

Dr. Phil's Ten Life Laws

Life Law #1: You either get it or you don't.

Strategy: Become one of those who gets it.

It's easy to tell these people apart. Those who "get it" understand how things work and have a strategy to create the results they want. Those who don't are stumbling along looking puzzled, and can be found complaining that they never seem to get a break.

You must do what it takes to accumulate enough knowledge to "get it." You need to operate with the information and skills that are necessary to win. Be prepared, tune in, find out how the game is played and play by the rules.

In designing a strategy and getting the information you need — about yourself, people you encounter, or situations — be careful from whom you accept input. Wrong thinking and misinformation can seal your fate before you even begin.

Life Law #2: You create your own experience.

Strategy: Acknowledge and accept accountability for your life.

Understand your role in creating results.

You cannot dodge responsibility for how and why your life is the way it is. If you don't like your job, you are accountable. If you are overweight, you are accountable. If you are not happy, you are accountable. You are creating the situations you are in and the emotions that flow from those situations.

Don't play the role of victim, or use past events to build excuses. It guarantees you no progress, no healing, and no victory. You will never fix a problem by blaming someone else. Whether the cards you've been dealt are good or bad, you're in charge of yourself now.

Every choice you make — including the thoughts you think — has consequences. When you choose the behavior or thought, you choose the consequences. If you choose to stay with a destructive partner, then you choose the consequences of pain and suffering. If you choose thoughts contaminated with anger and bitterness, then you will create an experience of alienation and hostility. When you start choosing the right behavior and thoughts — which will take a lot of discipline — you'll get the right consequences.

Life Law #3: People do what works.

Strategy: Identify the payoffs that drive your behavior and that of others.

Even the most destructive behaviors have a payoff. If you did not perceive the behavior in question to generate some value to you, you would not do it. If you want to stop behaving in a certain way, you've got to stop "paying yourself off" for doing it.

Find and control the payoffs, because you can't stop a behavior until you recognize what you are gaining from it. Payoffs can be as simple as money gained by going to work to psychological payoffs of acceptance, approval, praise, love or companionship. It is possible that you are feeding off unhealthy, addictive and imprisoning payoffs, such as self-punishment or distorted self-importance.

Be alert to the possibility that your behavior is controlled by fear of rejection. It's easier not to change. Try something new or put yourself on the line. Also consider if your need for immediate gratification creates an appetite for a small payoff now rather than a large payoff later.

Life Law #4: You cannot change what you do not acknowledge.

Strategy: Get real with yourself about life and everybody in it. Be truthful about what isn't working in your life. Stop making excuses and start making results.

If you're unwilling or unable to identify and consciously acknowledge your negative behaviors, characteristics or life patterns, then you will not change them. (In fact, they will only grow worse and become more entrenched in your life.) You've got to face it to replace it.

Acknowledgment means slapping yourself in the face with the brutal reality, admitting that you are getting payoffs for what you are doing, and giving yourself a no-kidding, bottom-line truthful confrontation. You cannot afford the luxury of lies, denial or defensiveness.

Where are you now? If you hope to have a winning life strategy, you have to be honest about where your life is right now. Your life is not too bad to fix and it's not too late to fix it. But be honest about what needs fixing. If you lie to yourself about any dimension of your life, an otherwise sound strategy will be compromised.

Life Law #5: Life rewards action.

Strategy: Make careful decisions and then pull the trigger. Learn that the world couldn't care less about thoughts without actions.

Talk is cheap. It's what you do that determines the script of your life. Translate your insights, understandings and awareness into purposeful, meaningful, constructive actions. They are of no value until then. Measure yourself and others based on results — not intentions or words.

Use any pain you have to propel you out of the situation you are in and to get you where you want to be. The same pain that burdens you now could be turned to your advantage. It may be the very motivation you need to change your life.

Decide that you are worth the risk of taking action, and that your dreams are not to be sold out. Know that putting yourself at risk may be scary, but it will be worth it. You must leave behind the comfortable and familiar if you are to move onward and upward.

Life Law #6: There is no reality, only perception.

Strategy: Identify the filters through which you view the world. Acknowledge your history without being controlled by it.

