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The Secret Language of Birthdays
with Gary Goldschneider

The Secret Language of Relationships
with Gary Goldschneider

Play with Your Food
with Saxton Freymann

THE 48 LAWS OF
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R
CONCISE EDITION

ROBERT GREENE

A JOOST ELFFERS BOOK

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PROFILE BOOKS

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This concise edition published in Great Britain in 2002 by
Profile Books

29 Cloth Fair
London

EC1A 7JQ

www.profilebooks.com

Derived from *The 48 Laws of Power*, which was first published in Great Britain in 1998 by Profile Books and was first published in the United States in 1998 by Viking, a division of Penguin Putnam Inc.

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A portion of this work first appeared in *The Utne Reader*

Typeset in Baskerville by MacGuru Ltd

info@macguru.org.uk

Printed and bound in Italy by

L.E.G.O. Spa - Lavis (TN)

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A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN-10: 1 86197 404 3

ISBN-13: 978 1 86197 404 4



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ASSUME FORMLESSNESS

Today we face a peculiarly similar paradox to that of the courtier: Everything must appear civilized, decent, democratic, and fair. But if we play by those rules too strictly, if we take them too literally, we are crushed by those around us who are not so foolish. As the great Renaissance diplomat and courtier Niccolò Machiavelli wrote, “Any man who tries to be good all the time is bound to come to ruin among the great number who are not good.”

The court imagined itself the pinnacle of refinement, but underneath its glittering surface a cauldron of dark emotions – greed, envy, lust, hatred – boiled and simmered. Our world today similarly imagines itself the pinnacle of fairness, yet the same ugly emotions still stir within us, as they have forever. The game is the same. Outwardly, you must seem to respect the niceties, but inwardly, unless you are a fool, you learn quickly to be prudent, and to do as Napoleon advised: Place your iron hand inside a velvet glove. If, like the courtier of times gone by, you can master the arts of indirection, learning to seduce, charm, deceive, and subtly outmaneuver your opponents, you will attain the heights of power. You will be able to make people bend to your will without their realizing what you have done. And if they do not realize what you have done, they will neither resent nor resist you.

Consider *The 48 Laws of Power* a kind of handbook on the arts of indirection. By studying the laws in this book, you will understand power and its properties. And by putting them into practice, you will be able to thrive in the modern world, appearing the paragon of decency while being the consummate manipulator.

LAW
 1

NEVER OUTSHINE
 THE MASTER

JUDGMENT

Always make those above you feel comfortably superior. In your desire to please and impress them, do not go too far in displaying your talents or you might accomplish the opposite – inspire fear and insecurity. Make your masters appear more brilliant than they are and you will attain the heights of power.

Everyone has insecurities. When you show yourself in the world and display your talents, you naturally stir up all kinds of resentment, envy, and other manifestations of insecurity. This is to be expected. You cannot spend your life worrying about the petty feelings of others. With those above you, however, you must take a different approach: When it comes to power, outshining the master is perhaps the worst mistake of all.

Do not fool yourself into thinking that life has changed much since the days of Louis XIV and the Medicis. Those who attain high standing in life are like kings and queens: They want to feel secure in their positions, and superior to those around them in intelligence, wit, and charm. It is a deadly but common misperception to believe that by displaying and vaunting your gifts and talents, you are winning the master's affection. He may feign appreciation, but at his first opportunity he will replace you with someone less intelligent, less attractive, less threatening.

This Law involves two rules that you must realize. First, you can inadvertently outshine a master simply by being yourself. There are masters who are more insecure than others, monstrously insecure; you may naturally outshine them by your charm and grace. If you cannot help being charming, you must learn to avoid such monsters of vanity, or find a way to mute your good qualities when in their company.

Second, never imagine that because the master loves you, you can do anything you want. Entire books could be written about

favorites who fell out of favor by taking their status for granted, for daring to outshine.

Knowing the dangers of outshining your master, you can turn this Law to your advantage. First you must flatter and puff up your master. Overt flattery can be effective but has its limits; it is too direct and obvious, and looks bad to other courtiers. Discreet flattery is much more powerful. If you are more intelligent than your master, for example, seem the opposite: Make him appear more intelligent than you. Act naive. Make it seem that you need his expertise. Commit harmless mistakes that will not hurt you in the long run but will give you the chance to ask for his help. Masters adore such requests. A master who cannot bestow on you the gifts of his experience may direct rancor and ill will at you instead.

