

*The 48 Laws of Power*

By Robert Greene

Power is not what  
we do but  
what we do  
not, - hasty  
and unwise actions  
that we repeat  
every day and  
which ultimately bring  
us into trouble



~ Robert Greene ~

## *Summary*

1. [Robert Greene](#) lays out 48 laws which will help you in you the mastery and conquest of your given field. He draws on historical examples of people who have observed or transgressed these laws as well as portions of fables and other short stories to help illustrate each law.

## *Key Takeaways*

1. Never outshine the master
  - Never let anything get to your head
  - Discreet flattery works best
2. Never put too much trust in friends, learn how to use enemies
  - Keep friends for friendship but **work with the skilled and competent**
  - Don't know your friends as well as you think
  - **Work with those who disagree with you - they are untapped goldmines**
  - **Enemies often useful to stay sharp and enhance goals**
3. Conceal your intentions
  - Your indifference will excite others
  - Instinctual to trust first appearances
  - Discuss goals openly - just not your true goals
  - Use the familiar to be most deceptive
  - Do not draw too much attention to yourself
  - Distract and draw in
  - People can only focus on one thing at a time
  - Reduce facial expressions to confuse and disarm
  - People want to believe that noble gestures are genuine
  - Seduce the victim into believe that you will act in the same patterns
  - Seamless blend - blend in with those around you
  - If found out, admit to it
4. Always say less than necessary
  - **Silence makes people uncomfortable and from this you'll more readily learn people's true intentions and they will not know yours**
  - When you say less, people hang on to every word you say

- Be wary and use this power in the right situations as silence can often be seen as suspicious
- 5. **So much depends on reputation - guard it with your life**
  - If no reputation, can cast doubt on others'
  - Mocking others' reputation shows confidence in yours
  - Controlling your reputation allows you to control your appearance and therefore how people judge you
  - Must work for reputation of outstanding quality, but then it will spread quickly
    - **Focus on achieving one sterling quality**
  - Once reputation is solid, if others slander it, take the high road
  - Very tough to come back once your reputation is stained, protect vehemently
- 6. Court attention at all cost
  - When first starting out, quality of attention is irrelevant (no bad publicity)
  - People crave larger-than-life figures
  - Slandering someone powerful attracts a lot of attention
  - Play against people's expectations of you
  - Create an air of mystery around yourself
    - Try to get people to try to figure you out
    - Do things people don't expect from you
- 7. Get others to do the work for you, but always take the credit
  - **Find those who have skills you lack**
  - **Stand on the shoulders of giants - use past knowledge and accomplishments however you can**
  - Must have a great reputation before this can be successfully implemented
- 8. Make other people come to you - use bait if necessary
  - Do not mistake *aggressive* action for *effective* action
  - Get others to react to your moves and always control your emotions (especially anger)
  - The fast attack often works too
- 9. Win through actions, never through argument
  - **The truth is generally seen, not heard**
- 10. **Infection: avoid the unhappy and unlucky**
  - People more susceptible to moods than we think
  - **Surround yourself in the best environment possible** - the smartest and happiest people you know
  - Only generous souls attain greatness

11. Learn to keep people dependent on you
  - Joining forces with the powerful can be foolish
    - Do what you can to become entrenched with *rising* powers
  - **Necessity rules the world** - very difficult to get people to act or change unless absolutely necessary
  - **Independence is not power, getting others to do what you want without force is power**
  - **Get others to tell you their secrets** and they will depend on you
12. Use selective honesty and generosity to disarm your victim
  - This tactic often disarms people
  - Deception is the essence of distraction
  - Dangerous to simply ask for what you need
  - **Give before you take**
  - All noble, selfless acts help to disarm people (especially generosity)
  - **Do not do this unless you can do it genuinely**
13. When asking for help, appeal to people's self-interest, never to their mercy or gratitude
  - Most people are pragmatic - they will rarely act against their self-interest
  - **Don't confuse your needs with theirs**
  - **Appeal to simple, every day realities you can help with**
  - **Must understand other's psychology - their desires and motivations to truly understand how you can help them the most**
14. Pose as a friend, work as a spy
  - **Leave nothing to chance** - learn as much as you can about your "mark" as you can
  - **Learn people's true intentions, desires and weaknesses**
  - Best to gather information yourself but using others is helpful too
  - **Superb conversationalists often say very little**
  - **Knowing a person's character is the most valuable information you can attain**
15. Crush your enemy totally
  - Especially true for former friends who have turned into enemies
  - Will create enemies no matter what you do - don't take it personally
  - Extinguish every last ember as even just one can rekindle the fire
16. Use absence to increase respect and honor
  - Same goes for the skills and value you offer - if rare, you become that much more valuable
  - **Make yourself less accessible** - limit phone calls, emails, meetings, etc.

