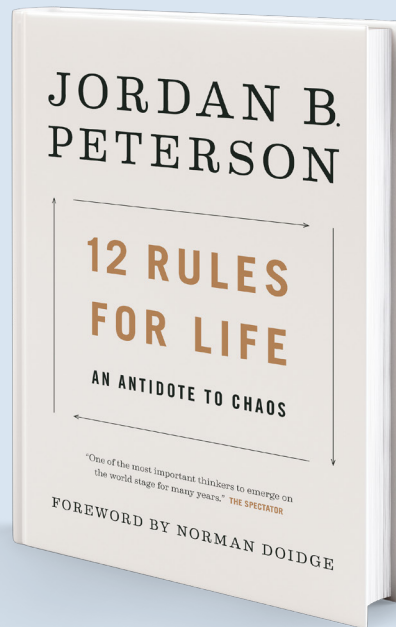


# Book Snaps™

In-depth reviews of best-selling business books.



## 12 Rules for Life An Antidote to Chaos

By Jordan Peterson

Jordan Peterson has taught mythology to lawyers, doctors and business people, consulted for the UN Secretary General, helped his clinical clients manage depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, anxiety, and schizophrenia, served as an adviser to senior partners of major Canadian law firms, and lectured extensively in North America and Europe. With his students and colleagues at Harvard and the University of Toronto, Dr. Peterson has published over a hundred scientific papers, transforming the modern understanding of personality, while his book *Maps of Meaning: The Architecture of Belief* revolutionized the psychology of religion.

*A Book Review by Soundview*

## Not Your Ordinary Self-Help Book

Jordan Peterson's book, *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos* is listed as a self-help book, but it goes beyond the ordinary prescriptions and how-to's of the traditional self-help book. Peterson provides his readers with rules that he believes will help them successfully live at the point where chaos and order are in proper proportion to each other, and he explains and defends his rules by employing deep dives into psychology, philosophy, and theology. He explores some of the great thinkers of all time in his chapters that mainly read as stand alone essays into his philosophy of life.

### Chaos and Order

In his first rule, "Stand Up Straight with Your Shoulders Back," Peterson discusses evolution and to explain how those characteristics that are deemed ideal are perpetuated. Evolution does not move towards a fixed point, however, because as society changes, so does the list of traits that are deemed desirable. Peterson believes that hierarchies have been around for half a billion years. When people experience defeat in this hierarchy, they have lower levels of serotonin which leads to more illness and less confidence among other things. When they experience success, their serotonin goes up as does their health and resiliency. Those on the low end of the hierarchy, he says, need to be constantly vigilant, and often they have to use the energy that ideally would be spent preparing for the future in dealing with current crises.

Peterson says that our habits can mess up our systems. This happens frequently through irregular sleep patterns and poor nutrition. Through situations like these, the individual becomes engaged in a negative feedback loop. Peterson says that when a person slumps, other people assign them less value in the social hierarchy. The individual's brain will pick up on that and will then produce less serotonin to reflect this lower status in society.

In his second rule. Peterson discusses chaos and order. Later in the book, he will expand upon this further and explain that order is predictability and chaos is what we do not know. Without chaos, growth cannot occur, but without order, people are not able to function properly within their lives. Because of this, the thriving

of human beings relies upon a balance of both order and chaos. Peterson starts this chapter by discussing how people are frequently adamant about making sure their pets receive medications they need, but people frequently do not take the medicine they need themselves. He mentions extreme cases where people need anti-rejection medications after life saving transplants but fail to take these medications. Peterson says that both the extreme cases as well as the more pedestrian ones occur because people see the evil within themselves, within all humanity, and deem themselves undeserving. People, he says, depend upon each other. As such, they have a responsibility to take care of themselves. As such, this second rule is that people should treat themselves like they treat people they are tasked with helping.

