a strong source of support, and he wore himself out groveling to many sources. By contrast, Michaelangelo thrived under one patron, Pope Julius II, as did Galileo with the Medicis.

In organizations where you want to have influence, you need to figure out who's pulling the strings, and concentrate on influencing that person.

Putting the Law to Work

In ancient times, many a kingdom or empire fell when it expanded too broadly and increased its vulnerability. It happened to Rome and Athens: They could no longer protect themselves on all fronts, and came under multiple attacks.

By contrast, the Rothschild banking family, a global power that started in the Jewish ghetto of Frankfurt, Germany, thrived due to a strategy of concentration and cohesion. They excluded outsiders (only family members controlled the business), their operation was impenetrable, and they lived by their founder's advice to avoid diffusion, dissension, and division. One family member described their business as functioning like a watch, with the internal parts moving together invisibly.

While other powerful families eventually disintegrated, the Rothschilds protected and expanded their wealth.

Exceptions to the Law

There are several downsides to concentration of effort.

- Sometimes concentration is dangerous. When you're weaker than your opponent, it may be better to disperse your forces (that's how guerrilla warfare works). Concentrating your forces makes you a clearer target.
- Similarly, focusing solely on an alliance with one person leaves you in trouble when the person dies or falls from power. In turbulent times, make sure you have more than one ally.

Law 24: Play By the Rules

The Law of Power: Courtiers of old were often masters of manipulation, expert at working their schemes within specific rules of behavior required in court. Learn from the courtiers' failures and successes, and you can rise in any system.

Principles

To thrive in whatever court or environment you're playing for power in, learn the rules and know how to manipulate them. Even in modern times, a skilled courtier or functionary who can successfully navigate and thrive in the world of power has great power himself. There's much you can learn about how to do this from studying courtiers of the past.

The laws that governed court politics in the days of kings remain applicable today. Here are a few:

- **Don't brag:** Bragging about your achievements stirs up resentment among your peers, as well as backstabbing.
- **Appear mellow and laid-back:** When you're working hard, make it look easy so people admire your capability.
- **Be judicious with flattery:** Flattering your superiors too much stirs up suspicions about what you want. Employ subtle flattery, for instance by downplaying your talents to make your superior look good.
- **Be noticed, in a good way:** This is a tricky balancing act. You want to be noticed without seeming to promote yourself. If you're not noticed, you've no chance to become more powerful. Adopt a distinctive style, but don't go overboard.
- **Adjust your style:** Adjust your style and way of speaking to fit the occasion. If you can't adapt to other cultures and circumstances, you'll be ineffective.
- **Don't be the bearer of bad news:** The cliché about the recipient of bad news killing the messenger is valid. Do whatever you have to to shift the responsibility for delivering bad news to a colleague.
- **Don't get overly familiar with your boss:** Your boss typically wants a subordinate, not a friend. If he acts friendly toward you, reciprocate, but warily. Otherwise, assume a formal manner.
- **Don't directly criticize a superior:** Sometimes you need to share negative feedback to avoid backlash later. But do it as indirectly and gently as possible.
- **Rarely ask superiors for favors:** Ask for favors only rarely because having to reject a request will stir guilt and irritation. Try to earn your favors, so your boss grants them without your asking.
- **Don't joke about appearance:** Never joke about your superior's appearance or taste, even outside her presence. It will come back to bite you.
- **Don't be a critic:** If you always criticize, you'll draw criticism in return. Conversely, when you credit others' achievements, you'll draw attention to your own.
- **Be self-aware:** Learn to see yourself as others are likely to see you, so you can avoid behavior that others might find offensive.
- **Control your emotions:** Like an actor, learn to disguise your real feelings and produce whatever emotion is required. Control your facial expressions too.
- **Keep up with the times:** You don't want to seem like a relic, but don't push the boundaries of new styles and expressions either.
- **Be a joy to be around:** Be pleasant so that others enjoy being around you. If you can't be thoroughly charming, at least minimize your less stellar qualities.

Putting the Law to Work

Here are some historical examples of successes and failures at applying court rules. The underlying theme is subtlety.

Successes

- During the Han dynasty, Chinese scholars compiled court chronicles that included stories, statistics, and reports of wars and events. At times they also inserted descriptions of strange phenomena such as geese flying backward. These were indirect warnings to the Chinese emperor of the potential for making a mistake. The emperor was godlike and couldn't be criticized, so these warnings were a gentle way of pointing out a problem without putting anyone's neck on the line.
- When the French architect Mansart was tasked by Louis XIV to draft plans for some minor additions to Versailles, he was careful not to seem arrogant. He always included small flaws in his drawings that the king would point out. Mansart would thank the king profusely and praise his astuteness. Mansart made the king look smarter, and was rewarded with a royal commission for major work on Versailles.

Failures

- A Greek student-philosopher, Callisthenes, had been trained in court etiquette but ignored his training when engaging in philosophical discussions with Alexander the Great. He rejected subtlety and spoke what he believed to be the unvarnished truth. As a result Alexander had him killed. Lesson: Never assume your superior wants to hear your honest opinion.
- Beau Brummell, an English dandy of the 1700s, was a popular authority on fashion and soon attached himself to the court of the Prince of Wales. Feeling secure in his popularity, he joked about the prince's weight, calling him "Big Ben" to his face. Fed up, the prince ejected him from the court, and Brummell died in poverty, rejected by all, for his bad manners. Never mock a superior's appearance.

Exceptions to the Law

A warning: Be sure to cover your tracks so you never get caught in your schemes. Napoleon's minister Talleyrand was caught in a scheme to trick Napoleon into thinking he was hunting wild game in a royal park, when the animals had been purchased at the market. It took Talleyrand months to regain trust, and Napoleon never forgave him.

Law 25: Reinvent Yourself

The Law of Power: Reinvent yourself with a powerful new image that stands out and draws attention, rather than letting others define you. Then change your appearance and emotions to suit the occasion, or stage riveting dramas as backdrops for your actions.

Principles

Everyone is born with a certain character, which is shaped by family, associations, and experiences. But this is a passive process. **You need to take control and shape and reshape who you are**, according to your circumstances — the images you create allow you to attain and wield power.

The first step is self-awareness — **view yourself as an actor, assuming the appearances and emotions required** for the occasion.

Second, **create a character or image for yourself that stands out and attracts attention**. Abraham Lincoln, for example, drew attention by portraying himself as a homespun country lawyer, down to his hat, clothing, and beard. He also was the first president to spread his image through the use of photos.

Besides having a memorable appearance, you need to create a drama in which to act — with suspense and an unfolding plot that rises and falls in a rhythm before reaching its climax. FDR staged his events in a way that gave his actions maximum impact. He started with a bold inaugural speech, and followed it with an orchestrated series of rapid moves including legislation and appointments.

Besides building yourself up, you can use drama to confuse or deceive, as playwright Bertolt Brecht confused the House Un-American Activities Committee.

Julius Caesar employed a *beau geste*, with his crossing of the Rubicon to attack Pompey, starting the Roman civil war. A *beau geste* is a climactic action that confirms your heroic image. You can use entrances and exits for dramatic effect as well. Just don't overact.

Putting the Law to Work

Julius Caesar knew the power of appearances — he staged dramatic announcements and used theatrical gestures to make himself the center of attention. He staged huge, entertaining public events, wore purple robes, and delivered his lines as if from a script. In battle, he rode the largest and strongest horse so his soldiers could always see him as a godlike symbol. Even his last gestures and moments were dramatic.

Similarly, in the early 1800s in Paris, a woman named Aurore Dupin Dudevant recreated herself with the pseudonym of a male author, George Sand. A publisher accepted her first novel, and critics gave it positive reviews, assuming it had been written by a man. She sometimes wore men's clothing and smoked cigars, winning acceptance from a group of male authors. She changed her character periodically so the public wouldn't get bored. Yet she carried on affairs as a woman with famous artists. Outwardly, she played the part of a male writer, but privately she remained herself.

"George Sand" refused to accept the constrained roles that society had assigned to women, creating a powerful new role, and controlling her own destiny, instead.

Exceptions to the Law

There are no exceptions to this law. Just keep in mind no one likes bad theater, so create and play your roles skillfully.

Law 26: Don't Dirty Your Hands

The Law of Power: You'll inevitably make mistakes or need to take care of messy problems. But it's imperative to keep your hands clean. Find scapegoats to blame and use cat's paws or fixers to handle problems while disguising your involvement.

Part 1: Cover Up Your Mistakes

Sub-law: Your good name and reputation depend more on what you conceal than on what you reveal. Everyone makes mistakes, but those who are truly clever manage to hide them, and to make sure someone else is blamed. A convenient scapegoat should always be kept around for such moments.

Principles

Mistakes themselves don't hurt powerful people — it's how they deal with them that counts. Making excuses or offering apologies are the worst possible responses. Excuses never satisfy anyone, and apologies dig a deeper hole for you. They raise questions about your competence (maybe you've made other mistakes too?), intentions, and motives.

The more quickly you can shift attention to someone else the better. **You need a scapegoat.**

The practice of using a scapegoat has a long history — Hebrew priests transferred the sins of the people to a goat (originating the term "scapegoat"), which would be abandoned in the wilderness. In some civilizations, a human scapegoat would be sacrificed to the gods.

It works for both the person using the scapegoat and the intended audience because **people are accustomed to blame shifting**. People naturally look outwardly to blame others rather than inwardly to explain their mistakes. And when the scapegoating is done by others, they accept the scapegoat's guilt.

