

## **Six Rules of Life Assembly**

The School of Life is a wonderful website, full of wisdom and insight. It offers thoughts on every aspect of human life. I thought I would share six of their rules of life with you this morning. I don't expect you to agree with them all – or even any of them. Certainly, some of the rules make the presumption that you have no religious faith. That will not be the case for many in the room. But whether you agree or disagree, I think you will be prompted to thought.

### **1. ACCEPT THAT YOU ARE AN IMPERFECT PERSON**

Let us start by recognising that we are full of faults and prone to make mistakes. We are inherently flawed. That does not mean we should not strive for the greatest success we can achieve, but do not tie your happiness to achieving perfection. Perfection is beyond us. In fact, if you relentlessly demand a flawless outcome, you will make yourself unhappy and reduce your chance of the success you seek.

It is tough to be a young person. It is in our nature to compare ourselves to others and feel bad about ourselves. We might feel we don't fit in. We might feel frustrated that we are different. We all will be tempted to compare our own messy insides with the apparent effortless success of someone else's outside. However, be sure to remember that no one is normal: the only people we might think of as normal are those we don't yet know very well. We are all in the same boat – doing our imperfect best in an imperfect world. Don't fight your inner nature - accept your imperfections.

### **2. SHARE YOUR VULNERABILITY**

Here is the second truth. We are all vulnerable – we are easily shaken by the troubles of life. Recognising that reality should inspire compassion for ourselves – and generosity towards others.

You need to look after yourself. The bedrock of true friendship, which we all crave, is our ability to reveal our vulnerability and what is wrong with us. Don't demand more of yourself than you would of another friend - be the friend to yourself that you are to others.

Because we are vulnerable, life is not fair. It is a sad fact that people do not reliably end up with the lives they deserve. No matter how good we are, it remains a possibility that we may fail. Therefore, we need to be slower to judge and quicker to understand. Those who have not succeeded are not 'losers'; we may soon be among them.

Be kind – always be kind.

### **3. ACCEPT YOUR CAPACITY TO GET IT WRONG**

We all have the capacity for foolishness and getting it wrong. There is no other alternative for a human being, given Rule 1. We are all fools, and we share the planet with seven billion other fools. Embracing our capacity to mess things up should render us confident before challenges – because we learn to forgive ourselves if we do not succeed. It should make us comfortable with ourselves, and ready to extend a hand of friendship to our neighbours. Accept your capacity to get it wrong, but don't give in to it.

Above all, do not let your capacity for foolishness prevent you from trying to fully express your talent – that really would be foolish. Reach high. Be an optimist, but be an optimist that remembers to bring along their umbrella.

### **4. YOU ARE GOOD ENOUGH**

As I have said, we cannot be perfect, but the alternative to perfection isn't failure. It is to understand that we are, each of us, 'good enough'. Deep down, you are good enough children, you are good enough young men, you are good enough family members and you are good enough students. One day, perhaps, you will be a good enough parent. Not perfect, but good enough.

Gentlemen, be forgiving of your parents: just like you, they are doing their best. Life is not elsewhere for those who are perfect; it is here and now, in this moment, for all of us. Accept it, just as you are. You are good enough, just as you are.

## **5. FEEL SAD CHEERFULLY**

There is great pressure, especially with social media, to be always smiling and always perky. But in life almost nothing will go entirely well: we must learn to expect frustration, misunderstanding, misfortune and rejection. Sometimes, it is OK to be melancholy. Melancholy has a noble quality – it is a quiet sadness that arises when we accept that along with all the joys and hopes of life, disappointment is also at the heart of the human experience. Through melancholy, we can understand that no one fully understands anyone else, that everyone sometimes feels lonely and that every life has a measure of sorrow.

But though there is plenty to feel sad about, our lives are also full of many wonderful things. Whilst recognising the sadnesses of life, we can take pleasure in the lovely things that come along – and there are so many of them. We can learn how to draw the full value from what is good, whenever it arises.

So it is alright to feel sad sometimes - but do so cheerfully: believe in cheerful sadness.

## **6. LOOK BEYOND YOURSELF**

We are not at the centre of anything; thankfully. Here is a rather frightening thought: we, each of us in this room, are contingent beings. We do not count one bit in the grander scheme. But this can feel like a liberation, not a curse.

Rather than complaining that we are too small, we should delight in being humbled by a mighty ocean or a mountain. John Lennon once said, 'As I looked out into the night sky, across all those infinite stars, it made me realise how unimportant they are.' The truth is, of course, the other way around. Embrace the wonder of the night sky and its message to us all. Always look up at the night sky.

Take the time to put yourself in context – and enjoy the feeling of being in awe of something greater than yourself. Humility – taught to us by nature, history and the sky above us – is a blessing and a constant alternative to a life of frantic jostling, humourlessness and anxious pride.

There are six rules of life for you. Does all that sound despairing? I hope not. Whether you agree or disagree, I hope it prompts thought. You can reread the assembly on the website, in the Life at Taylors' section. I hope the rules might even provide some comfort, if you reflect in the right way, at the right time.