

**ROBERT
GREENE**

*#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR
OF
THE 48 LAWS OF POWER*

**THE
DAILY
LAWS**

**366 MEDITATIONS
ON
POWER, SEDUCTION, MASTERY,
STRATEGY, AND HUMAN NATURE**

VIKING

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P R E F A C E

From the beginning of our existence as a species, we humans have depended on our connection to reality for our very survival and success. What this meant for our ancestors was that they had to become highly sensitive to their environment, detecting any changes in the weather, anticipating the presence of predators, discerning where opportunities for food might lie. They had to be aware, alert, and continually thinking about what the environment was telling them.

In such an atmosphere, with the pressures so immediate and the consequences of any inattention being life or death, the human brain evolved as an instrument for helping humans to not only detect dangers, but also to slowly gain control of a treacherous environment. The moment our ancestors began to turn inward and give in to wishes and fantasies, reality rigorously punished them for their delusions and bad decisions.

Today, so many hundreds of thousands of years later, we have the same brain designed for the same purpose. But because we have increasingly gained control of our environment and the physical pressures have loosened dramatically, the dangers have become much more subtle—they come in the form of people (not leopards) and their tricky psychology, and the delicate political and social games we have to play. And because of these less obvious dangers, our greatest problem is that our minds tend to become less sensitive to the environment; we turn inward, absorbed in our dreams and fantasies. We become naive.

To add to this dangerous brew, our culture tends to fill our heads with all kinds of false notions, making us believe things about what the world and human nature should be like, rather than what they are actually like. We take all of this for the truth and act on these misconceptions and, just as in the past, the environment and reality eventually punish us for our delusory behavior. We may not lose our lives, but our careers and relationships take wrong turns. We blame other people for our woes when all along the problem is inside us, stemming from our naiveté and the fantasies we've absorbed, which unconsciously guide our actions.

The following are some of the common false notions in our culture that can lead us astray: For instance, when it comes to our career, we believe that where we went to school, who we know, and who we are connected to is the key to our future success. We think that making mistakes or failing or any kind of conflict are to be avoided at all costs, and that we need to be in a hurry to make money, gain attention, and rise to the top. We imagine that work should be fun, that boredom is bad, and that we can take shortcuts to becoming really good at things. We have the idea that creativity is something we are born with, a natural gift. We feel that everyone is equal, and that hierarchies are a thing of the past.

With people, we operate under the belief that most of our friends and colleagues like us and want the best for us. We think that those with a pattern of bad behavior can be trusted if they say they've reformed, that people full of conviction and a sense of outrage must be telling the truth, and that those in power, including our bosses, are not insecure. We imagine that people who are extremely nice and accommodating are not potentially masking a dark and devious nature, that those who espouse progressive ideas have a corresponding virtuous character, and that people will be grateful for any favors we do for them.

With ourselves, we think that it's important to be honest and to tell others what's exactly on our minds. We feel that it's good to show off our best qualities—our intelligence, our industriousness, etc. We think that if bad things happen to us, we're just victims and not responsible in any way. We of course see that some people are narcissistic, aggressive,

envious, grandiose, and manipulative, but we believe that these are just a few bad apples and that we ourselves have none of these qualities.

What often happens is that at a fairly young age, burdened with such delusions, we enter the work world, and reality suddenly slaps us in the face. We discover that some people have fragile egos and can be devious and not at all what they seem. We are blindsided by their indifference or sudden acts of betrayal. Being ourselves and just saying what we think can land us in all kinds of trouble. We come to realize that the work world is riddled with political games that nobody has prepared us for.

Some of our career decisions, based on the desire for money and attention, lead to emotional burnout, disenchantment, and dead ends. And by not looking at ourselves in an honest way, and glossing over our own flaws and weaknesses, we become trapped in patterns of behavior that we cannot control. As the years go by, and the misreadings, missteps, and unrealistic decisions pile up, we can become bitter, confused, and damaged.

The Daily Laws is designed to reverse these toxic patterns and to reconnect you to reality. It takes aim at the various delusions we have all absorbed and seeks to attune your mind instead to the most entrenched traits of human nature and how our brains actually operate. Its goal is to transform you into a radical realist, so that when the book is finished, you will continue, on your own, to see people and events through this clarifying lens, and become ever more sensitive to the dangers and opportunities in your social environment. It is based on twenty-five years of intense research on the subjects of power, persuasion, strategy, mastery, and human nature, and is the distillation of all the lessons in my books.

The entries in the first three months will help rid you of all the external voices telling you about which career path to follow, and instead will connect you to your own voice, to what makes you unique, to your purpose and calling in life. Once this connection is made, you will have a guide for all your subsequent career decisions. These entries will show you that what matters is not education or money, but your persistence and the intensity of your desire to learn; that failures, mistakes, and conflicts are often the best education of all; and how true creativity and mastery emerge from all this.

The next three months will train you to see the political nature of the work world and how dangerous it is to take appearances for reality. They will help you to recognize the toxic types before they immerse you in their emotional maelstroms and teach you how to consciously outwit the great manipulators out there.

