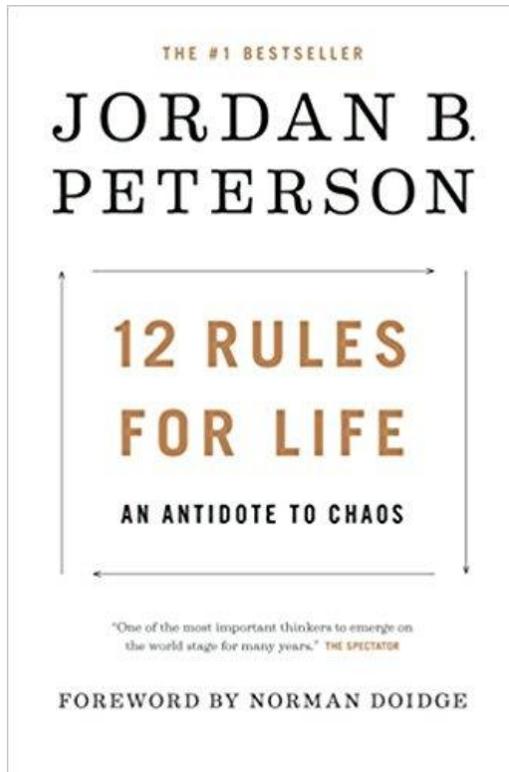


# 12 Rules for Life

By Rod Fraser

---



JORDAN PETERSON IS a professor at the University of Toronto, as well as a clinical psychologist. He first came to public attention for objecting to politically correct forms of speech. In particular, he didn't want to be coerced into using gender-neutral pronouns favoured by the LGBTQ community.

I watched his participation in the Senate hearings on Canada's Bill C-16, which he felt mandated the use of these pronouns. As I listened to him express his concerns on the importance of freedom of speech, I found him to be an interesting personality and a talented lecturer.

For the next couple of years—from time to time—I would listen to Peterson's YouTube videos on various topics and found them fascinating. So in early 2018, when his new book, *12 Rules for Life*, was published, I was eager to read it.

When the library informed me the book was available, I found its size (just over 400 pages) and smaller print annoying. I wondered why a book of this type—a self-help text—needed to be so long? Surely this subject could be adequately covered in 250 pages or less.

It may be Peterson lacks a writer's discipline to hone and trim his words. A loquacious style works well for him in lectures and YouTube videos. Why change? Terse and pithy writing may not be for him.

To make this point more clearly, the Swedish journalist, [Ivar Arpi](#), told Peterson he chose to listen to *12 Rules for Life* on audio CD, rather than read it. He suggested Peterson was a talented narrator, was a treat to listen to and he wasn't sure that magic was easily captured by reading the same material in

a book.

I tend to agree. Peterson has a folksy way of speaking, with long anecdotes and detailed explanations which are captivating. His speaking style encourages you to curl up in your chair, sip your coffee and enjoy his stories.

BE THAT AS it may, my job in this paper is to review Peterson's book, so here goes. *12 Rules for Life*, at its heart, is a book that asks people to take responsibility for themselves, to square their shoulders, take up the burdens of life and try to improve themselves, their families and communities over time.

It consists of twelve chapters, each mentioning a rule for life and then exploring in detail, with stories and explanations, the things that Peterson believes you should know about that rule. For example, Rule 6 states you should set your house in order before you criticize the world; and Rule 11 notes you shouldn't bother children when they are skateboarding. Quite so.

Rule 8 was a problem for me. It states you should tell the truth (or at least don't lie). On the face of it, it's good advice. But here's the thing: people lie every day, often for very good reasons.

A story to illustrate this point happened to me a

number of years ago. A client came to my office and told me a story about a woman he had been friends with for over thirty years. A friendship only, he emphasized. The next year he told me the same story with many more details. In the final telling—another year later—he told me the story with all the wonderful details of their thirty year affair.

Was the first telling of this story a lie? Was the second telling? I think not. I expect the man was assessing how candid he wished to be with me, and as his comfort level rose over time, he was more forthcoming. Here is my point with this: discussing Peterson's rule in all its complexity would warrant a book of 200 pages in itself. It just can't be a rule for general application.

In a way that is somewhat related to my above anecdote, people often complain that 'Uncle Fred' tells the same story over and over. While this may be true, it is possible it merely seems like the same story.

If you listen carefully and show some interest, 'Uncle Fred' may open up, be more forthcoming and provide more information. You may get to know him better. This, of course, is another one of Jordan Peterson's rules, a reminder to listen carefully. Rule 9 states you should assume the person you are listening to might know something you don't.

All in all, this is a fine book, possibly most helpful to young parents or millennials who have lost their focus and need some direction in their lives.

For those who would like to learn a little more about Jordan Peterson, I recommend you watch his Channel 4 News [interview](#) with Cathy Newman. This exchange is very good television and has become quite famous.

PERHAPS I WILL finish this review with a brief summary of what I know about Jordan Peterson. In my opinion, he is both an individualist and a traditionalist. He grew up in Fairview, Alberta, the son of a librarian (mother) and school-teacher (father).

Peterson studied at the University of Alberta for his undergraduate work and received his PhD in clinical psychology from McGill University in 1991. Then he taught at Harvard University, before moving back to Canada in 1998, to become a full professor at the University of Toronto.

After Peterson came to the public's attention in the months leading up to the Senate hearings mentioned earlier, he made a number of YouTube videos of his lectures and interviews.

I found him an inspired speaker. In one interview he explained that writing a book took a year's work (or more) and was usually read by only a few people.

On the other hand, making a video took very little time and often reached millions. Peterson feels this reality has largely redefined our world.

This observation might be expanded to say: Videos can also pave the way for successful books. *12 Rules for Life* is on best seller lists in the U.S. and U.K. Peterson is on a world tour to promote it. The royalties are likely to be substantial and long lived.

In a rather poignant observation in an interview with Wendy Mesley, Peterson admitted that he didn't know where his celebrity life might take him; he suspected it might end badly.

Nevertheless, I see him following his own advice in the years ahead. Knowing that life has its share of suffering and setbacks, he will straighten his shoulders, marshal his energies, pick up his banner and march up the hill to battle.

March 31, 2018