- Must first be established and omnipresent before you can take advantage of this power or else people will simply forget you
17. Keep others in suspended terror: cultivate an air of unpredictability
- Rigid patterns can be effective to lull others to sleep
  - Too much unpredictability can work against you
18. Do not build fortresses to protect yourself - isolation is dangerous
- **As people are social creatures, power lies in social interactions**
  - Lose perspective isolation. However, isolation is necessary for clear thinking
19. Know who you're dealing with - do not offend the wrong person
- Determine those who are arrogant, insecure, suspicious, cunning and unintelligent as they can pose a threat if crossed
  - **Never assume anyone is weaker or less important than you**
  - **Nothing to gain by insulting unnecessarily**
  - **Do not trust your instincts** - gather concrete evidence
  - **Do not trust appearances as they are unreliable**
20. Do not commit to anyone
- Be courted by all
  - **Desire is like a virus and the more un-graspable you are, the more people will desire you**
  - Between competing powers is a good place to be
  - **Those who rush to support get little respect since their help is so easily obtained**
  - Stay neutral and as it gives options in terms of positioning and which side to be on
  - Cannot control other's emotions but must keep yours in check
21. Play a sucker to catch a sucker - seem dumber than your mark
- The more someone thinks they can prey on you, the easier it is to turn the tables
  - Also can play down sophistication in certain areas to disarm people
22. Use the surrender tactic: transform weakness into power
- **Never choose the short-term glory of martyrdom**
  - **Outwardly bend, inwardly stay firm**
23. Concentrate your forces
- Do not overreach and spread yourself too thin
  - **Concentrate on a single goal or task and beat it into submission**
  - **Prize intensity over extensity. Perfection lies in quality, not quantity**
24. Play the perfect courtier

- Adapt these characteristics - modesty, **effortless quality work**, frugal with flattery, **subtly distinctive**, adapt behavior and language to those around you, don't be a bearer of bad news, keep relationship with those above you professional, **ask few favors**, never criticize directly, do not criticize taste or appearance, don't be the cynic, be self-observant, **master emotions**, mimic spirit of the times and **be the source of pleasure**
  - **Make the "master" look as good as possible**
  - Do not overstep your boundaries
  - **Very important to also please equals and subordinates**
  - Never let your devices be revealed
25. Re-create yourself
- **Be aware of your audience** - what will bore vs engage
  - Never be upstaged
  - **Do not accept the identity the world wants to give you - create your own**
  - Be self-conscious of appearance and emotions
  - Play many roles, **be whatever the moment requires**
  - Like attracts like
26. Keep your hands clean
- **People not undone by mistakes but how they deal with them**
  - Fall of the favorite, a close friend, is a very powerful enemy
  - Cat's paw - somebody who does your dirty work and saves you time and your reputation if caught
  - **A favor done elegantly and discreetly has 10 times more power**
  - Find ways to get others to do the work for you
27. Play on people's need to believe to create a cult-like following
- **The larger the group, the easier to deceive**
  - 5 steps to form a cult
    1. Keep the mission vague and simple
    2. Emphasize the visual and sensual over intellectual
    3. Use forms of organized religion to structure the group
    4. Disguise your source of income
    5. Create "us vs. them" mentality - create an enemy if need be
  - **Adapt to people's needs**
28. Enter action with boldness
- **The bolder the better** - don't be timid or defensive

