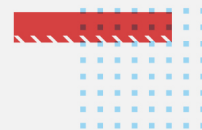


SUMMARY

12 RULES

FOR LIFE

JORDAN B. PETERSON



Summary of “12 Rules for Life” by Jordan B. Peterson

Written by Alyssa Burnette

Advertised as an antidote to chaos, 12 Rules for Life (2018) assesses humanity’s most pressing concerns through the ages and compiles their solutions in this handy self-help book.

Introduction	5
Get to the Top of the Pecking Order	6
Love Yourself as You Would Others	8
Choose Your Friends Wisely	10
Beat Your Own Personal Best	11
Raise a Kind and Responsible Child	13
Life Isn't Fair	15
Seek Sacrifice Over Instant Gratification	17
Stop Lying-- Even to Yourself!	19
Engage in Healthy Debate	20
Confront Complexity With Clarity	21
Avoid Suppressing Human Nature	22
Celebrate the Little Things	24
Final Summary	25



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Introduction

Wouldn't it be great if someone handed us a guide which explained very clearly what the rules of life were? Wouldn't that save us so much time and guesswork in trying to figure them out? Well, Jordan B. Peterson believes that a simple handbook of rules for life exists (at least now that he's written it!) and there are only twelve of them. This summary will take you through Peterson's rules for living your best life and teach you some unexpected facts along the way. Through the course of this summary, you'll learn:

- What lobsters can teach us about confidence
- What flowers have to do with finding the meaning of life and
- What skateboarders tell us about human nature

Get to the Top of the Pecking Order

You've heard of the phrase "the pecking order," right? It's commonly used in conversation, but do you know how it originated? It was coined by Norwegian zoologist Thorleif Schjelderup-Ebbe who was studying barnyard chickens during the 1920s and observed a clear hierarchy among the birds. When it was feeding time, he noticed that the strongest, healthiest chickens ate first and forced the sick or timid ones to wait until there were only scraps left. This, of course, ensured that the strong chickens retained their advantage while their counterparts only grew weaker.

The same is true with other species of animals as well. Lobsters, for example, exhibit similar behaviors whether they've been raised in captivity or in the world, proving that their sense of the "pecking order" is innate rather than a learned behavior. In fact, scientists have observed that lobsters instigate aggressive fights to compete for the best shelter spots and that this actually changes their biology. For example, winners possess a stronger ratio of serotonin octopamine while the ratio is reduced for lobsters who commonly lose. This means that the hormone advantage causes winning lobsters to stay stronger and healthier in addition to exhibiting a confident posture. By contrast, their counterparts become more timid and curl up out of fear.

And as you've probably observed, this behavior is frequently mimicked by humans as well. People who frequently "win" at life become emboldened by their winning streak and this causes them to pursue new challenges with confidence. In fact, that confidence is often what enables them to generate further success. Likewise, those who are in the grip of depression or feel that life is never in their favor are more risk-averse and tend to approach each situation as though they already know they will fail. This in turn becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy that reinforces their bleak worldview.

So, if you're trying to get ahead in life or break a toxic cycle, the best advice we can give you is, "Think like a lobster!" Strike that confident pose to tell people you're a winner and keep faking it till you make it!

Love Yourself as You Would Others

At first, that saying might sound like it's reversed. After all, isn't it supposed to say "love others as you would yourself?" But while that's definitely the common expression, it's reversed for our purposes because often, we're better at caring for others than we are for ourselves. That's because we're often hyper-aware of our own flaws and this awareness can lead to self-loathing. As we dwell on all the reasons we believe ourselves to be inferior, we become convinced that we're undeserving of self-care, kindness, or positivity. Because of this, we tend to focus all our positive energy on those we love, especially our partners and pets, and neglect to give ourselves the same kindness.

Eastern philosophy acknowledges these toxic patterns through its teaching on the duality of nature. The Yin-Yang symbol represents a dark side and a light side with the implication being that each side contains at least a hint of the other and neither can exist without the other. Eastern philosophy also posits that harmony can only be achieved by embracing both and seeking a healthy balance between the two. This balance can be attained by avoiding extremes as illustrated by an example of a parent and their child. Let's say that a parent wanted only the best for their child and was desperate to prevent them from experiencing anything "bad." However, if they were to go too far in shielding their child and thus prevent them from learning about the world or exploring new experiences, they would be hurtling toward an opposite extreme. Rather than being protected from negative influences, their child would simply feel stifled and might rebel in more extreme ways to regain a sense of freedom.

