



# **RULES YOU MIGHT HAVE MISSED: FOR ADULTS WITH ASD**

**WRITTEN BY  
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*A thought before you start reading. Change may seem scary, but doesn't staying the same sound so much worse?*

# Introduction

If you are reading this, you are or know an adult with autism spectrum disorder also known as ASD. This book should focus mostly on the golden rules that most people use for communication, but those with ASD might not have been told or figured out. This guide is not meant to explain all of communication and all the areas in which there are context specific rules. Examples of this include the appropriate behavior when going to a Greek wedding or what to do when you have no idea which fork is the salad fork. They are rules of general conversations and situations. This book will also be a discussion on how to figure out what new rules there might be in front of you. Before we get too far, I only feel it's fair to share how I figured out these rules and to tell you a little about myself.

My name is Zach, and I have ASD. Now that we have gotten past the AA like introduction, let me tell you what that means to me. It means that I did not know all the rules and throughout my life I have been punished for missing them or missing out on an opportunity to do something. This is not saying woe is me. The only way you learn is to make mistakes and reflect on them. One of my better mistakes was I was in the library, and I was reading some textbook for a college course. An attractive young woman came up and asked me to help her find a textbook. I am also dyslexic and truly hate the duodecimal system. I responded to her with “I am sorry I am dyslexic and cannot.”. I went on reading for a class, and it took me about two days to go “wait a moment.”. While I am sure that strangers have long forgotten that moment, I will always laugh about it. This text’s purpose is to explore those “wait a moment” times and to laugh and learn. Along with a lifetime of comical experiences, I decided to study psychology and got a master’s in rehabilitation counseling. I bring that up because part of humor to all this is

that I have turned each moment into a case study. I am not sure what is more ASD like than to go “yah yah emotions, but science?”. Without further ado let’s get to the rules.

## The Rules

1. Communication is about making predictable models.
2. No does not always mean no and yes does not always mean yes. Tonality, body language and history with the person are more important than words.
3. Location, location, location.
4. You have to be willing to let people be your friends.
5. Not everything is surface level and not everything is deep.
6. Communication goes beyond facts and taps into emotions.
7. Everyone is stupid in some way. Accepting that means we are too. This lets us explore the world.
8. Rules 1-7 may be ignored at any point and time for any reason.
9. There are basics in a conversation that need to be covered and often are forgotten when anxious.
10. Life is very short and often full of things we shall never understand.

Each of the following rules shall be broken into important lessons and what one can do with them. The formation of each section shall be the meaning of the rule, what proves the point wrong and what you could use from it. If at any point you go “What I experienced is nothing like that.” please keep in mind the old adage your mileage may vary!

# 1. Communication is about making predictable models.

We make models and we use them to predict how things will go. If you have ASD and experience social anxiety, this is it. It is awesome, right? It allows so many amazing things to occur like self-doubt, isolation, and general misery. Now if you have an ASD and read that literally let me introduce you to the first of many models, sarcasm. Sarcasm is easily identified by asking the question “does this make sense in reverse?”. So is self-doubt, isolation and misery awesome? If it’s not then sarcasm, if yes then masochism? This leads to the notion of a joke. A joke can traditionally be identified by looking at something absurd and acting as if it’s not. The normies or those I shall refer to as the average person are not told these are models but often figure that out. As an ASD person, it may seem like they were given a memo. I am here to say they were not. They are just more naturally skilled at understanding abstract social models. These models offer a way for people to talk. So, if you have friends who use other joke styles or sarcasm in other ways, it means they have figured out how to communicate with it. These models are fluid and will change with time. A great example is the greeting “Hi, how are you?.” It is no longer a question but more a polite way to acknowledge another. It is also worthy to point out that jargon and vernacular are also examples of models of communication. The lawyers sound like lawyers, and when they don’t it bothers some in their profession. These models mostly agree to allow us to communicate in a way that works.

## This rule working:

We all agree to the meaning of most words in the idea we shall understand each other. Jargon vs. vernacular helps us identify people and our expectations of the conversation. If I were to say that I have an understanding of psychology, using a behavioral philosophy that is derived from B. F. Skinner that then tumbles into cognitive behavioral psychology you would assume I

am a counselor and will speak in a manner that reflects education. If I were to say I learned how to make a joke by laughing at myself, you could say that I am wise or have depression. See how it differs and changes the expectations of what comes next? That is an example of making a model and then making a prediction to add normality and understanding. People dislike when things are not easily understood; it can cause fear, distrust or dissociation.

