

Peterson, Jordan B. – 12 Rules for Life

allen lange, 2018, [Surrounding Knowledge] Grade ★★★★★

According to *NY Times* Jordan Peterson is currently the most influential thinker on earth. This is surely an exaggeration but he is an Internet phenomenon. Instead of dwelling on Peterson as a public figure and have an opinion on whether he's a transfobic fascist as some would say, or the savior of men as other would have it, I thought I'd take the road less traveled and simply account for the twelve rules as they read and give my take of what they mean. It will not make much of a book review but at least we will know what's discussed.

However, it must first be understood that this isn't the author's self help advice on how to succeed in life – to Peterson the rules run much deeper. Some years ago the author had something of a personal crisis trying to reconcile the monstrosities performed by the Nazi and communist regimes of the twentieth century with some sort of hope for mankind. Peterson landed in the opinion that the world is a troubled place and while it is hard to know what a good life is, it is reasonably easy to know in which direction to go – and this is away from Auschwitz, Gulag and totalitarianism. The rules are steps on this path.

1. *Stand up straight with your shoulders back* – How you behave effects how others treat you. A person who takes responsibility for his life, acts with self-confidence and let this show in his body language will be treated as a winner, also by the opposite sex.
2. *Treat yourself like someone you are responsible for helping* – Don't be consumed by guilt. Instead learn to be proud of yourself and respect the progress you make. If you were to coach someone to become a better person, how would you do it? Now, do it to yourself.
3. *Make friends with people who want the best for you* – If a person you know only takes and never gives you cannot waste your only life on them. Walk away.
4. *Compare yourself with who you were yesterday, not to who someone else is today* – Act by an inner scorecard instead of an outer.

5. *Don't let your children do anything that makes you dislike them* – Your children will have a better life if they don't grow up dysfunctional. Be an adult, set boundaries, teach them what's right and wrong, encourage and mentor them and discipline them if necessary. Help each other as parents as it is hard work raising kids.
6. *Set your house in perfect order before you criticize the world* – Discard of any victim mentality and searches for scapegoats. Set your life straight and have the humility to not complain over others before you can govern yourself.
7. *Pursue what is meaningful (not what is expedient)* – Those that can delay gratification do best in life. Most people know what is good. Set long-term goals and make the sacrifices needed to reach them.
8. *Tell the truth – or, at least don't lie* – Stand up for what you believe. It is the silent majority that paves the way for totalitarianism.
9. *Assume the person you are listening to might know something you don't* – To get to the truth we have to listen to those who hold other opinions than ours. Either you will see the issue differently and change your mind or you will become more confident in your opinion. Both are good things.
10. *Be precise in your speech* – Face your personal monsters by diagnosing what they really are about. In precisely describing the bad you shine light on fears that lurk in the shadows.
11. *Do not bother children when they are skateboarding* – If we overprotect our children they will grow up incapable of handling the world. This is especially destructive for boys with more innate aggressiveness that must be channeled into something constructive. If it is instead suppressed it will take nasty forms later.
12. *Pet a cat when you encounter one on the street* – Appreciate the small joys of everyday life.

This somewhat odd book that draws on biology, literature, psychoanalysis, philosophy, religion and even folklore is unusual in that it salutes virtues like owning up to responsibilities. I like most of it.

Mats Larsson, May 12, 2018