Neither of these extremes are healthy, so as you seek balance in your own life, remember not to go too far toward the dark side or to go overboard in an attempt at perfection. It's impossible to be perfect and chaos is unavoidable, so don't waste your time and energy fighting the inevitable. But it's also important that you don't focus only on the things that make you happy. While it might be more fun to pursue only the things that give

you warm, fuzzy feelings inside, it also won't cultivate personal growth. So, focus instead on what's best for you in the same way a loving parent would do what's best for their child. A child might not want to eat their vegetables or go to bed on time, but their parent ensures they do because it's healthy for them. So, in your adult life, identify your life's purpose and direction and then make healthy decisions that will help you attain that goal.

Choose Your Friends Wisely

Have you ever noticed how the things your friends say slip into your own vocabulary before you even notice it? It's no surprise because the more time you spend around people, the more they rub off on you. And while picking up your friends' speech patterns might be harmless, it might be time to get concerned if you notice that your friends' toxic habits and traits are influencing you as well. Because we often choose our friends through superficial criteria like common interests or a shared sense of humor, we don't always pause to consider exactly what sort of person our best buddy is, nor do we always reflect on the impact toxic habits can have on our personal development. But negative people and bad life decisions have a scary ability to drag successful people down and unfortunately, that effect can occur just as easily in the professional sphere as in your personal life.

For example, many managers and professors think that putting an underachiever on a group project with high performers will build that person up and encourage them to emulate their counterparts' best practices. However, studies have shown that the opposite effect is actually more likely and the successful teammates will be brought down by the negative influence. And that's why it's so vital that we surround ourselves with positive people who actively cultivate good habits in their lives. So, remember that exercising discernment isn't the same as being snobby or judgmental. Rather than dismissing prospective friends because of petty factors like their sense of style or socioeconomic differences, you're actively seeking people who will help you affect positive change.

And the beauty of such a partnership is that it's mutually beneficial! A good friend won't allow you to wallow in self-pity or engage in negative self-talk and they'll call you out when they see you developing toxic behaviors. And in turn, you'll do the same for them. Because you're both seeking to improve yourselves and the world around you, your friendship will literally help you both to become your most amazing selves. So, choose your friends wisely!

Beat Your Own Personal Best

How often do you catch yourself comparing your success in relation to that of others? Whether it's with the intent to build yourself up with statements like, "Well, at least I did better than she did!" or to discourage yourself with such comments as, "I'll never win that award like she did," this thought pattern is beyond toxic. That's because comparison is a killer of progress. As such, it's important to clarify here that comparison and self-criticism are not the same thing. Self-criticism is healthy (to a degree) because it invites you to realistically take stock of your flaws and identify areas where you can improve. This is what motivates us to work towards a brighter, more successful future.

But self-criticism takes an ugly turn when it's distorted by the lens of comparison. Because instead of asking ourselves what we can do to improve upon our own personal best, comparison causes us to measure ourselves by the standards of others. This worldview eliminates the moments of incremental growth that shape our journeys along the way, replacing our progress with a black and white filter of either success or failure. And if we find that we don't measure up to others, we determine that we've failed. But nothing could be further from the truth! Because if we were to take a step back and look at the big picture, we would be able to clearly see every part of our lives and acknowledge the small, personal milestones that define our growth as individuals. Sure, maybe your co-worker got that promotion instead of you-- but maybe, instead of prioritizing your career, you were developing your relationship with your family because that's what was right for you.

So, stop comparing yourself to others and instead judge yourself against your own prior accomplishments. Are you better today than you were yesterday? Do you want to be better tomorrow than you were today? If the answer is yes (and it should be!) then this is the secret to keeping yourself on the right track. Because when you compare your present to your past, you'll recognize that you're growing in the ways that are right for you at the

speed that suits you best. You'll be able to acknowledge those small moments of growth that are critical in the development of your best self and you'll be able to appreciate the unique facets of your life that make your progress specific to you.

So, evaluate your personal progress only by the standards that are applicable to you. And as you take stock of your development, think of yourself as a home inspector. Just like a home inspector, you'll analyze everything from bottom to top, determining whether a problem is a cosmetic fix or a structural flaw. Make a list of everything you find that needs to be improved and then attack it, renovating yourself the same way you would a house. The best part is that when you're so focused on becoming the person you need to be, you won't have time to think about comparing yourself to others!