If your ideas are more creative than your master's, ascribe them to him, in as public a manner as possible. Make it clear that your advice is merely an echo of his advice.

If you are naturally more sociable and generous than your master, be careful not to be the cloud that blocks his radiance from others. He must appear as the sun around which everyone revolves, radiating power and brilliance, the center of attention.

In all of these cases it is not a weakness to disguise your strengths if in the end they lead to power. By letting others outshine you, you remain in control, instead of being a victim of their insecurity. This will all come in handy the day you decide to rise above your inferior status. If you can make your master shine even more in the eyes of others, then

Image: The Stars in the Sky. There can only be one sun at a time. Never obscure the sunlight, or rival the sun's brilliance, but rather fade into the sky and find ways to heighten the master star's intensity.

Authority: Avoid outshining the master. All superiority is odious, but the superiority of a subject over his prince is not only stupid, it is fatal. This is a lesson that the stars in the sky teach us – they may be related to the sun, and just as brilliant, but they never appear in her company. (Baltasar Gracian, 1601–1658)

LAW
2NEVER PUT TOO MUCH
TRUST IN FRIENDS,
LEARN HOW TO
USE ENEMIES

JUDGMENT

Be wary of friends – they will betray you more quickly, for they are easily aroused to envy. They also become spoiled and tyrannical. But hire a former enemy and he will be more loyal than a friend, because he has more to prove. In fact you have more to fear from friends than from enemies. If you have no enemies, find a way to make them.

King Hiero chanced upon a time, speaking with one of his enemies, to be told ... that he had stinking breath.

Whereupon the good king, being somewhat dismayed in himself, as soon as he returned home chided his wife, "How does it happen that you never told me of this problem?" The woman, being a simple, chaste, and harmless

dame, said, "Sir, I had thought all men's breath had smelled so."

Thus it is plain that faults that are evident to the senses, gross and corporal, or otherwise notorious to the world, we know by our enemies sooner than by our friends and familiars.

PLUTARCH,
C.46–120 A.D.

It is natural to want to employ your friends when you find yourself in times of need. The world is a harsh place, and your friends soften the harshness. Besides, you know them. Why depend on a stranger when you have a friend at hand?

The problem is that you often do not know your friends as well as you imagine. Friends often agree on things in order to avoid an argument. They cover up their unpleasant qualities so as to not offend each other. They laugh extra hard at each other's jokes. Since honesty rarely strengthens friendship, you may never know how a friend truly feels. Friends will say that they love your poetry, adore your music, envy your taste in clothes – maybe they mean it, often they do not.

When you decide to hire a friend, you gradually discover the qualities he or she has kept hidden. Strangely enough, it is your act of kindness that unbalances everything. People want to feel they deserve their good fortune. The receipt of a favor can become oppressive: It means you have been chosen because you are a friend, not necessarily because you are deserving. There is almost a touch of condescension in the act of hiring friends that secretly afflicts them.

The problem with using or hiring friends is that it will inevitably limit your power. The friend is rarely the one who is most able to help you; and in the end, skill and competence are far more important than friendly feelings.

All working situations require a kind of distance between people. You are trying to

work, not make friends; friendliness (real or false) only obscures that fact. The key to power, then, is the ability to judge who is best able to further your interests in all situations.

Your enemies, on the other hand, are an untapped gold mine that you must learn to exploit. When Talleyrand, Napoleon's Foreign Minister, decided in 1807 that his boss was leading France to ruin, and the time had come to turn against him, he understood the dangers of conspiring against the emperor; he needed a partner, a confederate – what friend could he trust in such a project? He chose Fouché, head of the secret police, his most hated enemy, a man who had even tried to have him assassinated. He knew that their former hatred would create an opportunity for an emotional reconciliation. He knew that Fouché would expect nothing from him, and in fact would work to prove that he was worthy of Talleyrand's choice; a person who has something to prove will move mountains for you. Finally he knew that his relationship with Fouché would be based on mutual self-interest, and would not be contaminated by personal feeling. The selection proved perfect; although the conspirators did not succeed in toppling Napoleon, the union of such powerful but unlikely partners generated much interest in the cause; opposition to the Emperor slowly began to spread. And from then on, Talleyrand and Fouché had a fruitful working relationship. Whenever you can, bury the hatchet with an enemy, and make a point of putting him in your service.

