

WHARTON'S RULES

FOREWORD

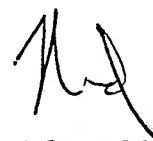
"Wharton's Rules" evolved over the last 45 years or so. Influences include memorizing C. S. Forester's "Captain Hornblower" as a boy, attending a military high school (the *University Military School*, Mobile, Alabama) graduating from the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, spending four years at sea on three ships, including serving as Commanding Officer, and a 27 year career at *The Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory*, a not-for-profit outfit whose job it was to tell the Navy the technical truth.

No claim is made for originality or completeness - or even consistency. Many rules are selected and adapted from other people who said them better. They overlap, are ambiguous (sometimes intentionally), conflict, and fail to address many important things. The best that can be said is that they may be useful as a "starter set" for people who will develop their own and better set of rules. The most important rule comes first followed by other general rules, some leadership and followship rules, and a small sample of tactical rules.

This expanded and interpreted set was written down partly for the fun of it, but mainly for whatever benefit it might provide to my sons in their professional careers.

Those who know me will be quick to note that I didn't always follow my own rules, which is true. Sometimes I used a rule they didn't know about. Not everything is included here and not all the rules included here were posted in my office. Sometimes I tried and failed, and sometimes I used the wrong rule.

A concern is that by writing this down I may have taken myself too seriously. If so, be sure you don't.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the initials 'M.A.' or similar, written in a cursive style.

Seal Cove, Maine, 1992

WHARTON'S RULES

EXPANDED AND INTERPRETED

WHARTON'S RULES

1. **Do the Right Thing.**
2. **The Truth Must be Told, But Tact is Allowed.**
3. **There is Always a Way.**
4. **The World is Not Fair.**
5. **Keep Your Sense of Humor.**
6. **It is Better to Ignore Some Things.**
7. **Conceptual Thinking is Essential, Entertaining and much Easier than Implementation. Unfortunately, Only Implemented Ideas Pay Off.**
8. **Find the Right People and Trust Them, But Check Up Every Once in a While.**
9. **Use Your Initiative. Mistakes are Allowed.**
10. **Grow Subordinates As Fast As You Can.**
11. **Solve Your Own Problems, and Train Subordinates to Solve Theirs.**
12. **If the Boss is Making a Mistake, You Are Obligated To Tell Him So, but Not Necessarily in Public.**
13. **If Your Boss Is No Good, Get A New One.**
14. **You Can Spot the Bureaucrat: He's the One Who Doesn't Really Care.**
15. **It is Nearly Impossible to Save Other People from Themselves.**
16. **Go See What Is Going On.**
17. **Don't Decide Until You Have To, But Decide Then.**
18. **Time is of the Essence in Personnel Matters.**
19. **Group Supervisors Don't Get To Have Morale.**
20. **Organization Is Not Architecture. It Is Deployment Of Resources.**
21. **Rewards and Punishment Must Flow Through the Chain of Command.**
22. **Never Lose Your Temper, Except On Purpose.**
23. **If a Meeting is Proceeding to the Result you Prefer, or if it is Totally Beyond Redemption, Keep Your Mouth Shut.**
24. **Let Your Opponent Underestimate You.**
25. **Never Give Your Opponent a Clear Shot.**
26. **Leave Your Opponent a Way Out.**

WHARTON'S RULES

1. Do the Right Thing.

This is the most important rule, which is why it is first.

The two important words are "do" and "right".

Many problems require an action, and the sooner you act, the better.

"Right" is harder. The obvious meaning is "moral", but it is not always clear what that is. Even when it is clear, we sometimes don't do it. Try hard.

When it isn't clear, the thing to do is run it through your brain over and over and over, however many times it takes, until it *does* become clear. Lying awake at night, driving, exercising, and staring out the window are good times for this process.

The "right" thing can also be the course of action which solves several complicated problems at once. The same rerun procedure applies.

"Do not think dishonestly" - Miyamoto Musashi (a legendary Samuri)

2. The Truth Must be Told, But Tact is Allowed.

Sometimes it is hard to know true from false, but if it's true it must be dealt with, whether you like it or not, and whether others like it or not.