Raise a Kind and Responsible Child

The right way to raise our children is one of life's biggest quandaries and it torments a lot of parents as they struggle to get it right. Because our children come into the world as blank slates, we're often paralyzed by the question of what to write on the people who will impact future generations. Niebauer suggests that the starting point for answering this question is to acknowledge innate human aggression. We all know how nasty kids can be to each other; pretty much everyone has a bullying story from at least one point in their childhood. So, what if our primary concern was simply raising kind kids? Niebauer asserts that cultivating kindness requires more than being a friend to your child; in fact, successful parenting demands taking the risk that there may be times when your child doesn't like you.

Although that might sting a little, take a moment to consider how this style of parenting would play out. After all, if you're focused on being your child's BFF, you're not focused on enforcing rules; rather, your job is to ensure that they're only ever happy and having fun. And that's not going to help your child become a well-adjusted or likable adult. So, while it may not be fun to set boundaries and enforce them, it might help to remember that you're doing your child a great service by teaching them life lessons early on. After all, isn't it better for them to learn responsibility from a loving parent than from a society that will teach them in far less gentle ways? So, if you're eager to help your child become the best they can be, here are Niebauer's top tips for successful parenting.

The first step is to avoid limiting the rules. While rules are absolutely necessary, if you have too many, your child will become frustrated and feel as though they're surrounded by obstacles. So, instead of controlling their lives down to the minutiae with rules like, "Your socks always have to match" or "You must always be in bed by this time," focus on practical, real-world rules like showing respect, being kind, and never using violence unless in self-defense. Remember that these rules will help shape your

child's core values, and honestly, would you rather have a child who's loving and respectful or a little monster whose socks always match?

The next rule is to always use the least amount of force necessary. So, make sure you set clear rules with equally clear consequences and take care to make the punishment fit the crime. Knowing which punishments will be most effective for helping your child learn the consequences of their actions also requires an in-depth knowledge of your child, so get to know the unique person they are and understand when only a verbal correction is necessary and when to take away video games for a week.

The third tip is to stand as a united front. If you are a two-parent household, make sure you let your child know that they can't pit you two against each other to get their own way. Likewise, be sure to support your partner, even when they make mistakes. Lovingly acknowledging mistakes and working on them together is the key to growth and a happy home.

Life Isn't Fair

“Why do bad things happen to good people?” is one of life’s age-old, anguished mysteries, and to this day, we still haven’t solved it. Often, that’s because it’s easier to blame injustice on others, whether that’s on a global or personal scale. However, that’s not the right response to the world’s suffering and neither is our temptation to give into despair. Although both these reactions are tempting, eschewing extreme responses is crucial to curating a healthy lifestyle. The acclaimed Russian author Leo Tolstoy didn’t see it that way, however. In fact, he suggested that the world’s injustice was so overwhelming to the human mind that only four responses could be valid. By his definition, these responses were comprised of childlike ignorance, hedonistic pleasure, suicide, or determining to struggle on despite it all.

But is that really all there is? Others certainly seem to have embraced this dismal worldview, as evidenced by multiple tragedies in which people decide to take other lives along with their own through mass school shootings. As of June 2016, statistics show that there had been over one thousand shootings in the United States over the preceding 1,260 days of the year. In each of these cases, the shooter had killed four or more people before ending their own lives. But while this is very bleak news indeed, it shouldn’t cause us to give up hope or conclude that humanity is inherently bad. That lesson comprises Peterson’s sixth rule for living, which invites people to take responsibility for their own lives and actions before condemning the world.

Drawing on the philosophy of Russian writer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Peterson asserts that it’s possible to reject the cruelty of life even when you’ve seen it first hand. That’s what Solzhenitsyn learned when, after a dedicated fight against the Nazis during World War II, he was imprisoned by his own state following the conclusion of the war. You might think life in a Russian gulag would be as bad as things could get, but for Solzhenitsyn, it

actually got worse; while serving his sentence, he also found out that he had cancer.