### This rule not working:

Model making does not work well when the understanding of the underpinning of the subject is missing. A great example of this is a lot of people know how to drive a car but not how it works. Putting it in drive allows it to go forward, but few understand the gear shifting mechanism, torque or the thermodynamics necessary for fuel to work. Making models of communication does not work when one makes poor models. It is a skill that is learned. Unlearning bad models can be quite hard. If you struggle with talking to strangers and assume all strangers are unfriendly, it could be that they are unfriendly due to your actions. A great example is online dating. If you struggle to connect but you start your message with a request for tits and a dick pic, it might be you are the issue. I prefer to send dik-dik pics. Very few dislike the dik-dik which is a small deerlike creature. If you have never seen one spell the name correctly in google and have some fun. Model making fails when you make bad models or predict failure and do not explore how to correct it.

### The takeaway from the rule:

Model making allows for many things. It allows us to predict the future and predict how a conversation will go. Word choice allows you to make predictions about the person; topic allows you to predict what may come next and patterns allow you to make predictions. These rules are always in flux, so it becomes easy to get lost. This is where the scientific model comes into play.

Try something and if it fails, attempt to figure out why it failed, consult with others and repeat to see if it was indeed the problem when necessary. Oppositely, you could have success, and you should do the same things: consult, repeat and explore. The terms for this aside from science are meta-cognition and social support. Meta-cognition is thinking about how you think, and social supports are the people you interact with that can aid you. Now not all friends are good friends, so you will have to see who will be of use in this regard and not all conversations are for all people. There are a few basic rules to this, and they are as follows:

- Friends are good for testing models involving romance or involve questions that are not horribly sensitive. To clarify romantic models could include things such as when gifts are appropriate or testing how a flirtatious line may be taken. It should be made clear that you are testing to see how it would work, not flirting with them if you are not.
- Family is good for models that are highly personal, and one should avoid questions of romance. To add additional clarity questions about good relationships are to be expected, pickup lines and are the aspects to be avoided.
- Mentors, teachers, and the like are good for subjects that are related to jargon or specific domains related to things like research or occupation.



- Stanger are just that, strange and make great test subjects for figuring out new things. Odds are you will not see them again if you are just passing by an area.

Before anyone goes telling an Institutional Review Board or IRB that they did not agree to be subject to experiments, I welcome you to social learning. We are always subjects and experimenters. Now again, these rules are not always true and different people have different relationships. We make models and we experiment with models. So, if you struggle with communication, it might be time to get out a piece of paper and start laying out a map of what occurred, what constants you can predict and then see if other people agree with your model. If you have no friends, you may want to explore it with a psychologist, counselor or other mental health professional. Amusingly, a good friend is like a good counselor; they will tell you when it clearly won't work.

## 2. No does not always mean no and yes does not always mean yes. Tonality, body language and history with the person mean more.

I am sure we have all heard that no means no. It reflects the culture that assumes people will pressure people into things they do not want. On face level, it is a very well-meaning sentiment. Comically, it's as untrue as any oversimplified statement. A stern no is always no, a playful no can be a yes, an angry yes can be no. Is the safe word pineapple? All that is to say, tone is important. Tone and elongation of words can help identify the meaning behind them. It turns out that words mean more than just their literal interpretation. Body language can help reflect people's meaning. I think a great example of this is the smirk. It has many meanings in conversations, it can be amusement, wryness, anger, confidence, just to name a few ways people use it. Amusingly, those who knew me when I played tabletop games assumed when I smirked, I had an evil plan. This leads to the history you have with the person; they were used to me having a thought that would be evil after a smirk and paired the two.

### This rule working:

Thinking of romantic relationships is a good place to look at how tone, body language and history are important. For those who have been in a relationship more than a few moments, they have stumbled into the “no, don't do that” being an agreement to do it. This can be when something is silly, playful and perhaps not the best choice at the moment but something that is agreed to. So, if you ever had a dumb thought, your partner said “noooo” then smiled at you, you have discovered the “no meaning yes”. On the opposite end you have said something dumb and there is a sharp change of tonality, a change in body language and a threat of “I dare you”. You have stumbled upon the “yes being a no”. All of this requires a history with the person you

are interacting with to understand the implied meanings. It may feel like people have secret languages, and that you don't understand them. Well, sometimes they do, and that history with them helps explain tonality and body language.

### This rule not working:

If you have limited history or the person is from a different culture, background or has life experiences that may flavor their view of the world this rule does not work. Those who experience traumatic things may take everything seriously and thus no will always mean no. On the flip side, there are veterans who live off dark humor and coffee. If you are not familiar with veteran humor, I would highly recommend one youtubeing it, they are a wild bunch. Much like rule one, this rule does not work when you do not know the person well or as well as you think. People do hide things and the more sensitive the topic the more likely they are to hide things. To repeat no can, and very often does mean no, but does not have to.