Often the truth can be more effectively and less painfully dealt with by exercising some care in the way in which it is stated or the time, place, context, manner, spokesperson or form of transmission. Avoid public embarrassment of the person who must change a previously held position, particularly if he is already threatened, insecure or provoked. Avoid the need for a real-time response by a person who will have to go off and convince others before taking a needed action.

3. There Is Always a Way.

This is not a rose-hued wish, but rather an argument that if you are tough minded enough, flexible enough, realistic enough, plan enough, consider enough alternatives, work hard enough, and exercise enough energy and self discipline, you can do what you set out to do. Play out every card you have in an orderly fashion. The tougher the problem, or higher the goal, the more important this rule is.

Do not give up.

"I will find a way or make one." Robert E. Peary

"Never give a inch." A tough old guy in Kesey's "Sometimes a Great Notion". (I think).

4. The World is Not Fair.

Do not expect other people or the world in general to play by the rules or to be fair. This is especially true in the short run and in local circumstances.

In the long run, you will probably get what you deserve, whether you like it or not.

5. Keep Your Sense of Humor.

This really means two things. First, you should not take yourself too seriously. Try to maintain a perspective which balances the importance of things to you and to other people and avoids a feeling of self importance. Always examine things from the other person's perspective. Second, recognize that both work and life ought to be fun, at least sometimes. If this isn't true, you need to take some steps to fix it. Start with learning to view "problems" as "challenges".

"Goody, Goody - Monday morning and another week in which to excel!"
U.S. Naval Academy saying.

6. It is Better to Ignore Some Things.

There are many applications. Some examples are:

- You don't have to fight about it every time someone does something you don't like.
- You don't have to be distraught every time someone insults or ignores you.
- Some problems will go away if you ignore them. Pick carefully.
- Some people will go away if you ignore them.
- Some problems have higher priority than others.
- Sometimes a subordinate will step up and solve a problem - and thereby grow in confidence, prestige and skill. This cannot happen if you jump in and solve it.
- Sometimes an enemy, subordinate, or senior will realize that they have done something dumb, and quietly withdraw.
- Sometimes people are posturing, blustering, or bluffing.
- Sometimes responding to a stupidity dignifies it.

As a junior ensign on a cruiser, I dutifully wrote down in my little notebook the overwhelming myriad of things I was expected to get done. On several occasions my notebook (and its long list) got lost. To my astonishment nothing happened, mainly because I *had* done the high priority things.

7. Conceptual Thinking is Essential, Entertaining, and much Easier than Implementation. Unfortunately, Only Implemented Ideas Pay Off.

Every enterprise needs new ideas, concepts, innovation, and fresh approaches. In fact, the enterprise without innovation will ultimately fail. Thinking up new ideas is fun. One reason it is fun is that it carries no responsibility for merit or even feasibility in solving an actual problem or meeting a real need. In fact, the worst kind of fuzzy thinker is hard to distinguish from the true genius at this stage.

The hard parts are selecting and combining ideas, (some of which may be old ones) to solve the problem actually at hand, and the long frustrating process of garnering resources to implement the solution, including overcoming unexpected difficulties.

It's not until the hard parts are done that you have something with utility.

Note the importance of verbal and written communications in the process of selection and implementation. If the inventor cannot describe it, or if the inventor or his champion cannot convince those in control of resources that they should be spent implementing this particular idea, then the invention may as well not have been born. This should be explained in undergraduate school (and the necessary communication skills taught), but it isn't.

One of my favorite New Yorker cartoons shows the brash young person talking to the experienced person. The caption says, "I'll feed you the new ideas J.B., and you just carry them out!"

8. Find the Right People and Trust Them, But Check Up Every Once in a While.

The key to managerial or supervisory success is not what you can do personally, but what the people who work for you can do. This being the case, your ability to select people, put them in the right place, train and grow them and motivate them will determine your success, theirs, and the organization's.

You have to be able to trust them because they must do things on their own.

You must check up - infrequently but unexpectedly - not so much because they may make mistakes, but because you may have picked the wrong people or put them in the wrong place. A painful and dangerous example might be sending a bright, self-motivated, fast growing but inexperienced person into a situation which is over his head resulting in serious damage to his self confidence and standing in the community. Another would be appointing a supervisor who creates an atmosphere inimical to the highest possible performance and growth of his subordinates. These are serious mistakes on your part.