## Oneself and Others

In rule three, Peterson considers the people we spend time with. He explains that when a low achiever joins a group, the group does not raise up the low achiever. Rather, the whole group lowers itself. Because of this, it is important for people to decide who to spend time with. It is hard to spend time with high achieving respectable people because they expect something from those around them. Peterson says, “It’s a good thing, not a selfish thing, to choose people who are good for you.”

In rule four, Peterson relays the commonly shared advice to “Compare yourself to who you were yesterday, not to who someone else is today.” Peterson shares how it is part of the act of maturing for a person to compare oneself to the dictates of parents and to those around them, but part of maturing into adulthood is learning to judge for oneself based upon one’s own criterion. People are harsh critics, however. Peterson advises his reader to broaden the perspective of what it is they want. Instead of looking towards one, possibly unachievable, goal that will make everything better, he encourages his reader to instead look for what will make life better.

When a person broadens their perspective, they also broaden the possibilities they see. He advises his reader to look around and decide what one thing they could do that would make life better. If the person is not willing to do such a thing, then he recommends continuing to set the bar lower until the individual finds something that they are, indeed, willing to do in order to improve their life. He then advises his reader to reward themselves. By continuously doing this, a person can dramatically improve their life over time.

In rule five, Peterson encourages parents not to let their children do anything that makes the parent dislike them. This is not shared from the perspective of the selfish parent who wishes to have children always be pleasing and easy. Rather, it requires parents to actively discipline and mold their children’s behavior into that which is acceptable by others. This, Peterson believes, should be a crucial aim for parents because children who have not been properly socialized will get rejected by society. Children will reap the consequences of their negative behavior out in the world, and poor and annoying behavior, he says, is better dealt with by parents who love their children rather than by the world which does not. Peterson

believes that being a parent is not the same as being a friend because the parenting relationship is a greater relationship. Parents, he says, need to stop being afraid of being rejected by their children and instead do what is best for them by providing proper guidance and discipline when appropriate.

## Focusing Within

Chapter six begins with a discussion of the Columbine killers and their belief that the human race ought to be wiped out. Peterson uses this duo to advance his next rule that people ought to focus on their own lives before they criticize the world at large. He discusses the four approaches Tolstoy mentioned to deal with a bleak world of suffering. These include remaining ignorant of the problem, overindulging in pleasure, continuing to live a meaningless existence, or destroying life. While Peterson believes people can be motivated to such extremes as mass murder through their confrontation with evil and suffering, they can also choose to make good out of it. An example of the possibility of this is that some abused children grow up to be abusers, but most rise above abuse and stop the cycle. Peterson says, “That’s a testament to the genuine dominance of good over evil in the human heart.” Peterson urges his reader, in the face of personal and societal suffering, to look within and clean up their own life. He says to “Stop doing what you know to be wrong.” This determination to clean up one’s own life can help a person start to see the possibility for good in the world.

Rule seven is entitled, “Pursue What is Meaningful (Now What is Expedient.)” In this chapter, Peterson discusses the benefits of postponing gratification for the greater good. Small sacrifices can lead to small gains, but Peterson encourages looking for the greatest sacrifice that can cause the greatest gain. People’s sacrifices need to be accepted and seen. “Satan,” Peterson says, “embodies the refusal of sacrifice.” Jesus, Peterson then points out, refused to sacrifice truth despite the repeated temptation by Satan in the desert. Jesus, instead, chose the greater good. Jesus “refuses to dispense with His responsibility for the events of His own life.” Peterson believes it is important to prize what one can achieve in the future through sacrifice over the sacrifices that need to be made in order to get there.

