

THE INTERNATIONAL
BESTSELLING SERIES

THE RULES OF PEOPLE

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OF
PEOPLE

every time – they have busy lives, and lie-ins to find time for, and days when expressing themselves doesn't come easy – but they want you to see things their way, so by and large they'll explain themselves. But only if you listen and adapt to what they're saying. If they know that whatever they say you'll go back to your usual theme – banging on about how they need to work harder, or how the world doesn't owe them a living, or how they're too young to understand, or how manners cost nothing, or how early bedtimes are important – why should they bother even trying to explain themselves? Why make the effort if it's going to fall on deaf ears?

So do your very best to imagine what it must be like to be them, rather than what you would do if you were in their position yourself. Ask questions that show you really want to get your head round their perspective. You don't have to agree with everything they say, or abandon all the rules they don't care for. But understand why they struggle with them. They might have a point, you know. Maybe there's room for compromise, or keeping to one rule but allowing them a different freedom in exchange.

In the last Rule, the third parent didn't play the heavy-handed enforcer because they listened. They understood how a teenager might want to explore the world for themselves and not just take the adult view at face value. And they realised – because they listened – that their child had learnt for themselves that they didn't want to repeat the experience. That's how they knew they didn't need to berate or punish their child.

**LISTEN TO WHAT THEY'RE
TELLING YOU. THAT DOESN'T
MEAN PAUSING UNTIL THEY'VE
FINISHED TALKING**

No one likes saying sorry⁷

I had two friends who fell out with each other. It wasn't a big deal really, but it took them months to make up afterwards. For one simple reason: they each insisted that the other one apologised. And neither wanted to lose face, especially when they felt it was the other one who should apologise. Over time they were civil when they couldn't avoid seeing each other, and in the end things got back to normal – without the falling-out ever really being discussed – because actually they liked each other and wanted to be friends. They just wasted several months over the 'sorry' thing.

Look, it really doesn't matter whether the other person says sorry when there's a falling-out. What matters is how they feel and how they act, not the words they say. Words are cheap. Personally I don't like the practice of making kids say sorry to each other when they behave badly. It's meaningless. We should be helping our kids to *feel* sorry, not simply mouth the word.

One of my kids was once berated by a teacher for not saying sorry as if he meant it. He told me, 'It wasn't true! I apologised as sincerely as I would have done if I'd actually *been* sorry.' See? The teacher achieved nothing. Whereas if she'd sat my child down and explained why his behaviour had upset his friend, he might have felt genuinely repentant.

The word sorry isn't the important bit. When you fall out with a colleague, a friend, a partner, let them save face by making their

⁷ Unless they're English, of course, in which case they'll revel in saying sorry, but only for things that don't matter, like bumping into strangers (or being bumped into by strangers, which most English people will also apologise for). For everything that actually matters, however, this Rule applies to the English as much as everyone else

regret clear without being forced to go through the process of saying 'sorry', which can feel humiliating. Their genuine concern for you and desire to make things OK are surely more important than that one silly word.

If someone makes an effort to smile and say good morning when you come in to work, that's their way of letting you know that they don't like the unpleasantness between you. Maybe – at some point – you might need a friendly chat about what went wrong, why it upset you, how to avoid it happening again. But the friendly smile is there to let you know the other person is OK with that.

You know, maybe they feel that *they* were the injured party, and that your behaviour warranted an apology. But the smile lets you know they're prepared to overlook it. So maybe that smile says they're (genuinely) sorry, *and* they forgive you too. All you have to do is smile back, by way of apology and forgiveness yourself, and the whole thing is practically sorted with no need for anyone to say sorry. Alternatively you could both grunt 'sorry' at each other like naughty children and not actually feel sorry at all. Now which makes most sense to you?

Having said all that – if you recognise that you're out of order in any way, and you're big enough, you could just say sorry anyway.

**WHAT MATTERS IS HOW THEY
FEEL AND HOW THEY ACT, NOT
THE WORDS THEY SAY**

The world is full of rebels

A friend of mine at school was amazingly resilient when being shouted at by teachers. I have to say I didn't mind being told off as much as some, but this guy was so unaffected even I was impressed. I was at school with him for years and I remember hearing once that he'd been on the receiving end of a serious telling-off from a teacher in a lesson I wasn't in. So I asked him what it was all about. He told me he had no idea. I pointed out that he must have had some idea what the teacher was so angry about, if only from the words the teacher was shouting. He looked surprised and said, as though it should have been obvious, 'I have no idea what he was saying. I wasn't listening.' I wasn't expecting this, so I asked him to explain himself. His reply was this: 'I never listen when teachers are cross with me. If I listened, this little voice inside my head would be telling me to do exactly what the teacher is telling me *not* to. And that's never going to be a good idea. So I just don't listen. I can't do the opposite if I don't know what it is.'

I was delighted with the brilliance of his response, and on occasion I have used various adaptations of it since then. Because I'm like him – I also have a little voice in my head telling me to rebel against whatever I'm being told to do. Lots of us do, although I suspect we're still a minority. Some people, on being told what to do, will appreciate the guidance, or accept the directive, or follow the instruction. Others find it more difficult to do as we're told.

You need to identify the people around you who are secret rebels, because telling them what to do can backfire. If you're their boss, you might encounter quiet resistance, or a determination to do things their way and not yours. If you're their parent or partner or friend, things can get a lot shoutier than that.

You have two options here. The first is to adopt reverse psychology – this works especially well with kids. Tell them not to do the thing you actually want them to do, and you should both be

happy. Just don't let them know afterwards that you manipulated them or they will be furious (and the ploy will never work again).

The other way to handle a secret rebel is to avoid giving them any more instruction than necessary. Indeed, if you can, let them know that you're not trying to control or direct them in any way. Set the parameters you have to, and leave them to get on with it in their own style: 'The research needs to be completed by Friday week, and I particularly want to know where the competition are on this. I'm sure you can work out the best way to go about it, so just ask if you need anything from me.'

The rule with rebels is the less you give them to kick against, the less they'll rebel. More than that indeed – they'll appreciate being allowed to do things their own way.

TELLING THEM WHAT TO DO CAN BACKFIRE

Some weirdos are great people

We're all pretty conventional as a social species. We like what we know – of course we do. We feel safe with what we know. And that applies to people as much as situations. You can tell so much about someone from the way they dress, speak, behave, wear their hair. When you meet someone new, you can pretty much pigeon-hole them straight away. You can see what type they are.

So it's quite disconcerting when you meet someone you can't categorise. Someone who stands out as being different. That doesn't feel safe at all. In many ways, the easiest thing is to avoid them if at all possible. Especially if they come across as someone who not only looks odd, but also seems to follow different social rules – you know, they don't get the unspoken stuff about where to stand or when to speak or how to address people.

What's interesting is that it's all to do with fitting in with other people. If you go to places where everyone is like this, suddenly it becomes acceptable, the norm, expected. And then the weirdos aren't weirdos at all. I used to live in Glastonbury, in southwest England, which is where the hippies hang out. A friend of mine once described them as people who 'like rainbow colours, don't brush their hair, and wear all their clothes at once'. They also talk a lot about chakras and healing crystals and how there's no such thing as coincidence⁸ because everything is 'meant to be'. If you meet one of these people in Glastonbury – which you will – you don't even notice because they blend into the crowd. But if the same person turned up at an office furniture sales conference, you'd definitely mark them down as a weirdo. Same person, different scenario.

⁸ Which if you think about it would be the most extraordinary coincidence