

**Suggestions for Living Better
From the Life of Benjamin Franklin**

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Benjamin Franklin developed a process for overcoming his bad habits and replacing them with good habits. He listed 13 virtues he felt were important in his life. Then he worked on each of the virtues, focusing on one per week for 13-week period. By the end of a week he felt he had well on the way to mastering the bad habit and so he proceeded in the next week to work on the following virtue, at the same time recording his success with all the other virtues. Since some of the virtues would facilitate the acquisition of others, he put them in a specific order. He worked on Temperance first, because as he said "it tends to procure that coolness and clearness of head, which is so necessary where constant vigilance was to be kept up." After he had acquired Temperance, he turned his attention to Silence because he viewed that knowledge could be better obtained "by the use of the ears than of the tongue." Order he expected would allow him more time for attending to his projects and studies. Resolution, once it became habitual, would keep him firm in his endeavors to obtain all the subsequent virtues; Frugality and Industry freed him from debt, and "producing affluence and independence, would make more easy the practice of Sincerity and Justice."

Franklin's List of Virtues

These are the virtues (or values) that Benjamin Franklin incorporated into his life.

1. TEMPERANCE. Eat not to dullness; drink not to elevation.
2. SILENCE. Speak not but what may benefit others or yourself; avoid trifling conversation.
3. ORDER. Let all your things have their places; let each part of your business have its time.
4. RESOLUTION. Resolve to perform what you ought; perform without fail what you resolve.
5. FRUGALITY. Make no expense but to do good to others or yourself; i.e., waste nothing.
6. INDUSTRY. Lose no time; be always employ'd in something useful; cut off all unnecessary actions.
7. SINCERITY. Use no hurtful deceit; think innocently and justly, and, if you speak, speak accordingly.
8. JUSTICE. Wrong none by doing injuries, or omitting the benefits that are your duty.
9. MODERATION. Avoid extremes; forbear resenting injuries so much as you think they deserve.
10. CLEANLINESS. Tolerate no uncleanness in body, cloaths, or habitation.
11. TRANQUILLITY. Be not disturbed at trifles, or at accidents common or unavoidable.
12. CHASTITY. Rarely use venery but for health or offspring, never to dulness, weakness, or the injury of your own or another's peace or reputation.
13. HUMILITY. Imitate Jesus and Socrates.

Franklin developed the following method for conducting a daily examination of his success. He made a little book, in which he allotted a page for each of the virtues. He ruled each page with red ink, so as to have seven columns, one for each day of the week, marking each column with a letter for the day. He crossed these columns with thirteen red lines, marking the beginning of each line with the first letter of one of the virtues. He then would make a mark with a little black dot for every fault he found he had committed respecting that virtue upon that day.

This is what the page for Temperance might have looked like.

TEMPERANCE

Eat not to dullness; drink not to elevation.

	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
T							
S							
O							
R							
F							
I							
S							
J							
M							
C							
T							
C							
H							

Franklin gave a week's strict attention to each of the virtues successively. Thus, in the first week, he made every effort to be temperate, exercising moderation and self-restraint. He left the other virtues to their ordinary chance, only marking every evening the faults of the day. At the end of the first week when he saw that next to the T it was clear of spots, he figured his ability to be temperate was strengthened and that he could focus on the next virtue the following week. He proceeded this way until after 13 weeks he had focused on all virtues. After one 13-week period, he repeated the process so that there were "four courses in a year."

After completing the project he commented:

"And like him who, having a garden to weed, does not attempt to eradicate all the bad herbs at once, which would exceed his reach and his strength, but works on one of the beds at a time, and, having accomplish'd the first, proceeds to a second, so I should have, I hoped, the encouraging pleasure of seeing on my pages the progress I made in virtue, by clearing successively my lines of their spots, till in the end, by a number of courses, I should be happy in viewing a clean book, after a thirteen weeks' daily examination."

Developing Good Habits

Brainstorm a list of good habits you would like to develop. You can use Benjamin Franklin's 13 virtues to start your list. Once you have developed a lengthy list, try to cut it down to the 13 most important virtues you would like to have. Then use the following chart and on a weekly basis keep track of your success, focusing on one habit at a time. At the end of each day review your success and make plans for tomorrow. If you make a mistake, resolve to not have a spot in that column tomorrow.

Virtue: _____

	Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat
1.							
2.							
3.							
4.							
5.							
6.							
7.							
8.							
9.							
10.							
11.							
12.							
13.							