Of course, modern leaders who don't want to be seen as fallible continue to use scapegoats today. When Mao's Cultural Revolution failed, he blamed his personal secretary and a high-ranking party member. FDR wanted to maintain a reputation of fairness and transparency, so he often used his secretary, Louis Howe, to commit dirty tricks and take the blame if they came to light (a role Howe accepted).

Other things to know about using scapegoats:

- **Besides shifting the blame for mistakes, a scapegoat can serve as a lesson to others to avoid crossing the boss.**
- Innocent parties are sometimes the best choice, since they lack power and their protests may be seen as a sign of guilt.
- You need to be careful not to create a martyr — remember to keep the spotlight on yourself as the victim, the one betrayed by incompetents around you.
- A person with more power may be an effective choice, if he/she is an unsympathetic figure.
- **It may be useful to choose a close associate, which sets up a "fall of the favorite" scenario.** When you throw your former friend to the wolves, people believe in his guilt because they wouldn't expect you to cold-heartedly misuse a friend.

Putting the Law to Work

When a Chinese general miscalculated his army's food supply, he had to cut back on rations while waiting for a new shipment. The troops naturally were unhappy, and rumors spread that the general was keeping food for himself while depriving others. A mutiny threatened to break out, so the general scapegoated his chief supply officer and had him executed.

Part 2: Use a Cat's Paw

Sub-law: If something unpopular or unpleasant needs to be done, you need a cat's paw or fixer to do the dirty work, keeping you from being hurt or seen as being responsible. (The term comes from an old story about a monkey who grabbed the paw of his friend, the cat, to pull chestnuts from a fire. By using the cat, he got what he wanted without hurting himself.)

Principles

There are two benefits of a cat's paw: **to save appearances (keep your hands clean) and to save energy and effort**. Like scapegoats, you may need to get rid of your cat's paw after he's served his purpose.

The American con artist Joseph Weil (the "Yellow Kid") often used cat's paws to hide his schemes while getting close enough to hook his target. He would identify someone the target already knew to be his cat's paw, and pretend to enlist the person in a money-making venture. The cat's paw would typically suggest including a wealthy friend (Weil's real target), who would readily fall for the scheme because he trusted the cat's paw.

You can also use a cat's paw to spread false information to your target, who won't suspect you're the source.

Another scenario, if you want to curry favor with a superior, is to **offer yourself as a cat's paw**. If you succeed in, for instance, protecting your boss from risk or recriminations, you'll increase your power. But don't brag or remind your boss he owes you a favor.

Here's an example of using a cat's paw to save energy and effort. A famous therapist who counseled couples knew that husbands typically refused to participate with the wives in counseling. So he used the wife as a cat's paw. He'd see her alone for counseling, and when she talked about her husband, the therapist would make provocative comments that he knew she'd repeat at home. This would rile up the husband and he'd accompany her the next time to set the record straight.

Putting the Law to Work

Queen Cleopatra of Egypt successfully used Julius Caesar and Marc Antony as unwitting cat's paws to secure her throne by getting rid of her enemies. They killed off her sibling rivals and used their armies (expending their energy and resources) on her behalf. Of course, her skill at seduction was a factor in her success, but she also was a master strategist.

You can also make yourself a cat's paw as a Japanese man, Daizen, did. Diazen learned that a friend had borrowed money to help someone and was in danger of not being able to pay it back. He decided to help his friend indirectly, so as not to offend or make him feel obligated. Diazen lavished praise on a painting his friend owned, until the friend offered to give it to him. Diazen accepted it but sent a rare vase in return. He mentioned the name of his friend's lender as a collector of such vases, who might want to buy it. The friend was able to use the case to pay off his debt, without feeling

obligated to Diazen.

Diazen made himself the cat's paw to satisfy the lender and free his friend from a burdensome debt. This is a good model to use when doing favors for friends.

Exceptions to the Law

Once in a while, you may want to acknowledge a mistake, if it will generate sympathy toward you.

Or, you may want people to know you're behind an action in order to intimidate your subordinates.

But you need to be extremely careful in either case – a cat's paw is usually a better option.

Law 27: Create a Cult Following

The Law of Power: People desperately want to believe in something. Offer them a cause to follow. Promise the world but keep it vague; whip up enthusiasm. Mimic a religious structure with a hierarchy, rituals, and requests for sacrifice (donations). You'll have untold power over your followers, who will worship you.

Principles

Creating a cult following is an effective way to build and use power. Among the many benefits:

- It opens up myriad opportunities for deception.
- It will increase your wealth.
- Your followers will defend you against your enemies.
- They'll recruit others to join the cult, giving you even more power and wealth.
- They'll treat you as one who can do no wrong, so you can get away with anything.

It's surprisingly simple to set up a cult. The reason is that **people have a desperate need to believe in something, and belong to a group or cause.** They're highly susceptible to the siren call of a new movement or trend.

History is filled with examples of people and movements that attracted a mass following. They look foolish or even tragic in retrospect, but they seemed divinely inspired to adherents at the time.

Rather than leaving people adrift or having to conjure up saints to believe in, **offer them yourself as the next savior.** Encourage people to form a cult around you.

Charlatans of 16th- and 17th-century Europe were masters at luring and manipulating people. A key was attracting crowds, where people get caught up in a contagious passion and suspend independent judgment and skepticism.

Modern-day charlatans in politics, entertainment, and business intuitively exploit the same psychological weaknesses; however, taking a systematic approach is most effective.

From studying the charlatans of old, it's easy to identify five proven steps to creating a cult.

1. **Concoct a vague and simple message:** Attract attention with vague promises of something wonderful and transformative. Listeners will fill in the blanks with their own yearnings and beliefs. Speak forcefully and with passion, using words that resonate and stir nostalgia, but whose meaning can't be pinned down. But keep it simple because people want quick fixes, not complexity.
2. **Create a spectacle:** To avoid waning interest and skepticism, give them a spectacle. Overwhelm the senses (and any ability to think) with sights, sound, scent, color, movement.
3. **Imitate organized religion.** Create a hierarchy, rituals, rankings, and religious-sounding titles. Ask for money to increase your wealth and power. Seem like a prophet or guru.
4. **Hide your income source.** By living a luxurious lifestyle you'll give your followers hope and something to aspire to, but don't let them know they're your source. Make your wealth seem like proof of the validity of your message. While busy trying to emulate you, your followers won't notice they're being fleeced.
5. **Give them enemies:** To keep your followers united, set up an us-against-the-world dynamic. This should be easy, since you'll generate outside critics as your movement grows. Then give them

enemies, real or invented. They'll vigorously defend their new cause against unbelievers.

Putting the Law to Work

In the late 1700s, a French doctor, Franz Mesmer created a mass following with claims he could cure people of all ills by using magnetic forces. He invited people to his apartment for demonstrations; with a background of incense and harp music, people sat around a pool of supposedly magnetic water, from which rods protruded. Visitors touched their bodies with the rods, and held hands with their neighbors to channel the magnetic force.

Mesmer's assistants sprinkled water on participants and rubbed the supposedly healing fluid into the skin. Participants experienced trance-like states or hysteria, and felt a strange power moving through their bodies.

Word of Mesmer's powers spread, and his fame and wealth grew, even attracting royalty. A cult of "Mesmerism" was born and societies formed around the country to experiment with magnetism. Eventually, however, a French commission investigated and debunked his practices and theories. Mesmer's reputation was ruined and he retired, but a few years later his cult revived and spread again.

With the right mix of spectacle, message, and religious fervor, you can get people to believe anything, and make you powerful and wealthy.

Exceptions to the Law

Because of group psychology, it's easier to get a group to believe you than an individual. But the downside is that if the group sees through you, you'll face an angry mob. Europe's charlatans faced this risk — people eventually figured out that their potions didn't work — and so they were always ready to move to the next town and find new followers.

Always stay attuned to your crowd's emotions, pay attention to how people are behaving, and be ready to run.

Law 28: Act Boldly

The Law of Power: If you hesitate before doing something, your doubts will undermine your efforts. When you act, do so boldly — and if you make mistakes, correct them with even greater boldness. Everyone admires the bold.

Principles

People have a natural tendency to hesitate before acting. To be powerful, you need to overcome this tendency, by practicing audacity.

Here's how these two tendencies — boldness and hesitation — work:

- **Lie boldly:** By acting boldly you can hide your weaknesses. Con artists know that the bigger the lie, the more likely it is to be believed. Audacity distracts attention from a phony story's inconsistencies.
- **Hesitate and you'll lose:** People sense weakness in others. If you show hesitancy, for instance through backing down or a willingness to compromise, others will pounce and take advantage. If people perceive that you're a pushover, that's what they'll do.
- **A bold move intimidates:** When you act boldly, you appear powerful and intimidating. If your bold move is also sudden it intimidates even more. You'll put people on the defensive against future strikes.
- **Hesitation creates obstacles:** If you pursue a goal half-heartedly, you create problems for yourself, the way a hunted rabbit behaves erratically and blunders into the path of the hunter.
- **Boldness erases doubt:** When you hesitate, you inspire doubt in others. But when you act boldly you sweep others along with you, giving them no time for second thoughts.
- **Boldness makes you stand out:** When you're bold, you attract attention, and therefore power.

Many people are timid because they want to be liked and avoid conflict. They may think bold thoughts, but they're afraid to put them into action.

Timidity is a type of self-absorption; you worry about yourself and what others will think of you. Boldness is the opposite — bold action makes you feel less self-conscious and focus outwardly, on results.

Boldness doesn't come naturally — it must be developed and practiced. Napoleon originally was timid and socially awkward, but he had to learn boldness to succeed on the battlefield. Later he applied it to all areas of his life, and it made him seem larger than life although he was physically small.