9. Use Your Initiative. Mistakes are Allowed.

This is an imperative to your subordinates. Initiative on their part is essential, but can only exist if you accept the unpleasant consequences of their mistakes. If you can't do it, you don't deserve subordinates with initiative.

You must absorb all the heat from above, but pass all praise and rewards down the chain.

If a subordinate requires correction for a serious mistake or too many mistakes, do so in a timely fashion, but privately and as a matter between the two of you.

Shiphandling provides a good example. A confident and capable Skipper will let others conn the ship (under close supervision) and thus learn how. An apprehensive and inept Skipper cannot let others conn the ship, partly for fear of embarrassment, but mostly because he cannot discern when real danger arises and lacks the ability to take exactly the right corrective measures. There are analogues in Law and Engineering.

10. Grow Subordinates As Fast As You Can.

You must constantly and explicitly help your subordinates grow as fast as possible. You must do this even if you end up with too many good people for your organization to use, and thus lose some. You must do this even if they get more recognition and visibility than you do, or even if one of them becomes a competitor for your job. You must do it as invisibly as possible, and therefore expect no credit from subordinates or seniors.

This is an absolute rule because alternatives involve inhibiting growth of subordinates which is an unforgivable wrong.

Having a qualified deputy, alternate or replacement is important for the organization and for you if you become unavailable or want to do something else. All leaders ought to start identifying and training their replacements as soon as they themselves are appointed.

11. Solve Your Own Problems, and Train Subordinates to Solve Theirs.

If you have a problem, face it and solve it. (See "It is Best to Ignore Some Things".) Don't expect your boss, the personnel department or one of your subordinates to solve it for you. Inform your boss promptly. If you don't, both of you are vulnerable to being blindsided.

Subordinates must know that they are expected to keep you informed of their problems. They must also know that your usual response will be "Well, what are you going to do about it?" Not "Here is what you should do." This has to be done with care for two reasons. First, the subordinate may really need your help. Second, you don't want the subordinate to wait until he has worked out a complete solution before he tells you about a problem.

"... I don't want you fellows sitting around asking me what to do. I want you to tell me what to do." General George C. Marshall

12. If the Boss is Making a Mistake, You Are Obligated To Tell Him So, but Not Necessarily in Public.

If your boss is about to do the wrong thing, find a private opportunity to tell him and to explain why it is wrong. If he is unable or unwilling to encourage (or at least accept) this, then you need a new boss. If you lack the courage to do this, you are at fault.

After having heard you out, he may go ahead and do it anyway, possibly for reasons of which you are not aware. You owe him your loyal support even though you may have advised against a particular action, except in a case of serious moral wrong. In that case you need a new boss yesterday or earlier.

13. If Your Boss Is No Good, Get A New One.

If you come to the final and inescapable conclusion that your present boss is no good, you absolutely must get a new one. This is because you really can't be loyal to him, and you must if you are going to continue to work for him. There are more ways than you might think to do this. Some are:

- Reform your present boss and make him into a new one.
- Find a new one in your present organization.
- Move to a different organization.
- If he's incompetent or done something really bad, get him fired or moved, or reduce his responsibility.
- Ignore him and become your own boss.
- Get him a good assistant or deputy (maybe you).
- Replace him yourself.
- Ignore or disobey wrongful directives.

These are oversimplified and may not apply in any given circumstance. A great deal of care and discretion are required, and principles of fairness, honesty, due process, and loyalty must be adhered to.

A corollary is that senior management is obligated to replace bad managers or supervisors no matter how painful this is. To do otherwise permits enormous hidden damage to the operations and productivity of the organization and to the morale and development of the people being managed or supervised.

14. You Can Spot the Bureaucrat: He's the One Who Doesn't Really Care.

This rule divides the people in the organization into two sets: those trying to get the job done and those concerned primarily with their own status or position. I call the second set "bureaucrats". They need to be enlightened.

You spot them by their actions. Do they actually help the workers and leaders get things done, or do they act to perpetuate their authority and positions? Are they overly concerned with rules and procedures and approvals? Do they respond in a hurry when it is necessary? Will they put in extra effort when needed? Do they withhold information as a means of increasing their power? Are they overly concerned with covering their rears and being in a position to blame others, especially on paper, if something goes wrong? Their disguises are clever and varied but completely transparent once you learn to look clearly at whether they are trying to get the job done or only trying to enhance their future.