Never let the presence of enemies upset

Men are more ready to repay an injury than a benefit, because gratitude is a burden and revenge a pleasure.

TACITUS,
C.55–120 A.D.

or distress you – you are far better off with a declared opponent or two than not knowing where your real enemies lie. The man of power welcomes conflict, using enemies to enhance his reputation as a sure-footed fighter who can be relied upon in times of uncertainty.

Image: The Jaws of Ingratitude. Knowing what would happen if you put a finger in the mouth of a lion, you would stay clear of it. With friends you will have no such caution, and if you hire them, they will eat you alive with ingratitude.

Authority: Know how to use enemies for your own profit. You must learn to grab a sword not by its blade, which would cut you, but by the handle, which allows you to defend yourself. The wise man profits more from his enemies than a fool from his friends. (Baltasar Gracian, 1601–1658)

LAW 3

CONCEAL YOUR INTENTIONS

JUDGMENT

Keep people off balance and in the dark by never revealing the purpose behind your actions. If they have no clue what you are up to, they cannot prepare a defense. Guide them far enough down the wrong path, envelop them in enough smoke, and by the time they realize your intentions, it will be too late.

LEADERSHIP We know

Do not be held a cheat, even though it is impossible to live today without being one. Let your greatest cunning lie in covering up what looks like cunning.

BALTASAR
GRACIAN,
1601–1658

KEYS TO POWER
Most people are open books. They say what they feel, blurt out their opinions at every opportunity, and constantly reveal their plans and intentions. They do this for several reasons. First, it is easy and natural to always want to talk about one's feelings and plans for the future. It takes effort to control your tongue and monitor what you reveal. Second, many believe that by being honest and open they are winning people's hearts and showing their good nature. They are greatly deluded. Honesty is actually a blunt instrument, which bloodies more than it cuts. Your honesty is likely to offend people; it is much more prudent to tailor your words, telling people what they want to hear rather than the coarse and ugly truth of what you feel or think. More important, by being unabashedly open you make yourself so predictable and familiar that it is almost impossible to respect or fear you, and power will not accrue to a person who cannot inspire such emotions.

If you yearn for power, quickly lay honesty aside, and train yourself in the art of concealing your intentions. Master the art and you will always have the upper hand. Basic to an ability to conceal one's intentions is a simple truth about human nature: Our first instinct is to always trust appearances. We cannot go around doubting the reality of what we see and hear – constantly imagining that appearances concealed something else would exhaust and terrify us. This fact makes it relatively easy to conceal one's intentions. Simply dangle an object you seem to desire, a goal you seem to aim for, in front of peo-

ple's eyes and they will take the appearance for reality.

One way to hide your intentions is to talk endlessly about your desires and goals – just not your real ones. You will kill three birds with one stone: You appear friendly, open, and trusting; you conceal your intentions; and you send your rivals on time-consuming wild-goose chases.

Another powerful tool in throwing people off the scent is false sincerity. People easily mistake sincerity for honesty. Seeming to believe what you say gives your words great weight. This is how Iago deceived and destroyed Othello: Given the depth of his emotions, the apparent sincerity of his concerns about Desdemona's supposed infidelity, how could Othello distrust him?

If you believe that deceivers are colorful folk who mislead with elaborate lies and tall tales, you are greatly mistaken. The best deceivers utilize a bland and inconspicuous front that calls no attention to themselves. They know that extravagant words and gestures immediately raise suspicion. Instead, they envelop their targets in the familiar, the banal, the harmless.

Once you have lulled people's attention with the familiar, they will not notice the deception being perpetrated behind their backs. The grayer and more uniform the smoke in your smokescreen, the better it conceals your intentions.

The simplest form of smokescreen is facial expression. Behind a bland, unreadable exterior, all sorts of mayhem can be planned, without detection. This is a weapon that the most powerful men in history have

**SNEAK ACROSS
THE OCEAN IN
BROAD
DAYLIGHT**

This means to create a front that eventually becomes imbued with an atmosphere or impression of familiarity, within which the strategist may maneuver unseen while all eyes are trained to see obvious familiarities.

FROM "THE
THIRTY SIX
STRATEGIES,"
QUOTED IN
THOMAS
CLEARY, THE
JAPANESE ART OF
WAR, 1991