So practice being bold, for instance in a negotiation involving a price. Don't make the mistake as most people do of asking for too little. When Columbus sought funding from the Spanish court for his voyage to the New World, he also requested the title "Grand Admiral of the Ocean," which was really a demand for respect. He received both.

Root out the habit of timidity and replace it with boldness. **If you make a mistake through boldness, remedy it with even more boldness.**

Putting the Law to Work

Pietro Aretino, a kitchen servant to a wealthy Roman family, had an ambition to be a great writer.

With boldness he achieved it.

Pope Leo X had received an elephant as a gift and he was enthralled with it. He was so upset when the elephant died that he commissioned a painting to be put over the elephant's tomb. Aretino saw an opportunity, and wrote a satirical pamphlet purporting to be the elephant's last will and testament, which ridiculed not only the pope but many cardinals, to whom the fictional elephant bequeathed various body parts. Readers immediately wanted to know who the audacious writer was. Even the pope was amused by his audacity and offered Aretino a job.

Exceptions to the Law

Boldness should be used tactically, rather than willy-nilly, to achieve specific goals. You need to control and target it, not overdo it. If you make it a pattern you'll offend too many people, which will cause your downfall. Lola Montez, mistress of the king of Bavaria, behaved so badly and inserted herself so boldly into the country's affairs that she stirred outrage among the people, and the king had to deport her.

Faking timidity could be to your advantage, allowing you to set people up so you can pounce on them later, although you'll soon develop a reputation and it will no longer work.

Law 29: Plan the Ending

The Law of Power: Make detailed plans with a clear ending. Think far ahead, take into account all possible developments, and don't be swayed by wishful thinking. Then pursue your plans and don't be tempted from your path.

Principles

Most people believe that they're thinking of the future and planning ahead. Instead, they're actually practicing wishful thinking of what they want the future to be, rather than a future based on reality.

However, unhappy endings occur more often than happy ones. For example, when the Athenians attacked Sicily, they weren't thinking about what could go wrong — they were focused on riches and glory. But the war was disastrous and led to the fall of their great civilization. The Sicilians fought harder on their home turf, multiple enemies banded together against them, and wars broke out on several fronts.

Vague plans will lead to trouble, so make detailed plans before acting. Think about possible unintended consequences, for instance whether you'll create new enemies, or whether a circling vulture will swoop in and take the spoils. Anticipate any circumstances that will tempt you to improvise, or to continue beyond your goal, and be ready to reject them. Going beyond your planned ending typically generates a reaction that may well end in your defeat.

Most people focus on smaller immediate dangers and miss seeing the larger dangers that will come later — take the long view with an eye to future pitfalls, remembering that **power comes as much from what you don't do (mistakes you avoid) as from what you do.**

The ending is all-important. It determines who gets the prize. Make it absolutely clear and firm, and always keep it in mind, refusing temptations and distractions.

Putting the Law to Work

In the mid-1800s Prussian leader Otto von Bismarck had a goal of created a united Germany ruled by Prussia. With this ending always in mind, he planned specific steps for getting there and wasn't sidetracked by temptations to grab more territory or glory.

His steps were:

- Incite war with Denmark, not to add territory but to stir up Prussian nationalism and unite the country.
- Incite war with Austria to gain Prussian independence (he refused the temptation to grab Austrian territory).
- Incite war with France to unite the German kingdoms against a common enemy, and prepare for the formation of a united, secure Germany.

Once this was achieved he stopped, although his generals wanted to take more land. Although other European leaders expected him to continue his aggression, he worked thereafter to avoid war. He wanted unity and security, not more land, and achieving that goal was his last move.

Exceptions to the Law

There are no exceptions to the need to think into the future as far as you can, and plan to the end.

Of course, to some extent the future is always uncertain and your plan must be somewhat flexible so you can respond to sudden developments. However, you'll be free to adapt only if you have a clear goal and a far-sighted plan. Otherwise, you're just improvising.

Exercise: Surprise Ending

When people make plans, they envision an ending but often neglect to plan the steps that will get them there, or they fail to think of what could go wrong and prepare for it. The results are not what they expected.

Have you ever planned or been involved in something where the ending surprised you? How and why were you surprised?

Could you have foreseen this outcome? How?

How could you have planned differently to get the outcome you wanted? For instance, how could your plan have been more specific? (Vague plans often lead to unexpected endings.)

Law 30: Make It Seem Easy

The Law of Power: Make difficult feats seem effortless and you'll inspire awe in others and seem powerful. Conceal the work behind your accomplishments — if you brag about it, you'll ruin the effect.

Principles

Natural phenomena such as volcanoes and tornadoes, which are demonstrations of power, seem effortless and leave people awestruck.

If you create an impression of effortlessness (make the difficult look easy) you can generate awe in others and seem powerful. **People admire those who perform seemingly impossible feats, especially when they make it look easy.**

The best courtiers prided themselves in their ability to make the difficult seem easy. Great Renaissance artists kept their studios closed and their works in progress under wraps, revealing only the final masterpiece. No one knew the effort that went into it, which would have ruined the magical effect. By contrast, **performers who try too hard make us uncomfortable**; graceful performers create a pleasing illusion by making their labor look natural.

Power works the same way; your public performances should be appealing, entertaining, and create a sense of anticipation — but most of all, they should be awe-inspiring. They can't be if you reveal the work behind them; people will tell themselves they could have done just as well or better. For the same reason, **don't try to show how clever you are by revealing your tricks.**

The French minister Talleyrand created an aura of power by never seeming to work very hard — while others did the legwork, he alluded to great things to come, which made him seem prescient. He carefully planned each public comment, but gave the impression that his remarks were off the cuff manifestations of his wit and intelligence.

Most people tend to brag about their hard work and cleverness in an effort to win admiration, or sympathy for their sacrifices for the sake of art. But they generate contempt instead.

Remember, the more mysterious your actions seem the more powerful you are. And when they seem effortless, you appear to have untapped ability and power.

Putting the Law to Work

When you show the effort that went into producing an effect, the effect is spoiled.

In the 16th century, Japanese tea ceremonies were elaborate and sometimes costly affairs that were supposed to achieve effortless perfection. The country's most famous practitioner was known for leaving a ceremony if it looked like the host was trying too hard.

The escape artist Harry Houdini made his escapes seem effortless. But he succeeded because of endless research, study, practice, and physical training. He learned sleight-of-hand tricks, studied the mechanics of many types of locks, and learned to make his body flexible and control his muscles and breathing. He learned how to swallow things, hold them in his throat, and bring them back up.

Be like Houdini. Research and practice diligently before appearing in public, but never reveal the labor behind your efforts.

Exceptions to the Law

While making things seem effortless, don't be overzealous about hiding the machinations or you'll come across as paranoid. Houdini made concealing his tricks seem like part of the fun.

Occasionally, you may want to reveal the inner workings, to make your audience feel involved and in the know (although you should never reveal everything). P.T. Barnum found that revealing his tricks amused his audiences, made them feel superior, and had the added benefit of making them suspicious of competitors who kept their tricks secret.

Your revelations, however, must be carefully planned, rather than impulsively and thoughtlessly blurted out.

Law 31: Set Up a Phony Choice

The Law of Power: To deceive people, seem to give them a meaningful choice. But sharply limit their options to a few that work in your favor regardless of which they choose. Your victims will feel in control, but you'll pull the strings.

Principles

We all like having choices, and often don't notice that the choices we have can be very limited, whether in elections, our jobs, or the marketplace. We accept this, even though it isn't fair, because the alternative, unlimited freedom of choice, is too overwhelming to contemplate. A limited range is easier to deal with and provokes less anxiety.

The fact that most people aren't bothered by limited choices creates great opportunity for deception.

People won't feel they're being deceived if they have at least a small amount of choice.

Here are some ways of setting up either/or choices for your benefit:

Spin the choices: Henry Kissinger often used this technique with President Nixon. He'd propose three or four choices presented so that his favored option always looked best compared to the others. This works well with an insecure boss like Nixon.

Advocate the opposite: Present what you *don't* want as your favored option, and people who are contrarians will choose the opposite (what you *do* want). This technique works with children as well.

Change the playing field: When people are resisting, you can force their hand with this technique. When John D. Rockefeller wanted to create an oil monopoly, he changed the playing field by buying railroad companies. Then when he offered to buy an oil company, their choice was to either sell to him or face ruin when he raised shipping prices or refused to ship their oil.

Shrink the options: When you've given someone options and they're not ready to decide, offer worse options each time they return with their answer. They soon figure out that today's choices are better than tomorrow's will be so they'd better get what they can immediately. This is an effective technique to use with indecisive people.

Emphasize the risks: You can steer a fearful person in the direction you want him to go by painting the other options as extremely risky. This tactic is similar to Kissinger's method of spinning the choices, but with a timid person you need to be more aggressive and strike terror in his heart to stop him from procrastinating.

Two bad alternatives: With opponents, you can force them to choose between two bad (for them) alternatives, either of which benefits you. When General William Sherman marched through Georgia during the Civil War, he divided his army into two wings. Facing either of them was a bad option for the Confederate troops.

Putting the Law to Work

Ivan the Terrible lacked sufficient power as czar under Russia's governing structure in the 1500s to do two things he needed to do: put down the boyars (a group of princes who continually tried to destroy

him); and beat back external threats of invasion from all sides.

His response was to get the Russian people to voluntarily grant him absolute power. He achieved this by withdrawing from the palace for a while and letting the bloodthirsty princes run wild. When the people became sufficiently alarmed, he offered a choice: Grant him absolute power with no interference from the princes, or find a new leader. The people opted for a strong czar.

