

The Daily Laws

ALSO BY ROBERT GREENE

Mastery

The 50th Law (with 50 Cent)

The 33 Strategies of War (a Joost Elffers Production)

The Art of Seduction (a Joost Elffers Production)

The 48 Laws of Power (a Joost Elffers Production)

The Laws of Human Nature

The Daily Laws

*366 Meditations on Power,
Seduction, Mastery, Strategy,
and Human Nature*



ROBERT GREENE

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PROFILE BOOKS

First published in Great Britain in 2021 by
Profile Books Ltd
29 Cloth Fair
London
EC1A 7JQ
www.profilebooks.com

First published in the United States of America in 2021 by
Viking, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC

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Content taken from *The 48 Laws of Power*, *The Art of Seduction* and
The 33 Strategies of War © Robert Greene and Joost Elffers

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

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A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978 1 78816 853 3
Export edition ISBN 978 1 78816 854 0
eISBN 978 1 78283 874 6



To the memory of Brutus, the greatest cat who ever lived.

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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 delusionary 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

JANUARY 2

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