### The takeaway from the rule:

You should learn about people you talk to and start to make models of them in your head. It will teach you what you can do to make them laugh or upset them. It allows you to define the meaning they have to you and how you should interact with them. If you can make a good model of the person in your head, you can have expectations, and that is how you learn what words mean to them, what their body language means and what their tone is hiding. If you are awful at all this, asking bluntly is step number one. If the person is worth your time, they will help you understand them.

### 3. Location, location, location.

Location is an independent aspect in the model of communication. Location can turn vernacular into jargon; it can change the appropriateness of the conversation in its head; it can change the impact of a person's history. Location is a pain to account for because it is so complex. Due to its complexity, it can also be used to one's advantage. A noteworthy example of location's impact is on where only underpants is an acceptable attire. In the bedroom it's good. In the store it's bad. In the rave club it's good. As swimwear it's confusing but acceptable. To determine all this a model had to be made. People's reactions are interpreted and thus communication has occurred. Often this is body language unless a crime is committed when looking at attire. Another example is when it is ok to geek out over a topic. Let's use anime as an example. College can be a good place. At church it's probably not. At anime conventions it's very good. At sports bars it's probably not. This is determined by who makes up the people at said location. "Hail Satan" would be poorly received by those who partake in church but would be comical to those at stores like Hot Topic or Spencer's. Jargon is good when in the office and people can understand it and less so when at the bar at 1 a.m. and words are barely understandable. Location also impacts what is appropriate to talk about in terms of sensitivity of the topic. Some things are meant to be talked about in private. Those things typically hold a more personal nature and may often be things that may embarrass others. If you are unsure if a topic is ok, reflect on the nature of the location. If everyone is talking about one subject, say profession, then, bringing up romantic topics may not be best. If the location allows other people to hear the conversation it might be best to ask to discuss anything that might be of question. Location impacts so many parts of communication.

## This rule working:

You can use location to determine where people you would like will hang out and where your topics of interest will be theirs. A great example would be going to the sports bar and talking about your local team. Unless it is the Browns, it is a safe bet the topic of the team doing well will be met in kind. For those not a fan of football, the Browns have a reputation for letting Cleveland down, and there is an assumption that they shall do it again. Another good example of this rule working is when one is at a convention. Whatever the convention is about, it is fair to assume that it will be a safe topic. If it's a professional convention odds are jargon and the profession will be on topic. If it's a social convention like an anime one it is fair to assume geeking out will bring good attention! Weebs are weebs and engineers are engineers for a reason; they share a common interest and often share similar viewpoints on topics related to their interest.

## This rule not working:

If you have little information on the location or it is a fairly generic location such as the first day in a general education class, this rule struggles. It struggles because the more generic the talking point the harder it is to connect with people. If you have struggled to talk to people out in public and you know nothing about the area, it can be a challenge. Let's pretend you just started college and are doing an orientation. It may be hard to find topics that start good conversations because everyone is there for different reasons. Now they may sort you by major, but that does not mean a whole lot. Most people will change their major at least once. Another example of where location makes things harder and the rules do not apply is when you are new to a location. If you know nothing about where you are, there is nothing to draw upon to start up conversations easily. There is a caveat to that in that you can start conversations by stating that you are new to

the location and looking for things to do. Some people might be friendly, others may not. Like all the rules, mileage will vary.

### The takeaway from the rule:

Location changes what is appropriate and what is not. Location can change what is appropriate with whom. Location changes a lot of things, but due to this you can use it to your advantage. You can look for places that are filled with your people, who share aspects of identity and are more willing to engage with you. If you struggle with talking to people, it may not be your approach, it might be your location.

## 4. You have to be willing to let people be your friends.

It is not uncommon for those who have experienced isolation or rejection to start to develop control mechanisms to avoid both rejection and isolation. Those with ASD might just start assuming people will hate them, no one shares their interest and that everything is awful. That might then lead to them rejecting people before they have a chance to be friends, avoid conversations in total and at the extreme being outright hostile to others. So, if you have experienced this, the question is not can you make friends, but can you let people be your friend? Can you give them the chance you wished people had given you? Can you risk being hurt again in hopes that things will be better. I would highly recommend that you give it a chance because it's the only way that things can change. Along with that, I hope you double-check your models, your location and think about the people you will be engaging with.

### This rule working:

When you are in a new environment with people that hold similar interests and backgrounds that might be akin to yours, this rule shines. Let's go back to a convention, it is a safe bet you can geek out about the shared topic of interest. Now you are in that anime convention in a panel for a given anime. It is probably a great conversation starter to ask what their favorite aspect of that show or panel is. Double down if they get excited. They will start talking. You may not have to do anything at all. Bam, you have an acquaintance. Now then, you must double down and do the friendship building, asking about them and telling them a little about you. That would be a back and forth much akin to "I like x about that show, what do you like most?" then going "Oh that's cool, \*insert connecting thought and then a follow up question\*". Most starting conversations are a mix of information gathering and affirming mutual interest. Now if there are none, the friendship is unlikely and that's fine. It is a game of odds, not

guarantees. You can increase your odds by placing yourself around people that share an interest, background and disposition.