Had he tried to take such powers by force, he would have stirred up resentment and subjected the country to civil war. Once people voluntarily gave him total control, they had less room to complain when he used the dictatorial powers they had chosen to grant him.

Exceptions to the Law

When dealing with opponents, it may be to your advantage to let them operate freely for a short time (rather than controlling their options) so you can observe their strategies.

Law 32: Fulfill Others' Fantasies

The Law of Power: Conjure up attractive fantasies in contrast to the gloomy realities of daily life, and people will flock to hear them. Truth is less pleasant, and fantasies are preferable. Spin the right tale at the right moment and wealth and power will follow.

Principles

Fantasy is appealing when life has become boring, gloomy, or oppressive. If you can create an appealing fantasy at the right moment, when spirits are low, you'll attract wealth and power.

Following are some types of fantasies that attract and deceive the masses, by offering a contrast to a depressing reality.

Transformative change: Change is usually slow, and requires hard work, sacrifice, and persistence. Instead, promise instant, painless transformation of people's fortunes (poverty to riches, sadness to happiness, sickness to health).

Adventure: Everyone must live within day-to-day constraints, including social and geographic boundaries, personal and familial responsibilities, financial and educational limits, etc. Instead, present exciting new worlds, where the usual rules don't apply.

- In the 1700s a young man drew attention in London for his riveting stories and writing about the exotic island of Formosa (now Taiwan). When he died later, it was learned that his stories and even the "Formosan" language he spoke were made up.

Peace and harmony: Humans are divided by so many things — culture, race, wealth, education, religion, politics — that conflict is inevitable. Instead, promise mystical connection.

Resurrection: The past is dead and gone, which is difficult for people to accept. Offer a fantasy that brings some element of the past back to life, for instance through the discovery of lost masterworks or sunken treasure.

Putting the Law to Work

In the late 1500s, when Venice had fallen on difficult times in contrast to its glorious past, a man named Bragadino arrived claiming he could make gold multiply by applying a secret substance. Venetians built him a palace and promised to fund a luxurious lifestyle, if he would produce gold to restore the city to its former glory. People believed his stories for a while, but eventually grew disillusioned and Bragadino had to flee to Bavaria, where he was eventually hanged after perpetrating the same scheme.

His fantasy was powerful because it came at the right moment, when Venice needed relief from its misfortune. Rather than the hard, painful work of rebuilding the city, he offered instant transformation — gold miraculously multiplied. For a while at least, his fantasy resonated and he enjoyed wealth and fame.

Exceptions to the Law

Spinning fantasies can be dangerous if people realize they're being deceived. To steer clear of such shoals, keep your stories and promises vague, and avoid getting close to a point where you're expected to produce something concrete.

Law 33: Use Others' Weaknesses

The Law of Power: Everyone has a weakness, a hole in his armor. It's usually an insecurity, an uncontrollable emotion or need, or a secret pleasure. Once found, it's leverage that you can use to your advantage.

Principles

Everyone has a weakness, a button you can find and push. Some people show their weaknesses openly while others hide them. You can most effectively exploit the weaknesses of those who hide them. Push their buttons and you can easily deceive them or get them to do what you want.

In your search to find and exploit someone's weaknesses, understand these principles:

Look and listen: No one keeps a secret. Even when people aren't talking they convey a message with other signals such as body language. But talking is the place to start. Routine conversation is revealing — learn to listen.

Always seem interested — a seemingly sympathetic ear will get anyone talking. An old trick is to pretend to share a confidence with them; it can be inconsequential or even fabricated — it just needs to seem sincere. The other person will respond with a confidence of their own, which likely reveals a weakness.

Pay attention to details — what a person laughs at, how they respond to a waiter, what their clothes say about them. Focus on unconscious behavior.

Find out what they like most, and are always looking to get. Indulge their desires or tastes.

Tap into the inner child. Needs and weaknesses develop in childhood as a result of how we were treated, whether we were indulged or neglected, and whether emotional needs were met. These needs follow us into adulthood, although they may be buried, developing into weaknesses you can exploit. One clue that you've hit on something is when the person's response is childlike. If you identify something missing from a person's childhood, such as approval, provide a substitute.

Look for the opposite. People who display a tendency or trait are often hiding its opposite. Those with big mouths are often cowards; the shy crave attention; the most critical person shares the vices he criticizes. See beyond appearances.

Find the linchpin. In groups and organizations, someone holds the key. Working behind the scenes, they know the score and have power and influence over the person at the top. They are essentially the group's weak link. Through them, you can influence the boss or break through the group's cohesiveness.

Fill the void. Everyone has emotional voids, which you can exploit to control them. Two typical voids are insecurity and discontent. Validate the insecure person, and find the source of the discontent or unhappiness. People are malleable when you address their unmet emotional needs.

Play on emotions. You can control people by playing on their strongest emotions and passions — the ones they have little control over or that seem disproportionate. For instance, paranoia, greed, fear, or hatred. An uncontrollable passion for the opposite sex is a weakness that can be used.

Putting the Law to Work

Look for the unhappy, the insecure, and the needy — playing on their weaknesses is a ticket to power.

- Art dealer Joseph Duveen made money by exploiting the weaknesses of wealthy heiress Arabella Huntington. Duveen realized she was insecure because she'd come from humble roots, so he flattered and subtly educated her, encouraging a taste in art that he could then cater to. He sold her the most expensive painting anyone had bought up to that time.
- Con artist Victor Lustig won the trust and then swindled a newly rich businessman by seeming to offer the friendship, validation, and social connections the man hungered for.
- In the 1500s, French regent Catherine de Medici controlled many ambitious men who threatened her power, by playing to their insatiable passions for women. She created a so-called "flying squadron" of skilled mistresses who seduced them and reported their plans back to Catherine.
- Prussian minister Bismarck pushed King William to build up the army and fight three wars, by playing on his insecurity about his manhood and secret desire to be seen as courageous.

Exceptions to the Law

When pushing people's buttons, it's easy to go too far. When you play on strong emotions and needs, people may go further than you intend or turn against you. Always look several steps ahead and be prepared to address such possibilities.

Law 34: Act Like Royalty

The Law of Power: Act like royalty and people will treat you that way. Project dignity and supreme confidence that you're destined for great things. If you demand a high price, people will think you're worth it; you'll accrue power and respect.

Principles

Act like royalty, and people will treat you as if you were royal, conferring on you status, respect, and power.

The crown creates an aura of power and entitlement that emanates from a king. Create such an aura for yourself by **acting as if you're destined for great things**. Your supreme confidence and belief in yourself will radiate power the same way a crown does.

This kind of self-confidence is contagious — others will believe it, and you can ask for and receive what you want. **Your belief in yourself will become a self-fulfilling prophecy**. Children charm adults this way when they confidently and happily ask for what they want — and adults enjoy indulging them.

Be sure to act differently — **people have expectations for how a king should act, and you must meet them in order to be treated like a king**. One of the most important is to act differently — separate yourself — from those around you.

One way to set yourself apart is to always act with great dignity, or regal bearing. (Don't confuse this with arrogance, which is a sign of insecurity.)

Ethiopian ruler Haile Selassie came from a noble family, but wasn't expected to ever ascend to the throne. However, as a young man his dignity, calmness, and self-confidence gave him a royal bearing that was soon noticed by the king, and he rose in the ranks.

Along with developing your inner confidence and strength, you can employ several outward strategies to create a royal aura.

- **Make an over-the-top demand:** Demand a high price and stand firm, as Columbus did in requesting funding and prestigious titles for his explorations from Spain's Queen Isabella. You're signalling your worth, and your superior will respect you even if she turns you down. That respect likely will pay dividends later.
- **Elevate yourself by going after the highest-ranking person.** When you take on a strong opponent, you're seen as her equal.
- **Give a gift to your superior or patron.** This establishes your equality with the person above you. You'll also get what you want in return without begging, which would make you seem small.

Putting the Law to Work

Christopher Columbus, who was the son of a cheese vendor, adopted an attitude and presence that convinced people he was descended from Italian royalty. When he wanted support for his explorations, he approached Queen Isabella and other monarchs as if he were one of them.

He had no experience whatsoever with the sea, but projected the charm and self-confidence of an entitled aristocrat. He seemed destined for greatness. He also set a high price, which established his

status. Besides ships, equipment, and pay for crews, he wanted the title Grand Admiral of the Oceanic Sea, the position of viceroy over territory he discovered, and 10 percent of the proceeds from these lands. (He got everything but a percentage of the proceeds.)

Be like Columbus; confidently ask for the moon, and others will think you're worth it.

Exceptions to the Law

While it's important to set yourself apart from others, never do it by humiliating people, which will create a backlash. Also, floating too high can make you a target. Radiate confidence, but not arrogance.

Law 35: Get the Timing Right

The Law of Power: Anticipate the ebb and flow of power. Recognize when the time is right, and align yourself with the right side. Be patient and wait for your moment when you know you'll benefit in the long run. When it's time to make your end move against an opponent, strike without hesitation.

Principles

In the quest for power, timing is everything. To take advantage of changing fortunes you need to recognize the moment to act. Constantly read the signs and ally yourself with the right side. But be ready to switch again right before the pendulum swings.

To survive and thrive while others are swept away, apply these principles:

- **Recognize change in the air:** Be alert to the undercurrent as well as what's happening around the edges of society. Rather than aligning with a crumbling past, look for the new leaders and movements to join.
- **Anticipate the reaction:** When a new movement gathers momentum or a new power takes the throne, anticipate a reactionary wave and be ready to ride it.
- **Be patient and keep your cool:** When things get chaotic, keep a low profile and play for time so you can see the right moment when it comes again.