- The bigger the target the better  
Especially useful in negotiations - **never ask for too little**
- **Understand when is the right time to act boldly**

**29. Plan all the way to the end**

- Most men ruled by the heart, not the head
- Have a concrete end goal so you know when to stop
  - Will rid you of anxiety and vagueness that leads to the majority of mistakes

**30. Make your accomplishments seem effortless**

- What is understandable is not awe-inspiring
- Gain advantages by keeping silent
  - Build an aura of mystery and awe
- Always keep a sense of humor about yourself
  - Sometimes appropriate to partially reveal secrets to please people

**31. Control the options: Get others to play with the cards you deal** (pair with Cialdini's [Influence](#))

- Create a situation where people choose the option which makes you more powerful since the other is too unpleasant
  - Even better, make all options somehow work in your favor
- Give people the illusion of choice and possibility of good fortune
- As long as there is a choice, people often do not focus on the missing options
- Techniques:
  - Color the choices - present the options in such a way to get people to choose what you want
  - Force the resistor - tell people to do the opposite of what you really want
  - Alter the playing field
  - Shrinking options - every time someone negotiates, raise the price or reduce the number of options
  - Propel weak men with fear
  - Implicate others - especially those who can do you the most harm if you fail

**32. Play to people's fantasies**

- **People rarely believe their problems stem from their own stupidity**
- Those who can spin fantasy out of the worst scenarios will gain great power
- **Search for what truly imprisons people and find a way to deliver** (or at least promise to deliver)

- To keep power, the fantasy must always remain at least somewhat unrealized
  - **Fantasy is not always fantastical**
33. Discover each man's thumbscrew
- Pay attention to unconscious signals to figure out his weakness
  - Can tell a (fake) secret to illicit a real one or a weakness from others
  - Keep an eye for the details as that is where the treasure lies
  - Knowing about their childhood helps give deep insight into possible weaknesses
  - **Look for contrasts** - the shy often love attention
  - **Insecurity and unhappiness are the two main emotional voids people want to fill**
  - **Feed on uncontrollable emotions** - what they cannot control you can control for them
  - **Recognition and validation are universal and easy to exploit**
34. Be royal in your own fashion: act like a king to be treated like one
- **Know how to sell yourself**
  - Carry yourself with quiet confidence and set your own price
  - Strategy of the Crown - truly believe you are destined for great things
  - **Dignity under all circumstances**
  - Make a bold demand and in a dignified way, go after the most important person
  - **Never be arrogant or humiliate people**
35. Master the art of timing
- Power sticks to the side that brings an issue to conclusion
  - Critical to recognize the spirit of the times but that does not mean siding with that side
  - Incredible patience is often required
  - **Time can be molded and if we can control our emotions we can slow down time and make better decisions**
  - Long time (patience), forced time (force others to hurry or wait), and end time (strike) must all be taken into account
  - Don't force peace out of fear or impatience
  - **Setting a deadline is an extremely powerful tool**
36. **Disdain things you cannot have: ignoring them is the best revenge**
- What you do not react to cannot bring you down
  - If you acknowledge a person or issue, you open yourself up to its influence
  - Ignoring lets you determine the conditions of the conflict
  - Engaging the weaker side can raise sympathy for them
  - Sour grapes - what you can't have doesn't even interest you

- Deflect the attack as if it didn't even happen
37. Create compelling spectacles
- **People want a strong, immediate appeal to their emotions**
  - **Establish a trademark and/or image from the past that becomes synonymous with you (words are often risky as they can be manipulated and misunderstood)**
    - **Symbols contain untold power, especially new symbols and/or combinations of symbols that haven't been seen before**
    - **Find a symbol for your cause and to energize/bind your troops - the more emotional the better**
38. Think as you like but behave like others
- Others often take different as disdain for their way of doing things
  - Most people hold their ideas and values without thinking about them - if forced to think about them or change they will resist
  - **Be all things to all people**
39. Stir up waters to catch fish
- Steal the initiative by forcing enemies to act early - play on uncontrollable emotions (love, fear, pride and hate)
  - Don't repress - **realize nothing is personal**
  - **The best response to someone's outburst is no response**
40. Despise the free lunch
- **Rid yourself of entanglements and complicated feelings by always paying full price**
  - Be generous with your money but have an end goal
  - **Powerful people judge everything by its cost - time, dignity, peace of mind**
  - The prospect of sudden wealth wreaks havoc with emotions - use it to your advantage
  - Money should be spent on people, not things and as gifts
    - Always value influence over things
  - Sudden, one-time gifts are extremely powerful
    - The more sentimental, the better
  - **Greed does not pay**
41. Avoid stepping into a great man's shoes
- Necessity compels man to take action
  - Men of great success usually come from nothing - they are hungrier as they have a void to fill
  - Never rest on your laurels - there is never time to rest