### This rule not working:

Certain groups might be more hostile than others or have very strict social norms. These groups make it much harder to allow people to be your friends. The risk is greater if you are in an impoverished area where resources are scarce or where resources are plenty, but the hierarchy is already set, and the game is about social points. In these types of environments there is greater risk, and thus, finding friends is much harder. Observation becomes key, and retraining your models to reflect the needs of what's going on around you. If you are poor at this, it becomes of greater importance to find allies that might help you correct your model. Now that is a paradox, how can you make friends if the people are hostile? Well, you start to minimize your risks. This can become saying less and watching people react than modeling the behaviors of those that are successful. It can be hard to figure out what makes it successful, which means you might want to try these behaviors in lower risk situations. It is unrealistic to say every place will have friendly people, and at the same time it is equally so to assume everyone will be hostile. If you are unaware of the norms where you are watching it is key to see how people interact then start building models and testing them out to see if they predict people's actions. If the models start to become predictable you can begin to experiment.

### The take away from the rule:

Hope is needed for change. Hope does not have to be unrealistic, but it needs to be present. If you want change then you have to believe it is possible and act like it. There will be risks, loss and sadness. At the same time, there will be loss and sadness if one does not try at all. It is much easier to regret the things you did not do than the things you did. If you want friends,



you have to allow people to be friends and act like they can be. If you welcome others, they will welcome you more often than not. If you scorn them they will do the same. It is the hardest lesson to learn in life.

## 5. Not everything is surface level and not everything is deep.

People are as deep as the ocean and as shallow as a pool. I have found that, with ASD, we tend to take things at face value, and it works sometimes and not others. Reflecting on the notion of letting someone be your friend, you can see that we are complex, and it is fair to assume other people are too. When it comes to conversation, there is often deeper meaning than the surface level intent. At the same time, it is not always so deep. This rule can be much akin to knowing how a car works. We know gas goes in the engine, starts up and off we go. See it, it's not that deep. Yet it is because there are a lot of things that go into making that car go beyond gas, like how the engine works, and how the axles play with the drive shaft. That simplistic understanding of cars is how a good number of people operate. They have no need to be mechanics. At the time, some people struggle with getting the meaning from the conversation. They must be mechanics and think about what everything does because they have to be sure it runs. Most people have an idea when it's deep, so they don't have to think of those underpinnings of conversations. Those who struggle with them must think over it a lot to get the same understanding. Now there is a risk level that impacts how directly people talk about something. Low risk topics typically hold a very straightforward meaning and higher risk topics can have more meanings.

### This rule working:

Let's look at high risk conversations when one is young, that is "do you have a romantic interest in her" or in childish terms "do you like her or do you like like her?". That question is that deep. While a simple "yah" answers the question you have stated that you like their traits and hold some value for their opinion of you. It's a very high-risk statement because most people

that like people want people to like them back. It holds value in more than the words. There will be times when people do not know the value of the words they are speaking, and there are times when people will talk around something. A good example would be talking about moving in with your partner and saying “man this means rent is cheaper!” it means a lot more than that normally. That conversation is of high importance so words can mean more than just words. Another example of things that have greater meaning than the actual act is dress code. A dress code is usually there to display status, distinction or the fact one values a team. It can indeed mean those things, but they do not have to connect. A great example of this is my grandfather who was told he had to wear a tie to the office. He did everything he could to wear a tie in a way that would not work including a bolo tie, a tie printed on a t-shirt, a bow tie and a tie worn under the shirt. He saw no meaning in the tie because it did not dictate how much he valued the work he was doing. He and his boss eventually came to the agreement that he had to wear a tie when his boss’s uppers were around. The disagreement about the tie was about more than the tie. It was about the respect one has for their work and grandad felt his effort spoke more than a tie.

Small talk is low risk and low reward, so odds are it’s not very deep. There is little to gain by talking about the weather and thus small errors and earnest statements are common. Now if you want someone to like you then there is a greater risk and reward, and the actions feel greater. Since the reward and risk are great you feel the cost of errors more and feel the choice of words needs to be better. While small talk is low risk, meeting new people and caring if they like you, is higher risk.

