

Craig's Rules For Life

I am not a god, a prophet, or divinely inspired. These rules are not in any sense supernatural in origin; they are the combined result of experience, reason, and my inherent moral sense. Following these rules will grant you no reward other than the knowledge that you will be the sort of person whom I (and, I believe, many others) can respect.

1. Interpret all rules in favor of kindness, generosity, and the well-being of others.
2. Interpret each rule in the context of all other rules. If the literal meaning of a rule ever conflicts with the intent apparent from the greater moral framework in which it resides, then it is your duty to follow the moral intent of the rule.
3. Do not mistreat or accept the mistreatment of yourself or others.
4. Cultivate relationships with people whom you can be emotionally honest with, and who demonstrate that they will be emotionally honest with you.
5. Love is powerful, but it is not self-sustaining; invest time and effort into relationships with the people you care about. Do not ask people to invest in you if you are not willing to reciprocate.
6. Acknowledge other peoples' feelings, and insist that others acknowledge yours.
7. Be forthright about your feelings with the people you are close to. If they are important to you, then you should tell them so. If you feel hurt by something they have done, then you must either disclose it in a timely fashion or else let it go; it is unfair to your loved ones to hoard little resentments in secret.
8. When you've been hurt, center the discussion on how you feel, not on your characterization of what the listener did wrong. The listener may have a very different interpretation of past events, and characterizing them in an unflattering fashion may provoke defensiveness. Your feelings, by contrast, are not up for debate.
9. Be honest with others; the truth is intrinsically valuable. However, when the truth is likely to be hurtful, you must deliver it gently. Offer a negative opinion only after offering a positive opinion to offset it, and even then do so in the form of focused, constructive criticism. Only disclose hurtful information or opinions in full if doing so is important to someone's well-being.
10. Be profligate and sincere with your apologies; it costs you nothing to express remorse for harming others or engendering negative feelings in them. Do not associate with people who express no remorse for doing the same to you.
11. Whenever possible, seek to make amends for harming another not just with words, but also with actions proportionate to the offense. If you have physically injured someone, for instance, then rush to secure medical aid; if you have damaged their property, then pay to replace it; if you have hurt their self-esteem, offer a sincere compliment. You must seek to make amends in this way even if the harm you caused was unintended.

12. Understand that others may choose not to accept your apologies or amendatory acts, or to forgive you for things you have done. It is their choice to make, and you must respect that choice even if it seems cruel or arbitrary.
13. Learn to let go of grudges. Although you should not tolerate mistreatment, harboring feelings of bitterness or resentment over a long period will poison your inner life.
14. Your time is limited; do not waste it on those who are unwilling to spend theirs on you.
15. Other peoples' time is limited, too—do not disrespect them by making them wait for you or canceling plans. If you must cancel plans, then provide advance notice, an apology, and an offer to reschedule: anything less falls afoul of the rule to make amends with actions proportionate to the offense.
16. Maintain communication with people you care about; if someone tries to contact you, it is cruel to not respond. Responding late is far better than never responding at all.
17. Understand that not everyone will reciprocate your desire to be close friends or lovers. Learn to recognize the signs of nonreciprocation in others; learn to appreciate it as an opportunity to free up time to find and invest in those who may be more appreciative of you.
18. Strive for balance in your affairs; it is true that money cannot buy happiness, but there is no joy in struggling to meet your basic needs either. You cannot help the world when you are struggling merely to exist.
19. Be willing to take reasonable risks with the understanding that they may not immediately pay off.
20. Do not shame yourself or others for failing to succeed in a task; sometimes, success or failure will be outside of your control. Whenever you fail to succeed at something, take the time to reflect upon what happened, learn from the experience, and move on, applying whatever you learned going forward.
21. Learn to envision far-off goals; develop the persistence necessary to achieve them even in the face of long stretches without encouragement or positive feedback. However, if a goal involves another person, then you must accept it at the outset if they are uninterested—take “no” for an answer.
22. Be unafraid to ask for help. Humans are communal creatures; we have always thrived by relying upon our communities, and there is no shame in doing so yourself.
23. Do not become attached to your initial reactions to information. Our minds arise from organs that evolved across thousands of generations of compromises, each maximizing survival and reproduction in dangerous environments with limited resources; what worked optimally on the prehistoric savanna may not work optimally now. Become aware of flaws in your own cognition and seek to compensate for them.