Time can be viewed and managed in three ways:

Take the Long View

There's a time frame that stretches years ahead and should be viewed with an eye to opportunity. Have a defensive strategy and play a patient, waiting game.

Waiting requires controlling your emotions and those of your colleagues who might get impatient and push you to act at the wrong time. It's better to let your rivals rush to act, if you know they'll fail. You can wait and pick up the pieces. In the 17th century, General Ieyasu of Japan knew that invading Korea would be a disaster. He simply waited while the emperor launched an invasion against his advice, which indeed failed. It took years, but when the emperor fell Ieyasu seized power.

Taking the long view has several advantages:

- When you're not in immediate or crisis mode, you're more clear-eyed and can see farther into the future.
- You'll be able to resist others' intentional provocations.
- You can be more flexible and able to take advantage of opportunities along the way that you would miss by rushing.
- You can be methodical, completing each step properly before moving to the next.
- When making long-range decisions, you'll be less driven by emotion.

Force Your Opponent's Hand

There is a short, immediate time frame in which you can act offensively to upset the timing of your opponents.

The Turkish sultan Mehmed distracted Hungary from noticing he was vulnerable to attack while he battled another foe. Mehmed did this by inviting Hungarian officials to negotiations, then repeatedly postponing the meetings after they arrived. They waited, on his terms, until he finally returned from battle and canceled the whole thing.

In contrast to making your opponents wait, you can make them hurry. You can start dealing with someone slowly, then suddenly speed things up: Demand a decision or set an unrealistic deadline. Under pressure, they're likely to make mistakes.

Salespeople use this technique by telling you that someone else is interested in the item you're thinking of buying, so you'd better put money down right away.

Finish the Job

There's a specific moment when you need to execute your plan, forcefully and without hesitation. Patience has its place, but when it's time to act, you must act, suddenly pouncing on your opponent and ending the game conclusively.

Putting the Law to Work

Joseph Fouche, who served as a key official and chief of police under France's top leaders including Robespierre and Napoleon, had an uncanny ability to read the chaotic times, align himself with the latest leaders, and avoid getting caught up in retribution for the crimes of the leaders who fell. He also knew when to keep a low profile and wait.

Exceptions to the Law

There's nothing to be gained by ignoring time and going with the flow. You need to be in control.

Law 36: Ignore Small Problems

The Law of Power: Sometimes it's better to ignore things. You'll make small problems worse, make yourself look bad, and give your enemy attention he doesn't deserve if you respond to a minor provocation. By not showing interest, you maintain your superiority.

Principles

When faced with an irritating, but minor offense, sometimes the best course is to ignore it. Not responding can be a demonstration of power — a message that it's not worth your interest.

Also, you avoid wasting time, becoming mired in someone else's mess, or drawing attention to someone or something that will fade away on its own.

Ignoring people who thrive on your attention is an effective power tactic. You cancel them out by withdrawing your attention, which may anger them but there's nothing they can do since you're not dealing with them. Meanwhile, you maintain your superiority.

Conversely, **paying undue attention to a minor opponent gives them greater importance** and makes you look petty, especially if they draw you into an extended conflict. President Kennedy helped make Fidel Castro a hero with his failed Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in 1961.

When you attack a small irritant you also run the risk of creating sympathy for the offender. Again, leaving it alone can be the best policy. This also applies to mistakes or problems — trying to fix them calls attention to them and often makes them worse.

Here's how to execute a strategy of disdaining what's bothering you.

- If you want something but can't get it, don't draw attention to it by complaining. Act as if you weren't interested in the first place.
- If you're attacked by an inferior (or make a mistake yourself), act as though you didn't notice it.
- **If you're caught in a mistake, don't respond defensively or you'll make things worse.** Own up to it but put a different spin on it, and it could work in your favor.
 - When Renaissance writer Aretino was discovered to have lied about being an aristocrat, he responded that he was indeed the son of a shoemaker — but that this humble beginning made his achievements all the more impressive.

Putting the Law to Work

In the early 1900s President Woodrow Wilson turned a relatively small problem into a large and prolonged one when he sent a large military force into the mountains of Mexico to find and capture bandit Pancho Villa in reaction to his raid in New Mexico.

Villa played a successful cat-and-mouse game against American forces that at one point grew to 123,000, including airplanes. Villa's popularity, which had been waning at the time of his raid, grew substantially. Eventually U.S. forces had to withdraw in failure.

Wilson let a minor incident turn into a major, costly embarrassment. By contrast, he could have sent a smaller, more effective force; set a trap; or waited for the Mexicans to deal with Villa on their own.

Instead, Wilson let it drag him down.

Exceptions to the Law

When you use the tactic of treating someone with disdain, make sure you're not creating feelings that will smolder until your opponent can exact revenge. When you disdain someone publicly, you may need to keep an eye on them to make sure they go away without causing further problems.

Exercise: Let It Be

When faced with a minor problem or annoyance, sometimes the best response is to ignore it. But people tend to jump in and try to fix it, which can make matters worse.

Think of a small, irritating problem that got worse when you tried to fix it. How did it play out? How did you end up feeling?

What would have happened if you'd done nothing?

What are some problems currently bothering you that might resolve themselves if you ignore them?

Law 37: Put on a Show

The Law of Power: In addition to words, use visuals and symbols to underscore your power. What people see makes a greater impression on them than what they hear. Put on a show using stunning visuals and powerful symbols that connect with people emotionally. Create a feast for the eyes and no one will notice what you're really doing.

Principles

Our visual sense is the one we depend on the most. What we see makes a greater impression than what we hear. Images, which bypass rational thought, create powerful emotional associations, and they rarely anger or offend people the way misheard or misinterpreted words can.

Associating yourself with images and symbols will underscore and enhance your power. **Use symbols to rally, excite, and unify your followers.** Find a symbol to represent your cause, the more emotional the association the better. You can add to the emotional power by incorporating old, revered symbols in new ways.

For example, during the rebellion against the French crown in 1648, loyalists to the king ridiculed the rebels, comparing them to slingshots used by small boys. A cardinal turned the mocking term into a symbol, which the rebels wore and incorporated into a rallying cry.

Incorporate and organize your images and symbols into a show or performance that inspires awe and distracts people from their mundane lives. Always pay attention to how you arrange things visually — put the most important images at the center; use color as well.

Create a compelling spectacle and words won't be necessary.

Putting the Law to Work

Diane de Poitiers, who was the mistress of King Henry II of France, kept him enthralled with her from his teens until he died, when she was in her sixties. She kept his attention in part by creating arresting visuals and symbols representing herself and their relationship.

For instance, she created a graphic depicting their relationship with their initials intertwined. She incorporated it into all aspects of the design of her castle, and he used it on his robes and on public monuments and churches. Also, Diane associated herself with the goddess Diana, rooting their relationship in powerful mythology. Images of Diana as a goddess were the motif at her castle and began appearing elsewhere as well. Poets wrote verses in her honor. Henry essentially worshipped her, making her a duchess and sharing his wealth.

Set yourself apart by associating with a powerful image, symbol, or figure of the past. You'll seem larger than life and keep your audience enthralled.

Exceptions to the Law

There's no downside to creating and using symbols to enhance your power.

Law 38: Go Along to Get Along

The Law of Power: If you make a show of being different, flaunting unconventional ideas and behavior, people will think you look down on them, and will retaliate against you for making them feel inferior. It's better to blend in; share your real views only with close friends and like-minded people.

Principles

It's impossible to speak absolutely freely. We learn at a young age to hide our thoughts so we don't offend, and to tell sensitive and insecure people what they want to hear. Inwardly, we think and believe what we want, but outwardly we try to be inoffensive.

However, some people chafe against such restraints, and aim to prove the superiority of their unconventional beliefs. **They mostly offend rather than convincing anyone** because people don't easily reject their values, which have an emotional component.

Most unconventional people learn to blend in with others and to share their differing views only with like-minded people. Appearances are what counts — when you look like others, they assume you believe as they do and they leave you alone.

We have many orthodoxies today that we're expected to adhere to, from which deviating is frowned on. For instance, when Jonas Salk discovered the polio vaccine he broke scientific protocol and publicly announced it before allowing vetting by the scientific community. Thereafter, scientists shunned him.

Powerful people, however, know the value of seeming to be all things to all people. You wear many different masks to avoid problems and get others to do what you want. When you let people think you believe as they do, they're flattered and let down their guard.

Putting the Law to Work

A writer named Campanella was imprisoned and tortured during the Spanish Inquisition for repeatedly expressing his atheist beliefs. While most people believed Catholic dogma or at least appeared to go along with it, Campanella couldn't restrain himself, and he paid for it. However, while in prison he came up with a new strategy of appearing to comply while still making his point.

First, to save his life, he feigned madness, and his death sentence was commuted to life in prison. Then he wrote a book espousing ideas that were the opposite of what he'd previously expressed. He was released and wrote another book, in which he presented the Catholic argument against the views of atheists and other free-thinkers. But in the process he had to explain the heretical views. In so doing, he gave the new ideas more exposure and to many people they seemed compelling compared to the church's standard, dull response.

It was unsettling to Catholic readers but they couldn't call it heretical because he'd used their own arguments. The lesson he learned was that appearing to fit in while expressing your ideas in a kind of code for a selected audience is a more useful approach than martyrdom.

Exceptions to the Law

Standing out instead of blending in can be useful if you're already powerful. It's a sign of your power and your distance from other people. President Lyndon Johnson sometimes held meetings while sitting on the toilet — thereby demonstrating that he didn't need to abide by social codes. Go too far and people might turn on you, however.