Higher risk means you may hide aspects of yourself or overexpose other aspects. The ASD community will refer to this as masking. This masking is not a bad thing as some counselors would have one believe. It is mostly because everyone does it and it allows for a

greater degree of acceptance from others and for others. An agreement not to talk about topics or reduce a trait's outward appearance allows people to engage in domains that are less innate. If you disagree with the notion that everyone wears masks, ask: are you the same with your friends, as you are with your boss, as you are with your parents? Very few people are. At the same time are the same conversations ok with your friends, parents and boss? That is highly unlikely and really highlights the nature of location in conversation. To clarify this is highlighting the aspect of location that is which people you are around. It is also worth noting that people will often mask for us as much as we can mask for them. Most people like to be liked. I would also like to note that not every hill is one to die upon. Not every conversation is an example of our entire souls, some are just a way to pleasantly pass the moment. With all that in mind do not worry about trying to predict all things and changing each sentence in your head to suit another. You can say and do everything right and still have it all go wrong. In very short, masking is something we all do, so instead of looking at it as a burden look upon it as a tool that can be of use.

To come full circle, the more important the conversation the deeper it can be, and the less important the more shallow, and likely at face value, it can be taken. At the same time, a joke about something messed up might just be a joke. A great example is those who have awful childhoods making a joke about something that has occurred. Humor can be a way to address those dark moments and turn them into nothing. A great example is this: "I went off to college and my mother said I was not an adult. I had to retort, I am 40k in debt, I have a job I hate, sounds like adulating to me".

## This rule not working:

Like many things, the nature of the person changes how they see risk. What may seem small to one person may be larger to another, and the subjective nature of communication means that more things have more meanings. Going back to the tie to my grandfather it was silly, and to his boss' it meant he was rebellious and not diligent. So, some days a tie is a tie and others a tie is a message. The words are not important in conversation; the act is the important bit. People may feel like they are always masking, and thus even simple conversation may bring up great feelings of acceptance or rejection. There is little way to know what meaning a conversation has and what its simplicity and complexity are. This rule's flaw is that life is subjective, and everything can have great meaning and no meaning at the same time.

## The take away from the rule:

Life is very complex, and when talking with others, there is little way to know all the meaning to the conversation or action. With that said, a safer bet is to assume low risk and low reward conversations are straight forward. Thus, a conversation about favorite cookies does not likely have a deeper meaning than a conversation about cookies. At the same time a deep conversation about shared life experiences is more than likely deeper than just the experience; it also holds how that experience impacts other areas of life. Now all that may sound stressful, and it should be important. With that said it is part of life. There is not getting out of life alive, you have to accept and enjoy the risk. If everything was predictable, could you ever be pleasantly surprised? Also, people's memory can be very short, so small mistakes are often forgotten. So, relax and let life happen, you will make mistakes, and you shall learn its part of the game. There is no way to avoid it.

## 6. Communication is not linear; it taps into emotions and thoughts that we may not have connected.

When we talk, we convey messages. Well duh, but what message we are trying to convey is not always clear to the listener or the speaker. If you have ever started talking and midway a thought, realized you were confirming a point to yourself or exploring a new domain of thought then you are experiencing this. When we start to talk freely, we end up exploring emotions and thoughts that we may not have connected before. A great example is when a bad joke comes to mind from a casual conversation. An example of one of those is “A bad dad joke is not apparent; it might not even be present”. The connection for me was a joke that goes “When does a joke become a dad joke? When it's apparent.” Now I have no idea who told me the joke, so do forgive me whoever came up with it. My connection was that I like to reverse things to get an understanding. My way of connecting is to explore multiple ways to understand the connections. Others will draw upon emotional responses to connect words. A great example of the emotion that can be brought in from a song that then leads to a change of thoughts for the day. People's history will lead to different connections such as the value of money to a person who grew up rich or poor. The philosophies that differ between psychology and medicine in regard to mental health practices flavor people's advice and what steps are next. So, our connections are not linear. When talking it is far from assuming to think connections will seem strange without explanation.

### This rule working:

People will make apparently random connections. The way around this is building that model and testing along with asking people to back track for clarification if you do not follow. So, let's pretend I had connected the thoughts of stress and food when talking. If I am always

comparing choices in life to a buffet, odds are I am making the connection that I am hungry. Thus, thematically my words will seem strange and focused on food. I may not be aware yet of my hunger, but my brain is. In talking about anxiety, I might bring up choice paralysis and then compare that to making choices at the grocery store which should hold minimal risk. If I keep the focus on choosing and bringing up restaurants and the same risk, I could be making a simple analogy, or I really do want food. So, in talking about choice and food, I can realize food is what I want; then, I can discuss getting that with co-workers. Another example is how emotion affects disposition and expectations of outcome. Everything could be lined up in a neat plan that always works, but because we feel bad, we assume the plan will explode. These nonlinear thoughts show how connections are unorganized and sometimes appear random. Now, one can retrace their steps in thought and normally figure out their origins. If you are feeling lost in the connections, retracing and asking for an explanation can stop that issue.