You know and experience this world only through the perceptions that you create. You have the ability to choose how you perceive any event in your life, and you exercise this power of choice in every circumstance, every day of your life. No matter what the situation, you choose your reaction, assigning meaning and value to an event.

We all view the world through individual filters, which influence the interpretations we give events, how we respond, and how we are responded to. Be aware of the factors that influence the way you see the world, so you can compensate for them and react against them. If you continue to view the world through a filter created by past events, then you are allowing your past to control and dictate both your present and your future.

Filters are made up of fixed beliefs, negative ideas that have become entrenched in your thinking. They are dangerous because if you treat them as fact, you will not seek, receive or process new information, which undermines your plans for change. If you "shake up" your belief system by challenging these views and testing their validity, the freshness of your perspective can be startling.

Life Law #7: Life is managed; it is not cured.

Strategy: Learn to take charge of your life and hold on. This is a long ride, and you are the driver every single day.

You are a life manager, and your objective is to actively manage your life in a way that generates high-quality results. You are your own most important resource for making your life work. Success is a moving target that must be tracked and continually pursued.

Effective life management means you need to require more of yourself in your grooming, self-control, emotional management, interaction with others, work performance, dealing with fear, and in every other category you can think of. You must approach this task with the most intense commitment, direction and urgency you can muster.

The key to managing your life is to have a strategy. If you have a clear-cut plan, and the courage, commitment and energy to execute that strategy, you can flourish. If you don't have a plan, you'll be a stepping stone for those who do. You can also help yourself as a life manager if you manage your expectations. If you don't require much of yourself, your life will be of poor quality. If you have unrealistic standards, then you are adding to your difficulties.

Life Law #8: We teach people how to treat us.

Strategy: Own, rather than complain about, how people treat you. Learn to renegotiate your relationships to have what you want.

You either teach people to treat you with dignity and respect, or you don't. This means you are partly responsible for the mistreatment that you get at the hands of someone else. You shape others' behavior when you teach them what they can get away with and what they cannot.

If the people in your life treat you in an undesirable way, figure out what you are doing to reinforce, elicit or allow that treatment. Identify the payoffs you may be giving someone in response to any negative behavior. For example, when people are aggressive, bossy or controlling — and then get their way — you have rewarded them for unacceptable behavior.

Because you are accountable, you can declare the relationship "reopened for negotiation" at any time you choose, and for as long as you choose. Even a pattern of relating that is 30 years old can be redefined. Before you reopen the negotiation, you must commit to do so from a position of strength and power, not fear and self-doubt.

Life Law #9: There is power in forgiveness.

Strategy: Open your eyes to what anger and resentment are doing to you. Take your power back from those who have hurt you.

Hate, anger and resentment are destructive, eating away at the heart and soul of the person who carries them. They are absolutely incompatible with your own peace, joy and relaxation. Ugly emotions change who you are and contaminate every relationship you have. They can also take a physical toll on your body, including sleep disturbance, headaches, back spasms, and even heart attacks.

Forgiveness sets you free from the bonds of hatred, anger and resentment. The only way to rise above the negatives of a relationship in which you were hurt is to take the moral high ground, and forgive the person who hurt you.

Forgiveness is not about another person who has transgressed against you; it is about you. Forgiveness is about doing whatever it takes to preserve the power to create your own emotional state. It is a gift to yourself and it frees you. You don't have to have the other person's cooperation, and they do not have to be sorry or admit the error of their ways. Do it for yourself.

Life Law #10: You have to name it before you can claim it.

Strategy: Get clear about what you want and take your turn.

Not knowing what you want — from your major life goals to your day-to-day desires — is not OK. The most you'll ever get is what you ask for. If you don't even know what it is that you want, then you can't even ask for it. You also won't even know if you get there!

By being specific in defining your goal, the choices you make along the way will be more goal-directed. You will recognize which behaviors and choices support your goals — and which do not. You will know when you are heading toward your goal, and when you are off track.

Be bold enough to reach for what will truly fill you up, without being unrealistic. Once you have the strength and resolve enough to believe that you deserve what it is that you want, then and only then will you be bold enough to step up and claim it. Remember that if you don't, someone else will.