The ensuing three months will attempt to show you how real persuasion and influence work—not by thinking first of yourself and saying what’s on your mind, but from getting into the mindset of others and appealing to their self-interest. They will also help you to become a superior strategist in life, effectively advancing those causes you so deeply believe in and realizing your goals.

And the last three months will immerse you in the underlying motivations that drive human behavior, including your own. By making you reflect on who you are and realize that you are a flawed human being like everyone else, you will not only have greater empathy and acceptance of people, but you will have the key to altering your own negative patterns. These entries will show you that by confronting your deepest fears about mortality, you can open yourself up to the truly awesome nature of life, appreciating every moment that remains to you for absorbing its sublimity.

The entries have been culled from five of my books, and from part of the book I am currently working on, *The Law of the Sublime*; from interviews and talks over the years; and from blog posts and online essays I have written. At the end of each entry, I share the title and the chapter of the book the entries come from, so that you can deepen your study on any specific idea. Each month has a specific title and subtheme, and begins with a short essay. These essays illustrate the connection of the ideas in my books to my own experiences, the hardships that I have encountered, and the realistic lessons I have derived from them.

This book can be read in a pick-and-choose manner, skipping around as you desire, fitting the ideas to your own issues at this particular moment in your life. But it is best to read *The Daily Laws* from cover to cover, beginning with whichever date the book happens to land in your hands. In this way the book will immerse you in each subject, infiltrating

your mind and helping you develop the essential habit of seeing things as they are. As part of this habit, it's best to take notes as often as you can, relating the entries to your own experiences past and present. And it's even better to occasionally put some of the ideas into practice and reflect on the real-world experiences that ensue.

Finally, consider *The Daily Laws* as a kind of bildungsroman. The *bildungsroman*—from the German meaning a “development” or “education novel”—was a literary genre that began in the eighteenth century and continues into the present. In these stories, the protagonists, often quite young, enter life full of naive notions. The author takes them on a journey through a land teeming with miscreants, rogues, and fools. Slowly, the protagonists learn to shed themselves of their various illusions as the real world educates them. And they come to see that reality is infinitely more interesting and richer than all the fantasies they had been fed on. They emerge enlightened, battle-tested, and wise beyond their years.

The Daily Laws will take you, the protagonist, on a similar journey through a land full of dangerous and toxic types of people, helping you shed your illusions and hardening you for the battles ahead so that you may find solace and pleasure in seeing people and the world in their true light.

We are not provided with wisdom, we must discover it for ourselves, after a journey through the wilderness which no one else can take for us. . . . The lives that you admire, the attitudes that seem noble to you are not the result of training at home, by a father, or by masters at school, they have sprung from beginnings of a very different order, by reaction from the influence of everything evil or commonplace that prevailed round about them. They represent a struggle and a victory.

—MARCEL PROUST

January

Your Life's Task

PLANTING THE SEEDS FOR MASTERY



All of us are born unique. This uniqueness is marked genetically in our DNA. We are a one-time phenomenon in the universe—our exact genetic makeup has never occurred before nor will it ever be repeated. For all of us, this uniqueness first expresses itself in childhood through certain primal inclinations. They are *forces* within us that come from a deeper place than conscious words can express. They draw us to certain experiences and away from others. As these forces move us here or there, they influence the development of our minds in very particular ways. Let us state it in the following way: At your birth a seed is planted. That seed is your uniqueness. It wants to grow, transform itself, and flower to its full potential. It has a natural, assertive energy to it. Your Life's Task is to bring that seed to flower, to express your uniqueness through your work. You have a destiny to fulfill. The stronger you feel and maintain it—as a force, a voice, or in whatever form—the greater your chance for fulfilling this Life's Task and achieving mastery. The month of January is all about discovering and developing your Life's Task, your purpose, what you were put here to do.

I had known from a very young age—perhaps the age of eight—that I wanted to become a writer. I had a tremendous love of books and of words. I thought at first, when I was young, that I would be a novelist, but after graduating university, I had to make a living, and I realized being a novelist was too impractical. And so, living in New York, I drifted into journalism as a way to at least make a living. Then one day, after several years of working as a writer and editor, I was having lunch with a man who had just edited an article I had written for a magazine. After downing his third martini, he finally admitted to me why he had asked me to lunch. “You should seriously consider a different career,” he told me. “You are not writer material. Your work is too undisciplined. Your style is too bizarre. Your ideas—they’re just not relatable to the average reader. Go to law school, Robert. Go to business school. Spare yourself the pain.”

At first, these words were like a punch in the stomach. But in the months to come, I realized something about myself. I’d entered a career that didn’t suit me, and my work reflected this incompatibility. I had to get out of journalism. This realization initiated a period of wandering in my life. I traveled all across Europe. I worked every conceivable job. I did construction work in Greece, taught English in Barcelona, worked as a hotel receptionist in Paris and a tour guide in Dublin, served as a trainee for an English company making television documentaries. I tried writing novels and plays. I wandered back to Los Angeles, California, where I was born and raised. I worked in a detective agency, among other odd jobs. I entered the film business working as an assistant to a director, as a researcher, story developer, and screenwriter. In these long years of wandering, I had totaled some sixty different jobs. By the year 1995, my parents (God bless them) were beginning to get seriously worried about their son. I was thirty-six years old, and I seemed lost and unable to settle into anything. I too had moments of great doubt and even depression, but I did not really feel lost. Something inside kept pushing and guiding me.