Society tolerates a few people who flaunt their differences because they make things more exciting, but you're most likely to achieve your objectives if you learn to blend in.

Law 39: Rattle Your Opponents

The Law of Power: Always stay calm and objective. When you get angry, you've lost control. But if you can make your enemies angry, you gain an advantage. Rattle your enemies to put them off balance.

Principles

When someone gets irrationally angry at you, realize two things:

- They will end up looking foolish, and will lose others' respect because they've lost control. Their behavior is a sign of helplessness.
- Their anger isn't personal— it mostly stems from past experiences. Rather than a personal grudge, it's an effort to punish or control you, which you can and should counter.

Instead of getting caught up in someone's emotions, think calmly about how to use them.

You may want to deliberately trigger someone, either to demonstrate their instability to all, or to bait them to behave foolishly. There are numerous ways to do this, including mocking your opponent's manhood, or injuring their pride or vanity. When they react, you can win easily.

Putting the Law to Work

Losing control of your emotions may be the beginning of the end for you. Napoleon's decline began when he exploded at a meeting with his ministers over Talleyrand's attempts to undermine him. Talleyrand remained calm while Napoleon became increasingly unhinged. His meltdown turned out to be emblematic of the way his regime was beginning to unravel, and others saw it that way.

Losing your temper in an unhinged way may cause people to fear you at first, but fear soon gives way to disrespect and doubts about your stability. When you publicly show anger or frustration, you're showing powerlessness, like a child having a tantrum. When you expose weakness in this way, you're headed for a fall.

Ethiopian leader Haile Selassie used an opponent's emotions to lure him into a trap. Selassie knew his opponent Gusga was plotting to oust him. To get control of the situation, Selassie insulted and angered Gusga to flush him into the open. Gusga marched on the capital as expected, but Selassie had persuaded many of his soldiers to defect, and Selassie defeated him. If you can control your emotions while pushing others so that they lose control, you'll have the upper hand.

Exceptions to the Law

Before deliberately triggering someone, make sure you won't be creating a situation you can't control, or that will end badly for you.

Occasionally, a concocted show of anger can benefit you, to bring someone into line. But if you use the technique too often, it will lose its effect.

Law 40: Use Money As a Tool

The Law of Power: Use money and generosity strategically to achieve your goals. Remember that everything has a price, and don't accept "free gifts." But use the desire for a "free lunch" to deceive others. Use gifts to build a reputation of generosity, which creates an aura of power, and also to obligate people to you.

Principles

Money is a tool of power — use it creatively and strategically to enhance your reputation and power. Or, use the psychology of how people behave around money to implement scams.

When someone gives you something for free, you're then obligated to them. You need to guard your independence, but you can use the tactic with others.

When you give a gift, you put the recipient under obligation. You also disarm the person so she's less likely to see what you're really up to. You enhance your reputation — everyone likes a generous person — and build allies, which furthers your quest for power.

There are several personality types who don't understand how to use money to enhance power. Don't fall into these patterns. Further, when you encounter these types, use their weakness to your advantage:

- **Driven by greed:** People who are driven by greed see only balance sheets. They view others as hindrances or pawns in their quest for money. They're isolated because their coldness alienates others. Their focus on numbers and failure to understand psychology makes them easy to deceive.
- **Obsessed with bargains:** These people waste time, energy, and even money, searching for the best price on everything, no matter how small the savings. When they do buy something, they worry about whether they could have gotten it somewhere else for less. Their bargains end up being costly when they turn out to be poorly made and need replacement. Their attitude is catching — when you're around them you start feeling you're a sucker and paid too much for something. Just remember that bargains have hidden costs.
- **Hardball player:** They play games with money to demonstrate their power, for instance by making you wait for money they owe you, haggling endlessly, or charging exorbitant interest. They enjoy torturing others over money.
- **Overly generous:** Generosity should be intentional, for a specific purpose. However, some people give money and gifts indiscriminately because they want to be admired or loved. But when you give to everyone, no one feels special. Such people are easy to swindle because they're driven by strong emotional needs.

Putting the Law to Work

Here are some examples and lessons in the use of money:

- Spain nearly came to financial ruin over the pursuit of gold. Untold money was spent on failed explorations for gold and riches in South America, particularly the futile search for El Dorado. Cities emptied and declined as men joined the search for supposedly easy riches. It was all that people could think and talk about. People lose control and become irrational at the prospect of easy money. Never let greed distract you. Stay focused on power — not money — and on the things you need to build power: self-discipline, goodwill, allies, respect, etc. As a

result, money will come.

- The Duchess of Marlborough was infamous for using money to play petty power games. For over twenty years, she complained about the costs, ranted, and refused to pay the architect and workers who were building the magnificent Blenheim palace. For being cruel and petty, she lost respect and social standing, and ironically wasted vast sums of money. Rather than trying to use money to demonstrate power by nickel-and-diming people, it's better to enhance your reputation (which pays dividends) by being generous.
- Baron James Rothschild was a Jew and German who needed social acceptance to build his wealth and power as a banker and outsider in Paris in the 1820s. So he used money, not to give gifts or bribe people, which would have been viewed as vulgar, but to win people's hearts. He spent huge sums of money entertaining the upper classes and showcasing France's culture. For instance, he hired the best French architects to design gardens and a ballroom for his parties; and a celebrated chef to prepare the best food. His parties became famous and his strategic spending won him the acceptance he sought.

Exceptions to the Law

As a power player, you understand that it's impossible to get something for nothing; everything has a price. But you can use others' desire for a "free lunch" or easy money to deceive and fleece them. Blinded by greed, they won't see the con.

Law 41: Chart Your Own Course

The Law of Power: If you succeed a great person or famous parent, find or create your own space to fill. Sharply separate and distance yourself from the past. Create your own identity, style, and symbols, and follow your own course. Beware of slipping back into the past.

Principles

Many successors struggle when they have to succeed a great leader or famous parent. It's difficult because the predecessor succeeded by building power from scratch. The successor is starting with a fait accompli, which is difficult to improve on.

There's also outside pressure on the successor to continue on the same course, since it's working, rather than break with tradition and precedent. The successor may be afraid to lose his inheritance as well, and therefore hesitates to change things.

But power requires you to appear larger than other people. When you're stuck in a great predecessor's shadow, it's difficult to project even more greatness. But if you find yourself in this situation, there are ways to overcome it.

You need the ability to fill a vacuum, or to occupy and dominate a new space. **When you succeed a great leader, you must find or create your own space to fill.**

Start creating your space by separating yourself from your predecessor:

- **"Kill" the past and your predecessor by disparaging them.** Contrast young with old, the new era against the old era. When John F. Kennedy was elected president, he did everything he could to distinguish himself from Dwight Eisenhower and the fifties era, by making the old look stodgy and the new vigorous and exciting. For instance, instead of playing golf, which was associated with Eisenhower and an older generation, Kennedy played football on the White House lawn.
- **Use symbolism to physically distance yourself.** King Louis XIV built his own palace, Versailles, which was unlike any that had come before. He established his own rituals, rejecting those of the past.
- **Burn the instruction manuals:** When General Douglas MacArthur took charge of American forces in the Philippines in World War II, an aide gave him a book of instructions from predecessors. MacArthur told him to burn the manual and any copies; he would make his own decisions in his own way. Similarly, you should reject precedent, and learn to respond to circumstances, which will be different from those of the past.
- **Most importantly, look for vacuums to fill.** While there may not be physical territory or kingdoms to conquer, there are always problems and challenges that have defied solution. Act boldly — most people are afraid to break sharply with tradition, but they respect and admire those who do.

On a cautionary note, **beware of becoming more like your predecessor over time**, as children get more like their parents as they age. Continually recreate yourself, and fill new voids. Don't rest on your laurels or slip into the ways of the past.

Putting the Law to Work

Alexander the Great, who succeeded his father, King Philip of Macedonia, set out to be completely different. Philip created an era of strength and prosperity, but Alexander despised his domineering stance toward his son, as well as his cautious and prudent style of ruling, and pleasure-seeking lifestyle.

When he became king, Alexander was bold and reckless, strengthening his hold throughout Greece, conquering Persia and expanding into India. On a march into Persia, he came upon a chariot tied to a tree with a so-called Gordian knot that no one had been able to untie. He slashed it with his sword, demonstrating he would do things his own way.

He didn't stop with conquering Persia — he didn't want past triumphs to surpass the present, so he never rested on his laurels.

Exceptions to the Law

There are times when it pays to do something the way it was done in the past. Don't reject something useful out of spite; you'll look childish. Emulate what was done well, but beware of getting stuck.

Meanwhile, keep your eye on potential future rivals, who are rising up in hopes of taking your place.

Law 42: Squelch the Troublemaker

The Law of Power: Trouble in a group often starts with a single individual who stirs the pot. You need to stop them before others succumb to their influence. Neutralize their influence by isolating or exposing them. Their followers will scatter.

Principles

In every group or organization, there are one or two people who like to stir the pot, or spread discontent. These troublemakers may operate overtly, subtly, or both. They may or may not be the group's leaders.

In any case, **their rumblings undermine a group's effectiveness and cooperative spirit** by stirring dissension and dissatisfaction and creating factions. Their dissatisfaction is like an infection that spreads quickly, if not caught and treated in the earliest stages.

Ancient Athens recognized the harm such people could do and typically banished them. To maintain your power and prevent your objectives from being derailed, you also need to identify and nip troublemakers in the bud.

When you sense trouble brewing, **look for the disgruntled individual that people seem to be listening to and quoting.** Troublemakers are typically overbearing and they're complainers. To stop them you need to isolate them immediately.