Some cautions: not all rules, approvals and procedures are bad. Many have roots in quality control, accountability, and in preventing disastrous mistakes. Also, many dedicated bureaucrats perform useful functions for the organization, but only if properly supervised.

Assess your own actions. Are you a bureaucrat?

15. It is Nearly Impossible to Save Other People from Themselves.

When a subordinate, senior, enemy or friend makes the same kind of mistake repeatedly, it is more likely due to their internal personality factors than lack of judgement, perceptiveness or intelligence.

That is, if they're overbearing, they're probably afraid of people. If they have trouble sticking to unpopular decisions, they may have an excessive need to be liked. For details, study psychology. The point is that logic and discussion aren't very effective. It is better to accept their frailties as part of your environment and deal with them on a pragmatic basis without anguishing over it.

If you understand what is really driving or motivating a person, you can better influence him, avoid trigger situations, or at least know what to expect.

16. Go See What Is Going On.

In the Navy it was called "visiting the spaces" which meant that several times a day an officer visited all the compartments for which he had responsibility, no matter how noisy, hot, cold, dirty or inaccessible they were. It was also useful to do so on a random schedule. This was very helpful for morale, but the most important benefit was that you knew what was really going on. In some civilian management textbook (maybe Drucker?) it is called "management by wandering about".

A minor variant is going to the other person's office when you need to talk to him. You not only get first-hand knowledge of his shop, but you have the initiative and can easily do whatever needs to be done. Best of all you can leave when you get bored which isn't true if he's in your office.

There is absolutely no substitute for first-hand knowledge of what the problem is and what the people are doing and thinking.

The foreman should take into account the abilities and limitations of his men, circulating among them and asking nothing unreasonable. He should know their morale and spirit, and encourage them when necessary." Miyamoto Musashi

17. Don't Decide Until You Have To, But Decide Then.

Naval officers are taught that "decisiveness" is a valuable trait. On the other hand, it is human nature to procrastinate when you don't know what to do. If you decide too quickly (are too "decisive") you risk an unnecessary mistake because you don't yet have all the facts, haven't thought about it enough or haven't talked to the right people about it. Talking to the right people is especially important, but there are two cases in which special wariness is required. The first is when advice conflicts with your instincts, and the second is when everybody tells you just exactly what you want to hear.

If you wait too long, external events or other people will decide for you, and you fail as a leader. Always ask yourself, "Is this the right time for this decision, and if not, what is?" Make the timing of a decision a separate explicit choice, not an accident.

18. Time is of the Essence in Personnel Matters.

Personnel matters involve very strong feelings of anger, anxiety, self confidence, frustration, etc. which if unaddressed, quickly affect people, their work and family members.

Solve problems and take actions as quickly as you prudently can. If action cannot be taken quickly, find a way to stabilize the situation until it can. A few words, or just listening, can help.

19. Group Supervisors Don't Get To Have Morale.

A leader needs to be self motivated and selfless. He should look after the morale of those he leads but should have the ability to function without anyone else looking after his morale.

A few examples are:

- Assume responsibility for subordinate's mistakes, but pass on to them any credit for their successes.
- Assume responsibility for unpopular orders from above (or don't pass them on).
- Never ask a subordinate to do something you wouldn't do. Save the nastiest assignments for yourself.
- Never get discouraged or give up.
- Never gripe or complain about top level management or policies.
- Never lose your temper (except on purpose). See "Never Lose Your Temper".

"Gentlemen, it is my experience an enlisted man may have a morale problem. An officer is expected to take care of his own morale."
General George C. Marshall

20. Organization Is Not Architecture. It Is Deployment Of Resources.

An enterprise needs to be organized to function. The basic form of the organization is determined by its job, be it manufacturing galvanized nails, giving advice, or destroying enemy ships.

There are never enough good leaders, and good leaders are needed to make the organization succeed.

Given the required basic form, the *details* of an organizational structure must be determined by the best possible deployment of the leadership resources available, considering character, courage, experience, technical skills, leadership skills, and other such matters.