## Searching for Truth and Understanding

In rule eight, Peterson urges truth over lies. He discusses a time when he had a landlord who was an alcoholic. The landlord would arrive at Peterson’s home in the middle of the night trying to sell Peterson items like toasters in order to get money to purchase more alcohol. Peterson and his wife realized they could not keep enabling the man, and when the man asked Peterson why he would not purchase his items, Peterson told him the truth. The man respected Peterson for telling the truth, and no serious altercation occurred. Peterson believes that the human mind has an immense capacity for self-deception, and people must be ruthless in their attempts to pursue what is actually true. He believes that if people become attentive to their words and actions, they will ultimately start to feel a disparity



## Listening is not the same thing as giving advice.”

when the two do not match, and this can be used to help a person actually discover what the truth really is. “If your life is not what it could be, try telling the truth.”

In rule nine, Peterson encourages readers to truly listen to others and to believe that others have something to teach. Listening, he says, is not the same thing as giving advice. Peterson writes about how people think through their words, and this process is important in helping people to understand the world. When counseling clients, Peterson, unlike Freudians, looks at his clients because he believes it is important for them to see his physical reactions even when he does not say anything. This is one way that a listener can give an honest opinion, and people need the opinions of other people at times.

One specific way that Peterson recommends people listen to each other is to summarize what the person has said after they speak before proceeding to share one’s own ideas. Then if the summary is inaccurate or deficient, the original speaker and the listener can work together until understanding occurs. This helps people truly listen. Sometimes it can take awhile to understand what a person is really saying because they are working it out themselves as they speak. True listening can lead to transformation.

In rule ten, Peterson tells his readers to be precise in their speech. This is because precision is necessary for growth. When people see objects, they see their usefulness. For example, when a person sees a car, they do not see all the different parts that make it run. Instead they see it as an object to get them from one place to another. This changes, however, when the car breaks down. Then this lack of understanding of the car leads one to feel the chaos of life. This is similar to how the victim of infidelity in a relationship feels. Once confronted with the truth, everything feels chaotic because the previously ordered world, including their own self, gets called into question. Peterson says that “Everything clarified and articulated becomes visible.” To see a problem clearly is to admit that it exists. Peterson says, “If you shirk the responsibility of confronting the unexpected even when it appears in manageable doses, reality itself will become unsustainably disorganized and chaotic.” Confronting problems with clear language can help people move forward.

### Power and Vulnerability

Peterson believes that children need to be able to do dangerous things, and he writes about this in rule eleven, and he writes about what he sees are the problems with a society that denigrates masculinity. He discusses the negative effects on young men when they are told that they are causing harm because they are the “beneficiaries of the patriarchy,” and he mentions

how his son told him that everyone knows girls do better in school. He explains how boys are falling behind and are making up less and less of a percentage of students in many higher education disciplines. This is not good for men, but it is also not good for women. Most women, he says, prefer to marry a man who is at least their equal in terms of education and success. When the percentage of men attaining those levels of success declines, successful women have fewer partners to choose from.

Peterson admits that any hierarchy is necessarily oppressive, but he does not believe that the patriarchal hierarchy was created solely by men to enhance the prospects of other men because women participated in such a system through the raising of boys who then participate in the system. Some men did and do use patriarchal systems in unjust attempts to gain and maintain power, but most men try to protect their wives and their children rather than overpower them. He believes that males toughen themselves and each other up, and that women want men who are strong.

Peterson’s twelfth and final rule is to “Pet a Cat When You Encounter One on the Street.” In this chapter, he discusses a life-altering, lifelong illness his daughter has and how he, as a parent, wished he could shield his children from vulnerability. People, he says, must learn to see what is beautiful despite the suffering that is around them. “They must see the good in Being.” As such, he encourages people to pet cats when they see them and watch little girls twirling as ballerinas in play. Such are the small joys in life.

While Peterson’s main points can be distilled into twelve rules, each of his chapters goes far beyond just the rules he advocates. Because he goes far beyond merely prescribing the course of actions he advises, he enables his readers to integrate these ideas and theories into life. They are a list of one man’s ideas, developed from the wisdom of the greats, and some views are more liberal and conservative than others. In the end, however, his advice goes beyond those distinctions as he is able to provide truly valuable guidance for how to work through life in a world of suffering and vulnerability.

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