I was searching and exploring, I was hungry for experiences, and I was continuously writing. That same year, while in Italy for yet another job, I met a man there named Joost Elffers—a packager and producer of books. One day while we were walking along the quais of Venice, Joost asked me if I had any ideas for a book.

Suddenly, seemingly out of nowhere, an idea just gushed out of me. I told Joost that I was constantly reading books on history and the stories that I read of Julius Caesar and the Borgias and Louis XIV, these were the exact same stories that I had personally witnessed with my own eyes in all my different jobs, only less bloody. People want power and they want to disguise this wanting of power. And so, they play games. They covertly manipulate and intrigue, all the while presenting a nice even saintly front. I would expose these games.

As I was improvising this pitch to him, which would eventually become my first book, *The 48 Laws of Power*, I felt something click inside me. I felt this tremendous sense of excitement welling up. It felt natural. It felt like destiny. When I saw that he was excited, I became even more excited. He said that he loved the idea and that he would pay me to live while I wrote half the book and then he would try to sell it to a publisher, himself being the packager, designer, and producer of it. When I returned home to Los Angeles and began working on *The 48 Laws*, I knew that this was my one chance in life, my one avenue of escaping all the years of wandering. So, I went all in. I put every single ounce of energy I had into it, because either I would make this book a success, or I would end up a failure in life. And I poured into this book all the lessons I had learned, all my training as a writer, all the discipline I'd gained from journalism, all the good and bad experiences I had accumulated in my sixty different jobs, all the horrible bosses that I had dealt with. And my pent-up excitement in writing the book could be felt by the reader and, much to my surprise, and beyond anything I'd imagined, the book had tremendous success.

Now looking back on all this some twenty-five years later, I realized that that thing that was pushing and guiding me (that I mentioned earlier) was a sense of purpose, a sense of destiny. It was like this voice inside

of me whispering, “Don’t give up. Keep trying. Keep trying.” This voice, which had first appeared to me as a child, was guiding me toward my Life’s Task. It took many years, many experiments, many mistakes, and obstacles, but it kept me advancing and oddly hopeful.

And now, many books later, I remain dedicated to that task. Like every person, I still need that sense of purpose to guide me, day in and day out. Each book I write has to feel like it’s part of that destiny, like it was meant to happen. And this sense of purpose I’ve had for my whole life that became so much clearer twenty-five years ago is what I believe has guided me through all the hard moments in my life. And I think it could do that for anybody, once you sense it within you, once you search for it.

The real lesson here is that it took me a long time to get there, with many twists and turns. And so, it can come even later in life—in your thirties or forties, or beyond. But my existence forever changed the moment I embraced my Life’s Task.

JANUARY 1

Discover Your Calling

Everyone holds his fortune in his own hands, like a sculptor the raw material he will fashion into a figure. But it's the same with that type of artistic activity as with all others: We are merely born with the capability to do it. The skill to mold the material into what we want must be learned and attentively cultivated.

—JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE

You possess a kind of inner force that seeks to guide you toward your Life's Task—what you are meant to accomplish in the time that you have to live. In childhood this force was clear to you. It directed you toward activities and subjects that fit your natural inclinations, that sparked a curiosity that was deep and primal. In the intervening years, the force tends to fade in and out as you listen more to parents and peers, to the daily anxieties that wear away at you. This can be the source of your unhappiness—your lack of connection to who you are and what makes you unique. The first move toward mastery is always inward—learning who you really are and reconnecting with that innate force. Knowing it with clarity, you will find your way to the proper career path and everything else will fall into place. It is never too late to start this process.

Daily Law: Mastery is a process and discovering your calling is the starting point.

Mastery, I: Discover Your Calling—The Life's Task

Reconnect with Your Childhood Obsession

When Marie Curie, the future discoverer of radium, was four years old she wandered into her father's study and stood transfixed before a glass case that contained all kinds of laboratory instruments for chemistry and physics experiments. She would return to that room again and again to stare at the instruments, imagining all sorts of experiments she could conduct with these tubes and measuring devices. Years later, when she entered a real laboratory for the first time and did some experiments herself, she reconnected immediately with her childhood obsession; she knew she had found her vocation.

Daily Law: You were obsessed with it as a child for a reason. Reconnect with it.

Mastery, I: Discover Your Calling—The Life's Task

JANUARY 3

The Voice

The way to recover the meaning of life and the worthwhileness of life is to recover the power of experience, to have impulse voices from within, and to be able to hear these impulse voices from within.