Never let anything interfere with application of the best leaders to the most important needs.

Organizations need to be simple enough for participants and customers to understand. Too many "assistants" and "staffers" are a symptom of lack of clear thinking and courage on the part of the top supervisor.

21. Rewards and Punishment Must Flow Through the Chain of Command.

Bypasses and shunts through the personnel department, staff personnel, etc. destroy the integrity of downward and upward loyalty, responsibility, and accountability that allow the organization to function.

Exceptions to this rule should occur only for specific cases where there is a clear-cut reason why the chain of command cannot be used.

22. Never Lose Your Temper, Except On Purpose.

This is an impossible rule.

Nevertheless, to the extent you can keep your cool when others lose theirs, you can prevail when you would have failed because you can think more clearly and avoid doing or saying dumb things. Leave the dumb statements or actions to others.

Sometimes you can intimidate others with real or self-generated anger, but it is really not much fun. The inverse (provoking the other person so that they lose their temper) can also be effective, but isn't much fun either.

Be prepared for those who try to provoke you into doing something dumb.

23. If a Meeting is Proceeding to the Result you Prefer, or if it is Totally Beyond Redemption, Keep Your Mouth Shut.

A "meeting" may mean a discussion, negotiation, a conflict, argument, or almost any process leading to a decision or event. Do your homework. Go in with clear objectives and a plan for the meeting. Get there on time, or early. Sit where you can watch others and can seize the floor quickly if you have to.

If the meeting is going where you want, keep your mouth shut as a matter of conservation of resources. That is, spend no energy, credibility or prestige, save additional arguments for later (if needed) and generally take no risks and gain no credit for the result. It is usually just fine for others to get the credit, especially if it allows them to gain needed self confidence and prestige.

If there is clearly no possibility of getting what you want, then keep your mouth shut for exactly the same reasons. One exception to this is when an important moral question is involved, in which case you must fight, even if you know you're going to both lose and get hurt. In most ordinary business or organizational matters though, save your resources to spend in that linear region where doing so can both make the difference and is really required.

24. Let Your Opponent Underestimate You.

If he underestimates you he will be unprepared, and it is easier to do him in.

It also saves you a lot of time and energy trying to look and act as if you are better than you really are.

25. Never Give Your Opponent a Clear Shot.

If you give him a clear shot, he will do you in.

When you are expecting a shot (probably because you did something dumb) do something to mitigate it. Avoid the confrontation, attack first, admit your mistake early, create an atmosphere where it is awkward for him to attack, tell a joke, set him up, become hard of hearing, ignore him, or embarrass him.

The most effective tactic by far is to do the right thing in the first place. As the newspaper said, "The best way to cure a hangover is not to drink too much the night before." See "Do The Right Thing".

26. Leave Your Opponent a Way Out.

There are two reasons. First, you may have to work with him in the future. Second, he will fight desperately if he is cornered and is thus harder to defeat.

This rule doesn't apply if you need to annihilate an opponent. In that case follow Musashi's rule. "Whenever you cross swords with an enemy you must not think of cutting him either strongly or weakly; just think of cutting and killing him. Be intent solely on killing the enemy."

HELPFUL HINTS

- Always draw a diagram so it will fit on a viewgraph.
- Always use pencils, pens and paper which will photocopy.
- Assume confidential and personal memos and remarks will be made public.
- Always read what someone gives you to sign before doing so, twice.
- Make a photocopy before you mail it off.
- Analyze the distribution list of other people's memos and letters.
- Read important outgoing letters carefully. They always have mistakes. If you find a mistake, look for another one.
- Place your phone calls yourself.
- Never give out any personal information about anyone in the organization (name, address, phone number, etc.).
- Always pay by check.
- Always deal with bureaucracies in writing and keep a copy. If forced to deal verbally, get the name of anyone who promises you anything. Keep notes.
- Make your own meeting notes, with date and attendees.
- Listen to side comments and remarks as the meeting breaks up. You will learn a lot:
- Never discuss sensitive matters by telephone or in elevators, heads, airplanes or other places where you can be overheard by people you don't know.
- Don't respond to telephone sales pitches or mail that begins "You have positively won one of the following prizes ..."