### This rule not working:

Logic in people is subjective not objective. In retracing, you could miss an obvious connection because it is not a logical jump for you or them. People are not always aware of what things stem from and exploration can lead to unexpected places. Comically, if we were purely logical entities not driven by apparently random connections, psychologists and counselors would have a very easy life. They don't, so here we are. Amusingly the error with this rule is the error with most of the rules in that incomplete knowledge and bad models lead to bad results. There is the old adage of the lost leading the lost and that directly relates to this. So, people are messy, confusing and chaotic and being able to understand that in any given person is hard to do. With all that said, there are objective truths, and we all have the right to be wrong example Freudians.

## The takeaway from the rule:

Being able to accept that connections are not clear and meaning are not always fully understood allows you to seek out clarification. The answer to figuring out anything new is learning what areas you do not know. By that I mean you must identify the void in the knowledge to begin to fill it. Practicing the skill of looking for connections allows you to find them better. While people have an aptitude in this that allows them to grow this skill faster, that does not mean that proficiency is out of reach for many. Being part of the ASD community and knowing our proclivities, I would like to add this note; If you feel that no one cares about how you connect the world, it is because you have not given them a reason to. No one is owed the privilege of being understood; we may only gain it by attempting to understand others. We connect with others not by force, demands or expectations, but by offering compassion, acceptance and patience. ASD makes our leaps in logic a little different and that takes more energy to understand, thus we have to offer more to others. Now, not everyone is deserving of such actions, so keep in mind that reciprocity is needed in all communications and relationships.

## 7. Everyone is stupid in some way. Accepting that means we are too. This let us explore the world.

Everyone is stupid in some ways, and everyone will do something in a stupid manner. This includes ourselves. We will misspeak, we will do things that are dumb or at least start out sounding dumb. So, hear me out, I am sure you have been with someone, and they had a crazy idea that worked. Well, all new ideas are just that a little crazy, they breach protocol and leave orthodoxy behind. Not every new idea will be good, but to enjoy a new idea it has the opportunity to unfold. Now this rule comes into play when having conversations and in the same way it holds to ideas. Hear out what someone has to say and hope they shall do the same for you.



Entering a conversation in good faith is just that, entering a new conversation with the expectations that something new shall come from it. With that said there should be some expectation of self-deprecation if you have any anxiety around conversations. Most people find it easier to say, “ Oh they think (insert topic here) is stupid”. This self-doubt and depreciation is a way for us to modulate our expectations. If one assumes it will go poorly, they can prepare and avoid taking the risk and succeeding. Many people will pick avoiding a loss opposed to trying for a win. People, often without thinking about it, make quick value judgements and if they determine the risk is too great, they avoid it. All of this to say, if one expects the worst they can prepare for it, but they rarely think of the best and reach for it. Well, most of my favorite conversations are with people who share dumb ideas. Perhaps they are not that dumb, and I just self-deprecate. While it could be just me that does that, I have seen so many others do it. I assume it's more of a norm for those who have any degree of social anxiety. Are the ideas really stupid? Perhaps not, but instead of working on one's overall image of themselves why not shoot for that smaller step and accept dumb?

### This rule working:

If you are starting a new conversation with someone and you start out by going “well this is stupid”, pause a moment and ask why. Is it that the orthodoxy is being challenged or is it a totally new idea unfounded and untested? Could it be due to the judgement of the person not the idea or is it stupid? Now the latter can be hard to determine, but even stupid is worthy of hearing out. At worst you confirm it's stupid and you get to feel right, at best you learn a new way of approaching a topic. Really the notion is accepting that stupid is a thing, and it's bound to be part of every conversation. Now if you are not self-deprecating, I would beg, are you being too judgmental? If you are, let me ask what value does it have to you? For some it adds a sense of

value; to others, it is a way to distance themselves from people. Now if you are trying to avoid people, this is the wrong text for you! Now if you are being judgmental with the idea that they cannot reject you if you reject them first, well then, what is the desired result? If it is to avoid feeling stupid, we go back to the same point: we don't need to change our whole world view to positive. We just need to be accepting of the possibility of good.

### **This rule not working:**

People will act in bad faith and accepting all stupidity is unreasonable. There are times that people will want to trick you and there are times where people say truly stupid things. In those cases, accepting stupid is inadvisable because it may do harm. Much akin to those who say “it’s ok to grab a propane tank by the connection port”. That is indeed how you damage the tank.

Another example is the Nigerian prince who wishes to give you millions of dollars if you only give them your banking information. So being skeptical and judgmental are acceptable things when given a good reason. We go back to the norms mentioned before. If something is breaking a norm it’s a good reason to ask why and see if it’s a trap. Some people will say stupid things or engage in a conversation in bad faith.