—ABRAHAM MASLOW

From the time I was young, I was entranced with words. I can remember in the fourth grade the teacher did this activity where she put up the word *carpenter*, and she asked us to come up with as many words as we could with just those letters. “Ant,” “pet,” “car,” et cetera. And I just thought, “Wow! You mean you can take letters like this and recombine them into words?” I was entranced. These childhood attractions are hard to put into words. Abraham Maslow called it “impulse voices.” He noticed that children know exactly what they like and dislike from a very early age. It is extremely human and powerful. You had those impulse voices too. You hated this kind of activity and you loved that other one. You didn’t like math but you were drawn to words. You were exhilarated by certain kinds of books and fell promptly asleep with other kinds. The importance of recognizing these early inclinations is that they are clear indications of an attraction that is not infected by the desires of other people. They are not something embedded in you by your parents, which come with a more superficial connection, something more verbal and conscious. Coming instead from somewhere deeper, these inclinations can only be your own, reflections of your unique chemistry.

Daily Law: Do something today that you used to love doing as a kid.
Try to reconnect with your impulse voices.

Robert Greene in conversation at Live Talks Los Angeles, February 11, 2019

JANUARY 4

It Is Already within You

Sooner or later something seems to call us onto a particular path. You may remember this something as a signal calling in childhood when an urge out of nowhere, a fascination, a peculiar turn of events struck like an annunciation: This is what I must do, this is what I've got to have. This is who I am.

—JAMES HILLMAN

As you become more sophisticated, you often lose touch with these signals from your primal core. They can be buried beneath all of the other subjects you have studied. Your power and future can depend on reconnecting with this core and returning to your origins. You must dig for signs of such inclinations in your earliest years. Look for its traces in visceral reactions to something simple; a desire to repeat an activity that you never tired of; a subject that stimulated an unusual degree of curiosity; feelings of power attached to particular actions. It is already there within you. You have nothing to create; you merely need to dig and refine what has been buried inside of you all along. If you reconnect with this core at any age, some element of that primitive attraction will spark back to life, indicating a path that can ultimately become your Life's Task.

Daily Law: Ask someone who recalls your childhood what they remember about your interests. Get reacquainted with those early passions.

Mastery, I: Discover Your Calling—The Life's Task

JANUARY 5

*Know What You're Drawn to and
Immerse Yourself in It*

The contemporary anthropologist-linguist Daniel Everett grew up on the California-Mexico border, in a cowboy town. From a very early age, he found himself drawn to the Mexican culture around him. Everything about it fascinated him—the sound of the words spoken by the migrant workers, the food, the manners that were so different from the Anglo world. He immersed himself as much as he could in their language and culture. This would transform into a lifelong interest in the Other—the diversity of cultures on the planet and what that means about our evolution.

Daily Law: What's something you've always felt a pull toward? Dive deep into it today.

Mastery, I: Discover Your Calling—The Life's Task

JANUARY 6

Change Is the Law

In dealing with your career and its inevitable changes, you must think in the following way: You are not tied to a particular position; your loyalty is not to a career or a company. You are committed to your Life's Task, to giving it full expression. It is up to you to find it and guide it correctly. It is not up to others to protect or help you. You are on your own. Change is inevitable, particularly in such a revolutionary moment as ours. Since you are on your own, it is up to you to foresee the changes going on right now in your profession. You must adapt your Life's Task to these circumstances. You do not hold on to past ways of doing things, because that will ensure you will fall behind and suffer for it. You are flexible and always looking to adapt. If change is forced upon you, you must resist the temptation to overreact or feel sorry for yourself. Before he became the great boxing trainer, Freddie Roach was forced to retire from boxing. He instinctively found his way back to the ring because he understood that what he loved was not boxing per se, but competitive sports and strategizing. Thinking in this way, he could adapt his inclinations to a new direction within boxing. Like Roach, you don't want to abandon the skills and experience you have gained, but to find a new way to apply them. Your eye is on the future, not the past. Often such creative readjustments lead to a superior path for us—we are shaken out of our complacency and forced to reassess where we are headed.

Daily Law: Adapt your inclinations. Avoid having rigid goals and dreams. Change is the law.

Mastery, I: Discover Your Calling—The Life's Task

JANUARY 7

Money and Success

For many people, the pursuit of money and status can supply them with plenty of motivation and focus. Such types would consider figuring out their calling in life a monumental waste of time and an antiquated notion. But in the long run this philosophy often yields the most impractical of results. We all know the effects of “hyperintention”: If we want and need desperately to sleep, we are less likely to fall asleep. If we absolutely must give the best talk possible at some conference, we become hyperanxious about the result, and the performance suffers. If we desperately need to find an intimate partner or make friends, we are more likely to push them away. If instead we relax and focus on other things, we are more likely to fall asleep or give a great talk or charm people. The most pleasurable things in life occur as a result of something not directly intended and expected. When we try to manufacture happy moments, they tend to disappoint us. The same goes for the dogged pursuit of money and success. Many of the most successful, famous, and wealthy individuals do not begin with an obsession with money and status. One prime example would be Steve Jobs, who amassed quite a fortune in his relatively short life. He actually cared very little for material possessions. His singular focus was on creating the best and most original designs, and when he did so, good fortune followed him.

Daily Law: Concentrate on maintaining a high sense of purpose, and the success will flow to you naturally.