- Establish a style and symbolism that sets you apart
  - A lot of power to be gained by entering into vacuums and voids
42. Strike the shepherd and the sheep will scatter
- **Recognize troublemakers and banish them as soon as possible**
  - The charismatic leader should be your most feared enemy
  - People will congregate around a single, strong personality
  - **Pointing out the troublemaker dissolves a lot of his power**
  - Often better to isolate than destroy enemies
43. Work on the hearts and minds of others
- Gauge people's particular psychologies and play into it
  - **Force only strengthens resistance** - often, the heart is the key
  - Play into primary emotions (love, hate, vanity) and figure out what makes that person unique and what they share with the masses
  - **A gesture of goodwill and self-sacrifice goes a long way**
  - **Quickest way to win people over is to show how an action will help them**
44. Disarm and infuriate with the mirror effect
- Neutralizing effect - mimic actions as best as you can
  - Narcissus effect - understand what a person wants and/or loves and act to fulfill that
  - Moral effect - mirror what others have done to you
  - Hallucinatory effect - creating a perfect copy of an object, place or person
  - **Verbal arguments rarely achieve what is desired**
  - Do not force your thoughts, etc. but always absorb and reflect
  - Figure out what sets someone apart, reflect and feed their fantasies and they will be yours
  - **People are locked in their own experiences**
  - Direct communication of people's problems or behaviors often just leads to more resistance
  - **Follow, study and mirror people's eyes and gestures and small details**
  - **Wordless communication, indirect compliments have amazing power**
  - **People have a need to believe their first instinct**
  - Do not fall into a situation where people associate you with someone else
45. Preach the need for change, but never reform too much at once
- **Never underestimate the hidden conservatism of those around you**
  - **Associate somehow with a romantic past**

- Humans associate voids with death and chaos - excellent environments to grasp power
  - Watch the zeitgeist
46. Never appear too perfect
- Once someone is envious of you, everything you do makes the envy grow
  - Never flaunt power or wealth, dampen down your brilliance
  - Emphasize luck when something good happens
  - Make power seem like a form of self-sacrifice, a burden
  - **Reveal a harmless vice or defect**
47. Do not go past the mark you aimed for; in victory, learn when to stop
- **Nothing more intoxicating or dangerous than victory**
  - Do not press your good fortune
  - Learn to improvise and adapt
  - Good luck more dangerous than bad as bad at least offers lessons
  - Either destroy a man or leave him alone entirely
  - Momentum is overrated if you are good enough - no rash actions
48. Assume formlessness (pair with [Bruce Lee's Like Water](#))
- Being formless allows you to adapt to any threat or scenario
  - **Never sacrifice mobility for safety**
    - Largeness is often the first step towards extinction - **size is not power**
  - **Power can only thrive if it is flexible in its forms**
  - Human creation evolves towards abstraction - more mental and less material
  - Never take anything personally - never act defensively
  - Formlessness gives the enemy nothing to attack
  - Need for formlessness increases with age as we get set in our ways - must adapt to each new circumstance
  - When you finally decide to attack, do so with power, speed and concentration

*What I got out of it*

1. A very exciting read and at points very manipulative. It would be impossible to keep all 48 laws in mind all the time but I think you can focus on a couple every month to improve on and add to your repertoire. A lot of it is very harsh and Greene does not dispute this, he simply lays out the facts and it is up to you how to proceed. A must read even to just protect yourself from having your arm forced by others