### **The takeaway from the rule:**

Being judgmental of ourselves and others can hinder our ability to listen and enjoy conversations. Accept a little dumb; it might not actually be dumb. It could also be very dumb but enjoyable. Not every idea is a fine wine, some of it is that oh so tasty and greasy hamburger. For those who read things literally at first, the analogy is that unrefined and cheap things can still be good. The takeaway from the rule is that things can be dumb and accepting that it is not the end of all things. Try to be a little dumb some days and it might just be enjoyable.

## 8. Rules 1-7 may be ignored at any point and time for any reason.

Each rule has a reason it won't work, and to be very fair, those reasons might be wrong at a given time or place or with a given person or people. Some people enjoy unpredictable conversations, and ironically, that becomes predictable. If you are in a high danger situation, trusting people is the wrong choice. Some people are very linear thinkers. The first rules are more like guidelines that most people pick up and most people struggle with at some point. This rule is to just reinforce that learning is part of every conversation and people shall learn different things when in different areas and talking with other people. Taking into account that one can always errors and learn is very important. This rule is not to say to discount the other rules but only to accept that most things can vary and will! Unlike the other rules, there will be no section on where it works and where it does not because it demonstrates where it works and doesn't. It would be akin to proving a negative. That is to say that it is very hard to say that something does not exist as opposed to confirming that something does. To elaborate, to prove something is real requires only one example where to prove it does not require many examples of how rules prevent it. The purpose of this rule is to state that no matter how well planned, thought out, ritualized or implemented a plan, is that it can go wrong and that's okay. It should be expected and not dwelled upon. If you could predict the future, you would be rich. If you had the information, you have now when you started a conversation it might have turned out differently, but you did not have that information, so it's not a fair way to look at oneself.

## 9. There are basics in a conversation that need to be covered and often are forgotten when anxious.

These basic things and the introduction, the meat and the ending. The introduction does not have to be formal or have any real concrete aspects other than that the person you are talking to now is aware you want their attention and has given it. The meat is whatever you wanted to talk about. The ending is however the conversation concluded and there are some rules to end on a better note and how to avoid ending on a bad note. Now, these things do not fall into the same format as the rules 1-8 because they hold true for successful communication. I say successful communication in the sense that communication was meant to actually exchange ideas and feelings with the notion of reciprocal response. I add this note because one can easily argue that communication is just telling someone to fuck off when you are upset then storming off with no desire other than to vent. You did convey an idea but to the degree that other even knows it occurs or matters is up for debate. These basic pillars for a successful conversation appear to be universal.

The introduction is just that introducing yourself to the person you wish to talk to. This can be a nod, a greeting or a glance. It is merely a way to get someone's attention. While this is obvious, when you are stressed out the obvious becomes a struggle. Many people will be quiet, will not be heard and then start getting to their conversation, and then the person they wish to talk to walks off or is otherwise distracted. If you have ever walked in, and saw a friend, and just started talking and they then turn and go “whaaaa...?” that is example of it failing. Ironically, confirmation of the introduction is that “wha?”. Confirmation of introductions is just the same as the initialization but from the opposite side of the conversation. If you nod to get someone's attention and they nod back, well there you have the conversation started. Comically,

the nod can be a whole conversation in itself. A simple acknowledgement of presses, a statement of acknowledgment and the passing by of the individual the ending. To the point the introduction is whatever form of greeting that is needed to get someone's attention. Otherwise, you are indeed just shouting into the wind.

Now the meat is whatever you want to cover. What exactly the meat is exactly made of becomes the problem. Things are left unsaid; people are misunderstood or ideas totally forgotten. Unlike sausage, one must know all the bits of what one wants to say to say it all. Now everything messes up this meat, and I do mean everything. Excitement can lead to ideas being forgotten just as easily as anxiety, anger can lead to more things being said than joy and vice versa. Even simple tiredness can mess up this meat. Knowing that it is easily messed up is a good reason to add check-ins, pause and to think on a topic or to even end a conversation early. Going back, no does not always mean no and yes does not always mean yes. So that “I dare you” or “Do it” may be the time to walk away or apologize. Along with just having the ingredients to the meat one must also layer it right. “Pizza, you hungry” without any prompting is confusing at first, then when thought about the order, can be made. “Are you hungry? How about pizza?” would be a clear example of how the order matters. The more complex the idea the more the order has to be correct. This is all to say the meat must be there. A hello and goodbye with no meat is normally viewed as a joke, but when it is done in earnest is confusing. For the vegans reading this, please substitute the word meat with veggie.

Now the ending is very important and often skipped. While you can just walk away from a conversation because you think it's over, the other party might not and thus lead to some confusion. If it's the first time you are talking to them, it may actually be the make or break of the relationship. Now the degree of its importance is based on the quality of the meat or veggies.