However, despite it all, Solzenhitsyn resisted the temptation to become angry and bitter. Preferring instead to focus on the good in humanity, he spent his time in prison seeking opportunities to contribute something meaningful in the time he had left. That mission included authoring the book *The Gulag Archipelago*, a scathing expose of Soviet internment camps. Not only did this book give Solzenhitsyn added purpose in life, it also played a vital role in demolishing public support for Stalin's brand of communism.

Seek Sacrifice Over Instant Gratification

Have you ever heard the story about the monkey who got his hand caught in the cookie jar? Although his hand could fit into the jar, it was too big for him to slip it back out while also holding a cookie. Because of this, the monkey was forced to choose between giving up and freeing himself from his predicament or holding onto his treat. The story ends with the monkey being captured by hunters, with the moral suggesting that greed is a trap which ensnares us. Chances are, you've probably witnessed similar behavior in human beings; the temptation to pursue what we want even when it will lead to negative consequences is a pretty universal human experience. But giving into that desire doesn't really make us better people, does it?

Unfortunately, this life lesson is connected to our previous chapter because unhealthy choices are often side-effects of despair. If we view the world as bleak and miserable, we naturally seek to alleviate our depression by pursuing any pleasure that will make our existence more bearable. This often leads to the justification that something can't be wrong if it makes us happy and that type of rationalization can be a gateway to very bad decisions. So, how can we combat this? Peterson suggests our best recourse is to pursue sacrifice over instant gratification. That's because sacrifice puts better things into the future through relinquishing instant pleasure in the present. And we sort of know that already; after all, we sacrifice things we'd rather be doing to go to work every day and earn a living.

But that type of sacrifice is still in the interest of personal gain because we do it to facilitate our own survival or save for the promise of a vacation later on. However, Peterson argues that true sacrifice-- the type we need to pursue in order to become kinder, happier, and more well-adjusted people-- is defined by the things we do for others. So, instead of pursuing selfish, instant pleasures, consider giving up a bit of your time to volunteer and make a difference in someone else's life. When you concentrate on the

good you can put into the world, you take a break from your negative worldview and allow yourself to be driven by positive influences.

You might find it helpful to think of the lotus flower as an inspiration. This plant starts its life at the bottom of a muddy lake and slowly rises to the top in small increments of growth until it bursts through the water to blossom in the sun. You can experience the same type of growth by prioritizing sacrifices for the good of others over instant gratification because selflessness not only reinvents your worldview, it makes you a better person.

Stop Lying-- Even to Yourself!

We all tend to lie to ourselves in one way or another. Whether it's by telling ourselves we're going to meet a certain goal without putting any work toward it or in deluding ourselves about our flaws, we're all liars. The Austrian psychologist Alfred Adler called this habit "life-lies" and defined them as "the things we say and do to get what we think we want." That distinction "what we think we want" is important because it acknowledges the fact that we often trick ourselves into craving things that ultimately aren't good for us. The same is true of our ability to convince ourselves that we already know everything we need to know.

This is an especially insidious lie because if we assume we already have the right tools for self-improvement, we lose all willingness to learn and grow. So, Peterson's eighth rule of living is: stop lying and tell yourself the truth! Hone your self-awareness and learn to recognize when you're telling yourself one of those life-lies. And then work to fix it! Realigning your goals and your personal truth can help you get your life back on track and be honest about your progress.

Engage in Healthy Debate

If you spend any time on social media at all, you know it can often be a hotbed of conflict and scathing criticism. People often take offense far too quickly and lash out by spewing hateful things at random strangers on the internet. This behavior has, regrettably, come to characterize the state of conversation in our society and it's an utter perversion of what healthy debate used to mean. Reclaiming your ability to engage in genuine conversation requires returning to the truths of ancient Greek philosophers who understood that respectfully challenging someone's idea is not the same thing as attacking that person.

Following this method taps into Peterson's ninth life lesson, which is to listen to what others have to say and assume that you have something to learn from them. Instead of treating your conversation as a competition, looking for opportunities to prove that you're right and the other person is wrong or looking for reasons to take offense, simply focus on listening. You might disagree with someone else, and that's okay; even in those cases, you should still approach all conversations by following the simple method of listening and then summarizing to recap what you heard out loud.

Rephrasing what you understood in your own words is a great way to communicate with the other person and ensure that you heard them correctly. It also shows that you care enough to truly hear and take in what they're saying.