Sometimes people in a group don't realize the effect a troublemaker is having — some pot stirrers like to work quietly and even disguise their actions. Sometimes you can diminish the effect just by pointing out the person and what she is doing.

More likely, however, you'll need to **separate the troublemaker from her audience or power base.** The overt troublemakers are people with charisma. You can't reform or educate them, and if you attack them they'll work underground to get revenge on you. Separate them from the group before they become the eye of a storm.

Use whatever means of isolation works: Physical (if they work for you, reassign or move them, for instance), political, or psychological (turn others against them; find a way to co-opt them or use leverage).

Lure or send the person away at a critical moment, using your skills of distraction and deception. Con artists have always understood that steering someone from their usual social context to a less familiar environment makes them vulnerable to you, and increases your power to influence them.

Putting the Law to Work

Athens had a way of getting rid of antisocial people for behavior such as a holier-than-thou attitude, scheming, being overly ambitious and undermining leaders, and asserting superiority over others.

The city held an annual event in which citizens gathered and voted on the person they wanted to banish for 10 years, by writing the name on a piece of earthenware. The event was cathartic and became a kind festival.

For example, they banished:

- Aristides, a general, for arrogance, superiority, and scorn for the common people.
- Themistocles, another general, for being overbearing and constantly talking about his military victories, as if the city wouldn't have survived without him.
- Hyperbolus, for slander and for stirring up anger in hopes of getting two political leaders ostracized.

To the Athenians, who were surrounded by enemies, their democracy was the basis of their power and these behaviors threatened it. Making one person suffer in order to restore peace for everyone was a fair price to pay.

Exceptions to the Law

When you isolate your enemy, make sure he can't come back to exact revenge.

Andrew Johnson, Lincoln's successor, isolated Ulysses S. Grant, but this enraged Grant, who generated support among Republicans and went on to become the next president. Sometimes it's better to keep people where you can watch them, while you undercut their support.

Law 43: Win Hearts and Minds

The Law of Power: Win others' hearts and minds, and you'll have them eating out of your hand. Play on their emotions and weaknesses, appeal to their self-interest and they'll willingly do what you want. Build broad support — someday you'll need it. Neglect this at your peril.

Principles

Making people do what you want by force may work in the short term, but it isn't a sustainable long-term strategy because it generates resistance. Winning their hearts and minds — so they bend to your will voluntarily — is more effective and less costly.

The key to winning hearts and minds is to use people's emotions and weaknesses. Understand their individual psychology and their emotional responses. Target strong emotions such as hate, envy, and love. Play on what they're afraid of and what's dear to them. When you connect with their emotions, they're more susceptible to your control. When he gave speeches, Mao always appealed to the crowd's emotions and spoke simply, reflecting their feelings.

The best way to stir emotions is by doing the opposite of what people expect, for instance by acting with kindness when your opponents expect payback from you. You can also win hearts by promising security, allaying fears, or relieving despair.

Use symbolic gestures to generate goodwill, for instance to show that you suffer as well, even if only in a minor way compared to their suffering. To find out what likes and dislikes motivate them, get them to open up. Use these as leverage.

Another way to connect effectively with people is by appealing to their self-interest, which is the strongest motivator. Show them how what you want will benefit them. People are more likely to support a cause that aligns with their self-interest.

Besides securing emotional commitment, work to build broad support including allies at all levels. Someday you'll need them.

Putting the Law to Work

French Queen Marie Antoinette lost her head because she never bothered to win her subjects' hearts and minds, and in fact insulted them. She had been pampered and indulged as a child, and came to believe that people owed her affection and admiration, without any love or consideration from her in return.

She lived lavishly and incurred massive debt to create a private Garden of Eden at Versailles, while the economy was deteriorating. She never toured the country to meet people or build support, and didn't receive public visitors.

As a result she became the focus of growing public resentment. When the French revolution began in 1793, she remained unconcerned, expecting it to dissipate. Even when people marched on Versailles and the royals were forced to move out, she didn't make any effort to communicate.

Marie-Antoinette went to her death unrepentant, and remains legendary today for her complete

indifference to others' concerns.

Exceptions to the Law

There aren't any exceptions to the need to win hearts and minds.

Law 44: Mirror Others' Emotions

The Law of Power: Use the mirroring technique to control people. When you mirror opponents' actions, doing as they do, they can't figure out your strategy. Seduce people by mirroring their emotions and interests; create the illusion that you share their values. Few can resist when you reflect their deepest needs and desires.

Principles

When you pass by a mirror and suddenly see yourself, it has a startling and powerful effect. You can create a similarly powerful effect on others when you use the psychological technique of mirroring.

You can neutralize an opponents' impact by doing what they do. Repeating their actions or words frustrates and distracts them from their objectives. Throwing their words or actions back at them can also disguise what you're up to and give you time to maneuver. It works well in military and political campaigns.

But more commonly, you'll want to **use mirroring psychologically to charm, manipulate, and deceive.** Most people try to dominate interactions with their opinions, feelings and experiences, and that's what others expect. When you instead mirror or reflect back (and appear to share) their deepest thoughts and feelings, they're disarmed.

Find out what sets the other person apart and reflect it; fuel their fantasies. Watch their expressions and gestures for indications of their emotions; consider their clothing and style, whom they associate with, and their habits.

Surprise them with your deep understanding of their psyche and they'll be so touched and grateful that they become putty in your hands.

Putting the Law to Work

When she was 18, Marie Mancini, the plain-looking daughter of a baroness, plotted out and successfully implemented a campaign to become the future king Louis XIV's mistress.

Because she lacked the beauty of her sisters, she learned everything she could about Louis long before he became king: He disliked scheming and pettiness and from reading adventure stories and plays, he had a romantic nature, high ideals, and a desire for heroic feats and glory.

She read the same things he did, and talked with him about the great deeds of knights, instead of gossip or fashion. Besides mirroring his interests and emotions, she treated him as the heroic king he aspired to be.

He fell in love with her, and showered her with gifts and attention, even taking her along on his military campaigns so she could watch him in action from a position of safety. He promised to marry her but was pressured by elders to marry someone else. To the end of his life he never loved anyone as much as he loved Marie Mancini.

Exceptions to the Law

You may unwittingly find yourself in a situation that mirrors a past scenario that you're unaware of. People will expect you to behave the way someone else did in the past. You won't be able to live up to their expectations, and will suffer as a result. This is a bad place to be, so if you find people associating you with something or someone from the past, break the reflection or association as quickly as possible.

Don't overdo mirroring, or people will feel used.

Law 45: Enact Changes Slowly

The Law of Power: Everyone understands the need for change, but people are nonetheless creatures of habit. Too much change is unsettling and will spark backlash. Make a show of respecting the old way of doing things. Evoke revered history and cloak your changes in familiar rituals.

Principles

People understand the need for change conceptually, but are unsettled by change that seems drastic or chaotic, or that affects them personally. **We're creatures of habit and change upsets our routines and expectations.**

Some change provokes immediate resistance. **Too much change too quickly creates anxiety that will eventually boil over.** Every revolution, no matter how welcome at first, eventually sparks a strong backlash.

However, there are ways to make change more appealing and less threatening to people, and therefore more successful.

An effective approach is to employ a comforting deception: preach change, and even make changes behind the scenes, but **maintain the comforting appearance of familiar institutions and traditions.**

For instance, retain familiar titles and traditions, and even institutional structure. When the Romans transformed their government from a monarchy to a republic, they replaced the king with two consuls, but retained 12 advisors mirroring the old structure. They retained the practice of an annual sacrifice, but instead of having the king perform it, they created a new position for a "king of the sacrifice."

You can also ease fears by publicly asserting your support and reverence for the values of the past; **appear to be safeguarding tradition.**

Also, pay attention to the public mood; if your reform is ahead of its time and people aren't ready for it, they'll be anxious and misinterpret it. Slow down and work to make your changes seem less radical.

Never underestimate people's conservatism — it's deeply embedded, so you can't just yank people into the future with drastic changes. They'll rebel, and you'll be the scapegoat.

Anticipate a delayed reaction. People may be initially enthusiastic but their enthusiasm will fade; they feel empty and start yearning for the past again. You need to quickly create a new set of values to replace the old ones and quell anxieties. Create new rituals, which can be linked to the past.

Putting the Law to Work

After trying to force change and modernization on China with the failed Great Leap Forward, Mao Tse-tung learned to move more slowly in implementing communism and to make it less threatening. He used China's enormous attachment to the past to his advantage instead of fighting it.

Mao succeeded by associating his radical ideas with familiar, revered historical figures and events of the past. He referred to history in his writings and speeches. This had a legitimizing and comforting effect.

He portrayed himself as a hero like the warrior statesmen of Chinese tradition, making him seem powerful and larger than life. On the other hand, he associated his opponents with any past violence and unhappiness, suggesting they would bring a repeat.

Mao skillfully used history to lend weight and authority to himself and his campaign, while allaying fears.

Exceptions to the Law

During stagnant periods, people hunger for change rather than resisting it. So launch your reforms, but remain aware of the public mood and slow down if necessary. Also, be ready for eventual backlash.

Exercise: Implementing Change

People accept change in the abstract, but are unsettled by change that seems too drastic, or that affects them personally. You can make people more comfortable with change by making it seem less threatening.

Think of a situation in which you implemented change. What steps did you take, over what time period?

How did people react: Were they accepting or resistant?

How could you have made the change less stressful and more acceptable?

Law 46: Watch for Envy

The Law of Power: Your talents and achievements will generate envy. The envious will work quietly against you. To forestall or mitigate envy, admit to a flaw or weakness, emphasize the role of luck, or downplay your talents. Envy is extremely dangerous — recognize it and don't let it escalate.