24. Always consider the context when evaluating others' actions. An act might be horrible under one set of circumstances, and yet that same act might be reasonable—even commendable—under a different set.
25. You do not need to have a definitive answer for every question; oftentimes, the only helpful or correct answer you can give is “I don’t know.”
26. Do not suffer yourself to remain ignorant. When you do not know a thing, set aside a reasonable amount of time to research the matter.
27. Be unafraid to ask for more information or clarification.
28. Be wary of conclusions reached without evidence or deliberation. You need not—and should not—accept any idea or position that lacks proper support.
29. Cite reliable sources when seeking to establish a fact.
30. Do not overstate the likelihood that your own conclusions are correct.
31. Do not accept studies from authors possessing direct monetary interests in the truth of their theories.
32. Learn to distinguish qualified experts whose conclusions you may rely upon from those who lay claim to unearned authority.
33. Understand, however, that when someone tells you about themselves or their own feelings, they are almost always providing you with the best possible evidence of those matters.
34. Detach your ego from disagreements with others by any means necessary. It is no victory to win an argument at the cost of your connection to a friend or loved one.
35. It is not always necessary to point out when others are wrong. Weigh the significance of the other person’s error against the potential consequences of an argument.
36. If you ever determine that you have spread false information, then it is your moral duty to admit your mistake, to correct misconceptions that may have arisen from your transmission, and—if you are able—to spread the truth in its stead. (When this rule conflicts with Rule 9, however, follow Rule 9.)
37. Understand that there is no such thing as a perfect person. Everyone is configured differently; what may seem like a weakness in some contexts may prove to be of incredible value in others, and vice versa. We evolved to live in communities, with each member contributing their strengths in order to make the whole greater; learn to recognize and value those individual differences, both in yourself and in others.
38. Learn to listen and to internalize others’ perspectives. This will help you to more persuasively share your own views; but just as importantly, it may cause you to reevaluate those views.

39. Do not mistake your own desires for the desires of others. Ask other people what they want instead of guessing.
40. Respect the people in your life as independent beings outside of your control. Persuasion may sometimes be called for, but duress will poison even the purest well.
41. Body language is a real mode of communication, but do not assume that you can read it inerrantly. When intoxicated or in doubt, always communicate verbally.
42. We are our bodies; if we do not have the final say over what happens to them, then we do not have the final say over our own selves. Always respect others' wishes concerning their own bodies.
43. Always seek consent before kissing someone or otherwise engaging in intimate touch with them. Anything other than clear, unambiguous assent is not consent. If a person lacks the capacity to give consent (for example: because they are too young, have substantially impaired cognition, or are unconscious), then you do not have consent regardless of what they say or do.
44. Take care of your body. As much as possible, you should strive to maintain a healthy diet, exercise regularly, and get adequate sleep; but also listen to licensed medical doctors. Take prescribed medications and get vaccinated. Neither good nutrition, nor a lean build, nor large muscles will immunize you from mental illness or infectious disease.
45. Cultivate hobbies and interests; develop playfulness and a sense of humor. It is not enough to be merely appealing to the eye.
46. You must never exploit an interpersonal gap in power (such as that which an employer possesses over their employee, or that which a landlord possesses over their tenant) to exact concessions outside the normal scope of your relationship. Ask only for that which you might reasonably expect to receive when bargaining on equal footing.
47. Rights arise in persons; persons are beings who presently possess the long-term capacity to perceive, feel, and remember. Weigh the needs of persons more heavily than whatever you might imagine the needs of non-persons to be.
48. Recognize that a legislature's priorities do not always align with what is ethical. It is far more ethical to disobey a cruel law than to obey it.
49. In interpersonal matters, be patient and strive to understand others; but in political matters, demand what is morally right with unyielding determination.
50. Do not draw conclusions about yourself or others based upon superficial categorizations. In both the interpersonal and political realms, you must never judge a person for aspects of their existence or identity that lie outside of their control, nor may you treat them worse than you do others on such a basis.
51. In the political realm, do not seek to deny other persons rights or benefits which you already possess; even if those benefits resulted in part from your own hard work, recognize that you did

not control every factor that led you to receive those benefits. You are not entitled to deny other persons a better life based upon superficial judgments about their own worth.

52. Do not mistake wealth or power for the fitness to hold either.
53. Do not mistake the way things are for the way things should be.
54. Appreciate that most things do not happen for a reason. Not every story has a happy ending. People experience pain, loss, or failure due to factors outside of their control every minute of every day. If there truly were a purpose behind such events, then it would have to be the purpose of a capricious or callous being. A more likely and palatable explanation is that human misfortune is simply a corpus of coincidences playing out against the backdrop of an indifferent universe; for this reason, it is up to us to band together and protect one another.
55. You are defined by what you choose to do. If your feelings do not match what is right, then choose to do what is right anyway; then, over time, righteousness will become a part of who you are.
56. You alone have the power to decide the meaning of your life. 60, 80, 100 years: all are barely perceptible when viewed against the expanse of eternity, a mere asymptote as close to nothing as a thing can be without failing to exist at all. And yet, even those who posit an eternal afterlife recognize that this infinitesimal sliver of a life is nonetheless incredibly precious. Do not depend upon the existence of an afterlife to somehow make up for this life. Proceed upon the assumption that this life is all you will ever have. Contribute positively to the lives of others; be a colorful and beloved figure in our rich human tapestry; make your existence matter by whatever morally sound means you choose.