Confront Complexity With Clarity

It's no secret that life can be confusing and our relationships with others can sometimes be even more complicated. However, we can alleviate part of that confusion by acknowledging that sometimes, the reason we fail to understand things is because we only pay attention to the details that interest or make sense to us. And while that's a natural human inclination-- after all, we're not physically capable of thinking of everything all the time!-- our inability to see the big picture can often make the world feel extra chaotic. That's why we need rule ten: use precise language.

Confronting the world's complexities with the clarity of precise language is invaluable because it helps us to break down complex concepts into simple, bite-sized nuggets of information that we can understand. By simplifying the situation through precise terminology, we can establish order in our lives. Whether the issue lies in our car breaking down or our bodies getting sick, by specifically articulating symptoms, we can start to take back control. The same is true of conflict in relationships. If your feelings are hurt or you're seeking to tackle an issue of your partner's, precise language can help you articulate the problem in a simple, honest manner.

Avoid Suppressing Human Nature

As today's society attempts to correct a culture of injustice, it can be difficult to know where the lines are. Our efforts to combat the ills of toxic masculinity sometimes leads people to stigmatize men and masculinity altogether. And that shouldn't be the answer! While it is extremely true that men have behaved deplorably for centuries and used their power to manipulate, stigmatize, and discriminate against women, people of color, and many other groups of people, we shouldn't unfairly direct our sense of outrage at all men. This worldview leads to destroying rather than fixing a problem or creating a solution and that shouldn't be the aim of social justice. Instead, we should concentrate on blending our differences to achieve a harmonious future.

Because many men, just like women, are aggressive or dominant by nature and those traits don't have to be a bad thing when they're channeled in the right direction. With encouragement and guidance on how to avoid becoming part of the problem, men can channel those personality traits into accomplishing amazing things that contribute to the greater good of society. And to illustrate this point, Peterson considers the example of skateboarders. He once noticed that, on the grounds of the University of Toronto campus, some young skateboarders were demonstrating amazing feats of agility and balance. However, because social norms often categorize skateboarding as undesirable or deviant, the city officials decided to ban skateboarding on their campus.

This policy failed to consider the teens' dedication, prowess, and willingness to embrace physical risk, and instead criminalized their behavior. Peterson argued that this was a mistake and suggested that the same is true of any instance where we vilify a certain group of people. Instead of holistically stigmatizing one group-- as illustrated by such statements as, "All men are trash"-- we should be willing to embrace new perspectives and talents that are different from our own. Ultimately, that is the worldview which should drive our society, because it invites us to make

rules that protect us without suppressing the good qualities that different people can bring to the table. That's why life lesson number eleven is: don't bother young skateboarders. So, whether it's skateboarders or men being persistent and aggressive, we shouldn't criminalize behavior unless it's actively hurting someone else, because then it really is part of the problem.

Celebrate the Little Things

We've already touched on the fact that life is often full of sorrow, but it's important to remember that life is also full of joy. The key difference is that where sadness often threatens to overwhelm us by smacking us in the face, we have to look a little harder to find joy. Peterson knows this firsthand because his daughter has battled severe arthritis since she was six years old. This degenerative disease has filled her childhood with extreme pain, frequent injections, and multiple invasive surgeries to replace entire joints. If you're reading this and feeling that life is unfair, you're right! There's nothing fair about an innocent child suffering so much pain. But Peterson asserts the darkness of these moments should only strengthen our motivation to seek out the good in life.

That's why rule number twelve is: make the best out of even the smallest joys that life offers. In his own experience, Peterson has discovered that relentless positivity is the only way to sustain yourself through even the darkest of times. Because although he is deeply affected by his daughter's suffering, he's grateful that after years of pain, she finally found a physiotherapist who was able to help her achieve greater mobility and develop a life with a lot more normalcy and a lot less pain. Although he knows she's not fully out of the woods yet and that more complications may arise down the road, he's grateful for the small mercies in her life and seeks to keep them both positive. To that end, he advises readers to always avoid getting bogged down by sadness and keep an eye out for even the littlest things that can make you happy, like petting a random fluffy cat you meet on a walk.

Final Summary

Life can be confusing and much of our time on earth is wasted in the pursuit of figuring out what we should be doing and how we can make the right decisions. However, Jordan Peterson hopes that we can learn from the questions and mistakes of the past and live our lives through 12 simple rules that can cut out the guesswork and make us happier.



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