If you have a great conversation, just wandering off most likely won't do much to the person's perception of you. If you did or said a lot of weird things, it might be the tipping point. In either case, it's far better to just have an ending. Something like "good talking to you" or "I got to go" is a great ending. Now, if this is your first time talking to someone, you want to add something so they know where they stand and what you may like to do in the future. So, if it was a really good conversation, saying so and that you would like to talk more is a great thing. In practice it would be something akin to "great talking with you hope to catch you again". Amusingly the reverse is true too, if you really didn't enjoy talking with someone, adding some distance to your ending can indicate that. Something akin to "I just think we have different opinions" can be a good way to distance yourself from a bad conversation or a person depending on how strong their opinions are. Now, I would only recommend that you end with that if you are looking to prevent further conversation in total. If you are stuck working with someone, it would be better to pretend to be pleasant and end things with a "good talking" or something else short and not overly enthusiastic. I spend so much time on the ending section because if you are anxious, you might have spent all your energy on the introduction and meat and none on the ending. That simple ending fix could be all that's hindering you from gaining that new friend. When people are shy or uncertain, they may not engage again, and a greeting that states that it's welcomed tends to lead to more people doing just that!

## 10. Life is very short and often full of things we shall never understand.

You may ask why this is a rule in a text about conversation's rules. Well, it is because conversations are what make up life. How we talk to people, and who we connect with leads to everything. Friends, lovers, family, professionals, allies, even enemies. Knowing this it may seem like every conversation is so very important and must be thought out. Well, life is short, with that in mind, how much time can you spend thinking about it? How much energy can you spend dwelling on failures? How much will you give up getting stressed out about a conversation? Even if everything goes well, will you really understand every aspect of that conversation? Amusingly the answer to most of these questions is no. Life is very short, and somehow as it gets longer it gets shorter. What is a year to a child may be a decade for an adult and, somehow, a lifetime can seem like only yesterday.

The point of this rule is to never forget that life is short. If you were to look back on your life, would you write of all the things you didn't do? All the friends you didn't make? All the businesses you didn't start? You could, but that story would be a rather sad story. With that, why not have the story of trying to talk to people, to do things, and have the story with success and failure alike? This rule has no exceptions no matter what. Somehow, it feels like life went by in a moment, so why not make it really interesting?

## Conclusion:

The rules of this book are meant to play on each other. If you make a model of a conversation, that means you have a history of that person. If you have a history with them, that means the location played some context to how you met. If you kept talking with them, that means you let them be your friend. This means that the conversation that may have started off as pure bullshit had a meaning much deeper than its topic. It connected to those emotions of joy that made you step away from the logic and take a risk. The acceptance of each of your friends, peers and the like is an acceptance of their flaws and yours which includes your stupidity. Knowing that almost everything has acceptance means that the rules can be broken, and models can be changed. So, start having your conversations, make sure the meat or veggies are enjoyable, and remind people how excited you are to see them again. Lastly, remember life is short, so you can stop worrying about what could happen and start making things happen because time moves greater than anyone thinks.

Thank you, for taking the time to read this book and I hope it was of some use!



## Shameless self-plug

Since I have your attention, forgive me for this self-plug. I offer services helping those with executive functioning issues and in choosing careers. That is to say, I help people figure out how to get organized and motivated and avoid procrastination. Much like communication, we make models that predict how things will go. Our plans are built from previous experiences and what was successful enough to work. Now, what was successful one day may be awful the next time it has to be used.

Let me offer a little bit of help with it right now: how you expect a plan to end changes how you engage with the plan and thus its actual outcome. An example would be getting on a roller coaster for the first time. Since you know it will not fling you to the great beyond, you can get on the ride and pacify the anxiety. That allows you to enjoy it. If you truly believe it will cause you harm, you will panic more, avoid it, and ruin one day at a theme park. All plans operate like that. You must believe it will work on some level to actually do it. If you need help planning, better, engaging more fully, and seeing more success, reach out!

Now for the blander pitch. I also offer training on ASD in terms of communication, advocacy, and vocational aspirations and techniques. These training sessions cover how to have a more inclusive work environment, how to aid individuals with ASD entering the workforce in both professional and entry-level jobs, how to aid students in college, and many other topics. These training sessions have been lectures, Q&A sessions or simply brainstorming to figure out complex problems together. These training courses have been virtual and in-person and have ranged from as few as 10 participants to just shy of 200. The audience ranged from students to professionals.

I know that it was short and covered a lot without much information. To be fair it would take a few more books to cover all those topics. To offer a better idea of how those training are styled back at the book. I write and present like I talk and think. If there are other topics you would like me to talk about reach out!

If you have any interest in working with me, please see my website at [stricklercarrerconsultants.com](http://stricklercarrerconsultants.com).