The Laws of Human Nature, 13: Advance with a Sense of Purpose—The Law of Aimlessness

Occupy Your Own Niche

As a child growing up in Madras, India, in the late 1950s, V. S. Ramachandran knew he was different. In his loneliness he would often wander along the beach, and soon he became fascinated by the incredible variety of seashells that washed up on shore. He began to collect them and study the subject in detail. Soon he was drawn to the strangest varieties of seashells, such as the *Xenophora*, an organism that collects discarded shells and uses them for camouflage. In a way, he was like the *Xenophora*—an anomaly. In nature, these anomalies often serve a larger evolutionary purpose—they can lead to the occupation of new ecological niches, offering a greater chance of survival. Over the years, he transferred this boyhood interest into other subjects—human anatomical abnormalities, peculiar phenomena in chemistry, and so on. He went to medical school then became a professor in visual psychology at the University of California at San Diego. He became intrigued by the phenomenon of phantom limbs—people who have had an arm or leg amputated and yet still feel a paralyzing pain in the missing limb. He proceeded to conduct experiments on phantom limb subjects. These experiments led to some exciting discoveries about the brain itself, as well as a novel way to relieve such patients of their pain. Studying anomalous neurological disorders would be the subject to which he could devote the rest of his life. It was as if he had come full circle to the days of collecting the rarest forms of seashells.

Daily Law: Embrace your strangeness. Identify what makes you different. Fuse those things together and become an anomaly.

Mastery, I: Discover Your Calling—The Life's Task

Find Inspiration from Your Heroes

As a young boy growing up in North Carolina, John Coltrane felt different and strange. He was much more serious than his schoolmates; he experienced emotional and spiritual longings he did not know how to verbalize. He drifted into music more as a hobby, taking up the saxophone and playing in his high school band. Then a few years later he saw the great jazz saxophonist Charlie “Bird” Parker perform live, and the sounds Parker produced touched Coltrane to the core. Something primal and personal came through Parker’s saxophone, a voice from deep within. Coltrane suddenly saw the means for expressing his uniqueness and giving a voice to his own spiritual longings. He began to practice the instrument with such intensity that within a decade he transformed himself into perhaps the greatest jazz artist of his era. You must understand the following: In order to master a field, you must love the subject and feel a profound connection to it. Your interest must transcend the field and border on the religious. For Coltrane, it was not music but giving voice to powerful emotions.

Daily Law: Are there people whose work affects you in a powerful way? Analyze this and use them as models.

Mastery, I: Discover Your Calling—The Life’s Task

JANUARY 10

Embrace Your Weirdness

The most courageous act is still to think for yourself.

—COCO CHANEL

What do we say about masters? “They’re one of a kind.” There’s never been a Steve Jobs ever before. There’s never been a Warren Buffett. There’s never been an Albert Einstein. They’re unique. They embraced what made them different. Yes, it comes with some pain. With my books, particularly *The 48 Laws of Power*, you might hate it, you might think it’s satanic, but I can guarantee you’ve never read or seen a book that looks like it. The sections I created, the opening paragraphs, the quotes on the sides, the shapes—the book reflects me and my weirdness. The publisher was frightened by it. They wanted a more conventional book. And I said, “No. I know I’ve never published anything before, but I’m sticking to what I have here.” I stuck to what was weird and strange about me.

Daily Law: Always stick to what makes you weird, odd, strange, different. That’s your source of power.

Podcast Interview. *Curious with Josh Peck*. December 4, 2018

What Makes You Feel More Alive?

Sometimes an inclination becomes clear through a particular activity that brings with it a feeling of heightened power. As a child, Martha Graham felt intensely frustrated by her inability to make others understand her in a deep way; words seemed inadequate. Then one day, she saw her first dance performance. The lead dancer had a way of expressing certain emotions through movement; it was visceral, not verbal. She started dance lessons soon thereafter and immediately understood her vocation. Only when dancing could she feel alive and expressive. Years later she would go on to invent a whole new form of dance and revolutionize the genre.

Daily Law: Do something that makes you feel at the peak of your being today.

Mastery, I: Discover Your Calling—The Life's Task

JANUARY 12

The Obstacle Is the Way

Some people do not become aware of inclinations or future career paths in their childhood, but instead are made painfully aware of their limitations. They are not good at what others seem to find easy or manageable. The idea of a calling in life is alien to them. In some cases, they internalize the judgments and criticisms of others, and come to see themselves as essentially deficient. If they are not careful, this can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Nobody faced this fate more powerfully than Temple Grandin. In 1950, at the age of three, Temple Grandin was diagnosed with autism. A doctor had suggested she be institutionalized for the rest of her life. Through the help of speech therapists, she was able to avoid such a fate and attend regular school. She slowly developed an intense interest in animals and in autism itself. This led to a career in the sciences. With her exceptional reasoning powers, she has been able to throw light on the phenomenon of autism and explain it in a way no one else has been able to. Somehow, she had managed to overcome all of the seemingly insurmountable obstructions in her path and find her way to the Life's Task that suited her to perfection. When you confront your limitations, you are moved to respond in some way that is creative. And as it was for Temple Grandin, it may be in a way that no one else has done or even thought of before.