Principles

Your success will arouse the envy of those around you, and can bring harm upon you, if you don't recognize the signs and stop it before it grows into a destructive force.

With little exception, **your talent, accomplishment, and public admiration will generate unease in others**. The reason is that most people have an inflated sense of self-worth. Your success punctures their balloon — they're not as talented or as smart as they thought. They may even be mediocre. This stirs up envy and feelings of inferiority.

People may disguise their envy by criticizing you (for instance by saying you got where you are by taking advantage of others), or they'll praise you excessively. Others will be indirect, working quietly and persistently to undermine you. Signs of envy include sarcastic remarks or open expression of resentment.

The people you should fear the most are those close to you — the family, friends, peers, and acquaintances you've outshone.

Although you may not recognize that someone's jealousy is building, you'll eventually feel the brunt of it — unless you learn to prevent or de-escalate it.

Often your obliviousness and your own actions will stir up envy. By being aware of your actions and tendencies, you can mitigate it.

Here are two of the ways people help create envy:

- When something good happens to them, they trumpet it. They enjoy making others feel inferior
- Those with great natural talent show it off; rather than charming people, it makes them hate you. It's wiser to downplay your outstanding qualities, by acknowledging a small flaw or weakness.

It's better to **avoid creating envy in the first place**. Following are some pitfalls to watch for:

- When you're the beneficiary of something that seems to come out of nowhere, downplay your merit and emphasize the role of luck. However, don't express a false sincerity that others can see through — you don't gain anything by alienating your peers; you need them as part of your power base.
- Attaining political power creates envy. Mitigate it by seeming to be unambitious, or make your position seem less attractive by emphasizing the sacrifices it requires.
- Avoid the urge to help or do favors for those who envy you — it will come across as condescending.
- Be aware that colleagues and peers, accustomed to a semblance of equality, are especially susceptible to envy.

Finally, you may feel envy yourself for more successful people. This will cause you to act emotionally and think less logically. To counter this, accept that others will surpass your achievements and talent, and that you'll envy them to some degree. Use that feeling to push yourself harder to surpass them or reach your

own goals.

Putting the Law to Work

Here are some examples of dealing with envy, both effectively and ineffectively.

- The painter J.M.W. Turner's great skill with color generated envy among fellow artists, to the point that some wouldn't allow their paintings to be hung next to his in galleries, because they looked bad by comparison. Turner realized he'd soon have difficulty finding places to show his work, so he temporarily toned down some of his colors using soot.
- To avoid stirring up envy, George Washington at first refused high positions that were offered: Commander in Chief of the American army, and the presidency. By doing so, he increased his popularity.
- Sir Walter Raleigh eventually was executed, in part due to the jealousy he constantly inspired and made no attempt to mitigate. He was one of the most brilliant men of his time — a sea captain, writer, entrepreneur, scientist, and a charming, attractive courtier under Queen Elizabeth — but failed to recognize his many implacable enemies.
- In the 1950s, the writers and lovers Joe Orton and Kenneth Halliwell started their careers together, but while Orton achieved success and acclaim for his plays, Halliwell failed. Orton tried to boost his friend's career but ended up insulting him. Halliwell seethed for years, and finally ended up murdering Orton and then taking his own life.

Exceptions to the Law

When you're in a position of power, and you can't do anything to mitigate someone's envy, be aggressive. Show disdain for those who envy you. Instead of hiding your accomplishments, display them. Your opponent's self-imposed torment will be your revenge.

Exercise: Dealing With Envy

When someone becomes jealous of you, they often work quietly against you and can cause a lot of harm before you realize it. It's important to watch for signs and take steps to minimize envy.

Think of an achievement or honor you received. How did the people around you react? Did anyone's behavior suggest envy? How?

How did you react to the recognition? Did this have an affect on how people behaved?

How could you have reacted differently? What effect would it have had?

Law 47: Know When to Stop

The Law of Power: The moment of victory is a moment of danger because you're tempted to press your luck. Don't let emotions push you past your goal. Stop, consolidate your gains, and prepare for new, different circumstances.

Principles

Once you've achieved a victory there's a great — and dangerous — temptation to continue pressing forward. The ability to resist the temptation, stop, and consolidate your gains distinguishes the powerful from the wannabes.

The danger inherent in victory is this: Up until the point of victory you've relied on a strategy, which has given you the ability to control what comes next. However, **victory and the elation it generates undermine your control** for two reasons:

- They motivate you to press forward beyond your strategy. This may no longer be the best direction for you because your success depended on a set of circumstances that won't be duplicated going forward.
- **Success makes you emotional and you feel invincible.** You're motivated to make reckless moves that undercut or erase your victory. A complicating factor is that people below you, feeling the same emotions, often press you to go beyond your mark and risk losing what you've gained.

While victory is intoxicating, you need to be guided by reason, not emotion. The moment of victory is the point to stop and think. Don't be deluded into believing your success was a result of your brilliance alone — luck and one-time circumstances played a role, and they're ever-changing.

Your fortunes will turn — your victory is the point at which to open your eyes and begin preparing. You need a new strategy that keeps you in control.

Putting the Law to Work

In France during the 1700s, being the king's mistress tended to be short-lived. As soon as she achieved the position, the mistress immediately began trying to extend her reign by escalating many of the tactics that got her there — for instance, ruthlessness toward potential challengers, vindictiveness, manipulation, and scheming. These tactics might work for a short time but they created an eventual backlash and her undoing.

However, Madame de Pompadour, King Louis XV's mistress, took a different approach. After achieving her goal with a long-planned and methodically executed strategy, she stopped and employed a new strategy.

Rather than pressing forward to attack and eliminate potential rivals, she consolidated her power base, won support and new allies (including the queen), and remained alert to changing circumstances and addressed them creatively.

Madame de Pompadour succeeded where others failed because she stopped when she achieved victory, and devised a new strategy for new circumstances. She remained mistress for an

unprecedented twenty years.

Exceptions to the Law

At the moment of victory, make sure you don't stop before you've crushed your enemy. Once that's done, however, don't create more enemies by overreaching.

Also, don't be suckered into rash action by a belief in momentum, which is overrated. Fear of losing momentum is an emotional reaction, which could drive you to repeat tactics that won't work a second time rather than acting rationally and strategically.

Law 48: Be Elusive

The Law of Power: Be flexible, fluid, and unpredictable — formless — so your opponents can't get a fix on you and figure out how to respond. When you look and behave in conventional ways that your enemy can grasp, you're easy to attack. Change constantly to suit ever-changing circumstances and needs.

Principles

Learn to be formless — that is, flexible, fluid, and unpredictable — and your opponents won't be able to get a handle on you. Formlessness is strategic. It gives you room to maneuver, create surprises, and bewilder your opponent. It's a tool that increases your power. **Don't be locked into a single system, process, strategy, or approach. Change to suit your needs and circumstances.**

Guerrilla warfare is formless (without a clear or definite shape or structure). T.E. Lawrence, a British officer and diplomat, put formlessness into practice as a guerrilla strategy during the Arab Revolt against the Ottoman Empire in World War I. While working with the Arabs fighting the Turks, he made the Arabs fade into the desert, never presenting a target. The Turks wasted enormous energy trying to find them, but the Arabs never revealed themselves until they attacked. Their indirection and elusiveness prevailed.

Formlessness is useful in many arenas other than war, as it frustrates your opponents by giving them nothing solid to attack. When you're not weighed down by a system and inflexible ways of doing things, you're able to move fast, sense change, and adapt to it.

When in conflict with someone stronger and more rigid, be formless and adaptable — then catch them off guard.

In interactions with others, people use your visible emotions to figure you out and manipulate you. For instance, when you respond to something defensively, your opponent knows he's hit a nerve and presses his attack. In contrast, a bland facial expression (formlessness) confuses scheming opponents; they don't know how to read you.

As a German Jew in the unfriendly culture of Paris, banker James Rothschild never took any attack personally, or showed frustration or hurt. By projecting a calm, unreadable demeanor, he successfully adapted and grew his business in the changing political climates of multiple monarchies.

The Japanese accepted foreigners graciously for centuries, without harm to their culture. They appeared on the surface to adopt some foreign styles and customs, but underneath, their culture continued to thrive. Had they been rigid and tried to fight foreign influences, they would have suffered. But they adopted a kind of formlessness, appearing to accept other cultures, thus giving the foreigners nothing to fight.

When you're unreadable and impossible to pin down, you keep initiative on your side while your opponent must constantly react to you.

Putting the Law to Work

Protective armor only protects to a point. Those who depend on such heavy, inflexible defenses, ultimately lose to nimble, unencumbered, formless opponents.

Ancient Sparta learned this lesson. It had created a culture focused on one thing: an invincible

infantry. Sparta trained boys from age seven to be soldiers. The entire culture and economy focused on building and supporting the military; there was no money or art, and no skills other than fighting were taught. For a while, it was the most powerful infantry in the world.

But after a 27-year war in which Sparta conquered Athens, Sparta's world changed. Its rigid, militaristic system ultimately couldn't withstand the winds of cultural change it unleashed with its victory. Athenian wealth and culture overwhelmed and broke down Spartan discipline. Spartan governors sent to Athenian lands quickly became corrupt.

Thirty years after defeating Athens, a much weaker Sparta went to war against Thebes and lost. Soon thereafter, it collapsed. Its lack of adaptability spelled doom.

Exceptions to the Law

While operating in as flexible and formless a way as possible, there's a time when you need to concentrate your power and strike: at the point when you choose to engage your opponent. But once you've defeated him, resume your flexibility and elusiveness.