Daily Law: Confront one of your limitations—one of the obstructions in your path—today. Break beyond it, climb over it, think your way around it. Don't run from it. It was created for you.

Mastery, I: Discover Your Calling—The Life's Task

Master the Small Things

When you are faced with deficiencies instead of strengths and inclinations, this is the strategy you must assume: Ignore your weaknesses and resist the temptation to be more like others. Instead, direct yourself toward the small things you are good at. Do not dream or make grand plans for the future, but instead concentrate on becoming proficient at these simple and immediate skills. This will bring you confidence and become a base from which you can expand to other pursuits. Proceeding in this way, step by step, you will hit upon your Life's Task. Your Life's Task does not always appear to you through some grand or promising inclination. It can appear in the guise of your deficiencies, making you focus on the one or two things that you are inevitably good at. Working at these skills, you learn the value of discipline and see the rewards you get from your efforts. Like a lotus flower, your skills will expand outward from a center of strength and confidence. Do not envy those who seem to be naturally gifted; it is often a curse, as such types rarely learn the value of diligence and focus, and they pay for this later in life. This strategy applies as well to any setbacks and difficulties we may experience. In such moments, it is generally wise to stick to the few things we know and do well, and to reestablish our confidence.

Daily Law: When in doubt, focus on the things you know you do well.
Expand outward from the center.

Mastery, I: Discover Your Calling—The Life's Task

Avoid the False Path

At the center of your being you have the answer;
you know who you are and you know what you want.

—LAO TZU

A false path in life is generally something we are attracted to for the wrong reasons—money, fame, attention, and so on. If it is attention we need, we often experience a kind of emptiness inside that we are hoping to fill with the false love of public approval. Because the field we choose does not correspond with our deepest inclinations, we rarely find the fulfillment that we crave. Our work suffers for this, and the attention we may have gotten in the beginning starts to fade—a painful process. If it is money and comfort that dominate our decision, we are most often acting out of anxiety and the need to please our parents. They may steer us toward something lucrative out of care and concern, but lurking underneath this can be something else—perhaps a bit of envy that we have more freedom than they had when they were young. Your strategy must be twofold: First, to realize as early as possible that you have chosen your career for the wrong reasons, before your confidence takes a hit. And second, to actively rebel against those forces that have pushed you away from your true path. Scoff at the need for attention and approval—they will lead you astray. Feel some anger and resentment at the parental forces that want to foist upon you an alien vocation. It is a healthy part of your development to follow a path independent of your parents and to establish your own identity. Let your sense of rebellion fill you with energy and purpose.

Daily Law: If you're on the false path, get off. Find energy in rebellion.

Mastery, I: Discover Your Calling—The Life's Task

JANUARY 15

Let a Sense of Purpose Guide You

Just as a well-filled day brings blessed sleep,
so a well-employed life brings blessed death.

—LEONARDO DA VINCI

What we lack most in the modern world is a sense of a larger purpose to our lives. In the past, it was organized religion that often supplied this. But most of us now live in a secularized world. We human animals are unique—we must build our own world. We do not simply react to events out of biological scripting. But without a sense of direction provided to us, we tend to flounder. We don't know how to fill up and structure our time. There seems to be no defining purpose to our lives. We are perhaps not conscious of this emptiness, but it infects us in all kinds of ways. Feeling that we are called to accomplish something is the most positive way for us to supply this sense of purpose and direction. It is a religious-like quest for each of us. This quest should not be seen as selfish or antisocial. It is in fact connected to something much larger than our individual lives. Our evolution as a species has depended on the creation of a tremendous diversity of skills and ways of thinking.

Daily Law: Think back on the moments when you felt deeply and personally connected to an activity. Think about the pleasure it brought you. In such activities are signs of your true purpose.

Mastery, I: Discover Your Calling—The Life's Task

There Are No Superior Callings

Keep in mind that your contribution to the culture can come in many forms. You don't have to become an entrepreneur or figure largely on the world's stage. You can do just as well operating as one person in a group or organization, as long as you retain a strong point of view that is your own and use this to gently exert your influence. Your path can involve physical labor and craft—you take pride in the excellence of the work, leaving your particular stamp on the quality. It can be raising a family in the best way possible. In any event, you will want to go as far as you can in cultivating your uniqueness and the originality that goes with it. In a world full of people who seem largely interchangeable, you cannot be replaced. You are one of a kind. Your combination of skills and experience is not replicable. That represents true freedom and the ultimate power we humans can possess.

Daily Law: No calling is superior to another. What matters is that it be tied to a personal need and inclination, and that your energy moves you toward improvement and continuous learning from experience.

The Laws of Human Nature, 13: Advance with a Sense of Purpose—The Law of Aimlessness

JANUARY 17

The True Source of Creativity

You must alter your very concept of creativity and try to see it from a new angle. Most often, people associate creativity with something intellectual, a particular way of thinking. The truth is that creative activity is one that involves the entire self—our emotions, our levels of energy, our characters, and our minds. To make a discovery, to invent something that connects with the public, to fashion a work of art that is meaningful, inevitably requires time and effort. This often entails years of experimentation, various setbacks and failures, and the need to maintain a high level of focus. You must have patience and faith that what you are doing will yield something important. You could have the most brilliant mind, teeming with knowledge and ideas, but if you choose the wrong subject or problem to attack, you can run out of energy and interest. In such a case all of your intellectual brilliance will lead to nothing.

Daily Law: Work at what connects to you emotionally and ideas will come to you.

Mastery, V: Awaken the Dimensional Mind—The Creative-Active

JANUARY 20

See Mastery as Salvation

The misery that oppresses you lies not in your profession but in yourself! What man in the world would not find his situation intolerable if he chooses a craft, an art, indeed any form of life, without experiencing an inner calling?

—JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE

The world is teeming with problems, many of them of our own creation. To solve them will require a tremendous amount of effort and creativity. Relying on genetics, technology, magic, or being nice and natural will not save us. We require the energy not only to address practical matters, but also to forge new institutions and orders that fit our changed circumstances. We must create our own world or we will die from inaction. We need to find our way back to the concept of mastery that defined us as a species so many millions of years ago. This is not mastery for the purpose of dominating nature or other people, but for determining our fate. The passive-ironic attitude is not cool or romantic, but pathetic and destructive. You are setting an example of what can be achieved as a Master in the modern world. You are contributing to the most important cause of all—the survival and prosperity of the human race, in a time of stagnation. And you must convince yourself of the following: people get the mind and quality of brain that they deserve through their actions in life.

Daily Law: You must see your attempt at attaining mastery as something extremely necessary and positive.

Mastery, I: Discover Your Calling—The Life's Task

Depending on Others Is Misery

There is nothing worse than feeling dependent on other people. Dependency makes you vulnerable to all kinds of emotions—betrayal, disappointment, frustration—that play havoc with your mental balance. Being self-reliant is critical. To make yourself less dependent on others and so-called experts, you need to expand your repertoire of skills. And you need to feel more confident in your own judgment. Understand: we tend to overestimate other people's abilities—after all, they're trying hard to make it look as if they knew what they were doing—and we tend to underestimate our own. You must compensate for this by trusting yourself more and others less. It is important to remember, though, that being self-reliant does not mean burdening yourself with petty details. You must be able to distinguish between small matters that are best left to others and larger issues that require your attention and care.

Daily Law: It is simple: depending on others is misery; depending on yourself is power.

The 33 Strategies of War, Strategy 3: Amidst the Turmoil of Events, Do Not Lose Your Presence of Mind—The Counterbalance Strategy

JANUARY 22

Use Resistance and Negative Spurs

Every negative is a positive. The bad things that happen to me,
I somehow make them good.

—50 CENT

The key to success in any field is first developing skills in various areas, which you can later combine in unique and creative ways. But the process of doing so can be tedious and painful, as you become aware of your limitations and relative lack of skill. Most people, consciously or unconsciously, seek to avoid tedium, pain, and any form of adversity. They try to put themselves in places where they will face less criticism and minimize their chances of failure. You must choose to move in the opposite direction. You want to embrace negative experiences, limitations, and even pain as the perfect means of building up your skill levels and sharpening your sense of purpose.

Daily Law: Embrace negative experiences. When was the last time you failed, felt embarrassed, got criticized? What were you doing? What did the experience teach you?

The Laws of Human Nature, 13: Advance with a Sense of Purpose—The Law of Aimlessness

Create a Ladder of Descending Goals

Operating with long-term goals will bring you tremendous clarity and resolve. These goals—a project or business to create, for instance—can be relatively ambitious, enough to bring out the best in you. The problem, however, is that they will also tend to generate anxiety as you look at all you have to do to reach them from the present vantage point. To manage such anxiety, you must create a ladder of smaller goals along the way, reaching down to the present. Such objectives are simpler the further down the ladder you go, and you can realize them in relatively short time frames, giving you moments of satisfaction and a sense of progress. Always break tasks into smaller bites. Each day or week you must have microgoals. This will help you focus and avoid entanglements or detours that will waste your energy. At the same time, you want to continually remind yourself of the larger goal, to avoid losing track of it or getting too mired in details. Periodically return to your original vision and imagine the immense satisfaction you will have when it comes to fruition. This will give you clarity and inspire you forward. You will also want a degree of flexibility built into the process. At certain moments you reassess your progress and adjust the various goals as necessary, constantly learning from experience and adapting and improving your original objective.

Daily Law: Remember that what you are after is a series of practical results and accomplishments, not a list of unrealized dreams and aborted projects. Working with smaller, embedded goals will keep you moving in such a direction.

The Laws of Human Nature, 13: Advance with a Sense of Purpose—The Law of Aimlessness

JANUARY 24

Combine Your Fascinations

If you are young and just starting out in your career, you will want to explore a relatively wide field related to your inclinations—for instance, if your affinity is words and writing, try all the different types of writing until you hit upon the right fit. If you are older and have more experience, you will want to take the skills you have already developed and find a way to adapt them more in the direction of your true calling. Steve Jobs, as one example, merged his two great fascinations: technology and design.

Daily Law: Keep in mind that your calling could be combining several fields that fascinate you. Keep the process open ended; your experience will instruct you as to the way.

The Laws of Human Nature, 13: Advance with a Sense of Purpose—The Law of Aimlessness

JANUARY 27

The Real Secret

The hunger for the magical shortcuts and simple formulas for success has been a constant throughout history. But in the end all of this searching is centered on something that doesn't exist. And while you lose yourself in these endless fantasies, you ignore the one real power that you actually possess. And unlike magic or simplistic formulas, we can see the material effects of this power in history—the great discoveries and inventions, the magnificent buildings and works of art, the technological prowess we possess, all works of the masterful mind. This power brings to those who possess it the kind of connection to reality and the ability to alter the world that the mystics and magicians of the past could only dream of. Over the centuries, people have placed a wall around mastery. They have called it genius and have thought of it as inaccessible. They have seen it as the product of privilege, inborn talent, or just the right alignment of the stars. They have made it seem as if it were as elusive as magic. But that wall is imaginary. This is the real secret: the brain that we possess is the work of six million years of development, and more than anything else, this evolution of the brain was designed to lead us to mastery, the latent power within us all.

Daily Law: Work to create the kind of mind you desire. Unleashing the masterful mind within, you will be at the vanguard of those who are exploring the extended limits of human willpower.

Mastery, Introduction

JANUARY 28

The Path Is Not Linear

You begin by choosing a field or position that roughly corresponds to your inclinations. This initial position offers you room to maneuver and important skills to learn. You don't want to start with something too lofty, too ambitious—you need to make a living and establish some confidence. Once on this path you discover certain side routes that attract you, while other aspects of this field leave you cold. You adjust and perhaps move to a related field, continuing to learn more about yourself, but always expanding off your skill base. You take what you do for others and make it your own. Eventually, you will hit upon a particular field, niche, or opportunity that suits you perfectly. You will recognize it when you find it because it will spark that childlike sense of wonder and excitement; it will feel right. Once found, everything will fall into place. You will learn more quickly and more deeply. Your skill level will reach a point where you will be able to claim your independence from within the group you work for and move out on your own. In a world in which there is so much we cannot control, this will bring you the ultimate form of power. You will determine your circumstances. As your own Master, you will no longer be subject to the whims of tyrannical bosses or scheming peers.

Daily Law: You must see your career or vocational path more as a journey with twists and turns rather than a straight line.

Mastery, I: Discover Your Calling—The Life's Task

JANUARY 29

Become Who You Are

Some 2,600 years ago the ancient Greek poet Pindar wrote, “Become who you are by learning who you are.” What he meant is the following: You are born with a particular makeup and tendencies that mark you as a piece of fate. It is who you are to the core. Some people never become who they are; they stop trusting in themselves; they conform to the tastes of others, and they end up wearing a mask that hides their true nature.

Daily Law: If you allow yourself to learn who you really are by paying attention to that voice and force within you, then you can become what you were fated to become—an individual, a Master.

Mastery, I: Discover Your Calling—The Life’s Task

Trust the Process

Let us say we are learning the piano. In the beginning, we are outsiders. When we first study the piano, the keyboard looks rather intimidating—we don't understand the relationships between the keys, the chords, the pedals, and everything else that goes into creating music. Although we might enter with excitement about what we can learn, we quickly realize how much hard work there is ahead of us. The great danger is that we give in to feelings of boredom, impatience, fear, and confusion. We stop observing and learning. The process comes to a halt. If, on the other hand, we manage these emotions and allow time to take its course, something remarkable begins to take shape. As we continue to observe and follow the lead of others, we gain clarity, learning the rules and seeing how things work and fit together. If we keep practicing, we gain fluency; basic skills are mastered, allowing us to take on newer and more exciting challenges. We begin to see connections that were invisible to us before. We slowly gain confidence in our ability to solve problems or overcome weaknesses through sheer persistence. At a certain point, we move from student to practitioner. Instead of just learning how others do things, we bring our own style and individuality into play. As years go by and we remain faithful to this process, yet another leap takes place—to mastery. The keyboard is no longer something outside of us; it is internalized and becomes part of our nervous system, our fingertips. We have learned the rules so well that we can now be the ones to break or rewrite them.

Daily Law: Trust the process—time is the essential ingredient of mastery. Use it to your advantage.

Mastery, Introduction

JANUARY 31

The Source of All Power

Do not try to bypass the work of discovering your Life's Task or imagine that it will simply come to you naturally. Although it may come to a few people early in life or in a lightning-bolt moment, for most of us it requires continual introspection and effort. Experimenting with the skills and options related to your personality and inclinations is not only the single most essential step in developing a high sense of purpose and attaining mastery, it is perhaps the most important step in life in general.

Daily Law: Knowing in a deep way who you are, your uniqueness, will make it that much easier to avoid all of life's other pitfalls.

The Laws of Human Nature, 13: Advance with a Sense of Purpose—The Law of Aimlessness

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