



**THE DOs AND DON'Ts
OF THE WILD AND FREE**

A ROUGH GUIDE FOR SHIT DAYS

BY ADAM GNADE

The DOs and DON'Ts of the Wild and Free:

A Rough Guide for Shit Days

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HELLO

Who am I to tell you what you should and shouldn't do? I have no desire to judge. Moralizing be damned, but ethics ... ethics are a different beast. This is a short section of my ethical code. It's very personal. But maybe we're alike. Maybe my personal is close to your personal. If so we'd probably be good friends. Maybe we're friends already. What this text says is: hello friend, remember to be gentle, remember to be strong, remember to live well, remember to remember...

-Adam Gnade, Hard Fifty Farm, October 1st,

2019

DO be a lantern.

Don't let your fire burn those around you.

Do let your fire light the world.

If you can.

Try.

But don't take that on as a responsibility.

No one person can save everyone.

Save yourself and be as good as you can to
the ones who need it.

Pay attention to those around you.

But, just the same, pay attention to how
YOU'RE feeling.

A tank empty of gas will get you nowhere.

DO lend a hand and try your best to understand what makes life hard for the people in your life.

Listen.

That's the most important thing I'll say to you in this book.

Listen.

Listen to people.

Let them talk.

Don't butt in while they're speaking.

Sometimes it feels like everyone is just waiting for their chance to talk while someone else is talking.

Don't be that person.

Don't sit formulating your response while someone is talking if it keeps you from listening to them.

Hear people out.

Think about what they're saying.

Give them the respect they deserve.

What they say might surprise you.

DON'T preach from a place of privilege.

You can't (I can't) tell anyone how to live because everyone is coming from a different place—a place with its own circumstances, traumas, fears, ambitions, history, and an endless, boundless sea of motivations.

People are complicated, right?

Everyone is.

You might look at someone and instantly start judging them.

I know I do.

“Oh this guy’s a fucking dumbass.”

“Oh this person’s shallow as hell.”

But we’re all more than we seem.

This is not to say everyone is good.

Everyone is NOT good.

We start out good.

We’re good at the beginning, and then the

world twists us, darkens us, taints us, bends
us in the form of the wind like a tree on a
cliff's side.

We start out pure and sweet and desirous of
gentle treatment and good times.

Not everyone is good, yeah.

But we're complicated.

There's a lot going on in all of us.

So don't tell people how to live.

That also goes for what you're reading right
now.

Take my advice for what it is—notes to help
me keep my own course, maybe notes that will
give you some ideas too.

That's up to you.

Throw out any book that doesn't work for you.

Delete any file.

Disregard any idea.

Disbelieve any fact you've been told is true
but is not true in your heart.

Burn down the church.

Build a different church.

Ignore churches all together.

There is an exhausting static of opinion and
chatter and philosophy out there haunting us
in clouds like mosquitos.

Who do you listen to?

Who should you pay attention to?

Whose truth is true?

Who is right?

I know this: Bad books make great drink
coasters.

DO be a river.

Don't be a set of handcuffs.

Don't be a cop, a wall, a fence.

Don't be a barrier.

There are so many barriers out there.

So many walls between you and what you need.

And I mean what you need, not what you want.

That whole line about how if a door closes on you then you should look for a window?

That's creepy.

Do you need to get in that door or do you just want to?

Most times I think it's want rather than need and want is a dangerous verb (and sometimes a noun).

"Need" is pure.

"Need" is instinctual.

"Need" is when you listen to your heart.

We have so many wants and so few needs.

What do you need?

Maybe you need people.

I need people.

Not everyone needs people.

Some of us are happier alone.

It all depends on your chemistry.

You need to feel fulfilled.

Everyone needs to feel fulfilled even if they don't know they do.

You need security (which is a loaded word and often defaults, diverges, or runs tangential-ly from needs to wants).

You need to eat and drink and sleep and you need the sun and air.

You need to keep the people you love safe.

You need to live and not die for as long as you possibly can.

That's about it.

What do you want?

I know what I want.

Today I want ramen.

I want cheap ramen.

Not the good kind.

I want the ramen you get at the grocery store for 25 cents a package and I want to make my own broth and eat it as soon as it's cool enough, but maybe I'll burn my mouth too.

I want wine.

Good wine, something dry.

I hate the sweet shit.

I want to catch up on the New Yorkers that are stacked all around the house.

I want to finish the latest Paris Review.

I want to buy presents for people.

I want to give myself a haircut.

I want to have a good weekend.

Do I need any of that?

Not really.

Doesn't make any of it bad, but I don't necessarily need it.

My needs, your needs, come from a truer, simpler place.

Here's something to try.

Make a list of your needs, your true needs.

It'll be a short list.

DO help out whenever you can—especially when there's no money involved.

Always be ready to say: what can I do to help?

What do you need help with?

What can I do?

Sometimes you can't do it and you've got to pay attention to yourself enough to know when something is out of your range.

Maybe you can't fix that person and maybe no one can except for them.

Maybe you can't loan someone the money they want because you flat out don't have it.

We can't always help in the ways we'd like to.

And that's heartbreaking sometimes.

We have such lofty ambitions and we'd love to be everything for everyone but no one can be

everything for everyone.

Everything for everyone is not a thing.

It's not physically, psychically, emotionally possible.

The very concept defies the laws of reality.

So, help where you can.

And as often as you can.

But be realistic.

You can't save someone from drowning when you yourself are drowning.

DON'T let the 16-year-old you down.

Remember them?

You were them and they were you, but maybe you've changed.

Maybe you've turned your back on them.

Ask yourself that.

Have I turned my back on the one I once was?

Maybe that's a good thing.

But maybe not.

Maybe the 16-year-old you was the best you.

Could you go back to that?

Could you recapture some of what that was?

I think about myself at 16 and goddamn I was a child.

I was a dreamer.

I wanted so much, but I had no idea what I wanted.

I just "wanted."

I wanted and I hoped and I saw a life ahead that could be a good life, could be a great life, but how the fuck was I supposed to get there?

What does "there" even mean?

Do you know you're there when you're there?

I think about that kid sometimes.

Not often, but sometimes.

I think about his dreams and his hopes.

Maybe you were like me.

Maybe I was like you.

If so, remember those dreams.

Come back to them and see if that's still something you want.

If those dreams are still relevant, chase them again, dig them up, stir up that particular cauldron.

When you feel like giving up, remember how

hard that kid dreamed your dreams.

If you are 16, I'm sorry.

I wish someone would have warned me how hard it is to be a teenager.

I got none of that.

You see movies about high school and it's all glory years and comradery and even in the darker scenes the people generally come out on top and laugh about it later and skate on through to adulthood.

No one told me that some days it would feel as if the world were ending.

No one told me I would hate myself.

No one told me I would hate how I looked.

No one told me I would hate my voice, my hair, my skin, my own personality.

No one told me I'd think about killing myself all the time.

No one told me I'd want nothing more than to die.

No one told me that sometimes everyone you know abandons you, sometimes everyone gives up on you, sometimes you walk through life alone.

No one told me that sometimes people just hate you and there's nothing you can do about it and maybe it doesn't even have anything to do with you, maybe they hate themselves, maybe they're scared, maybe they're hurting.

No one told me this.

Being a teenager wasn't *The Breakfast Club* or *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* or *Goonies*.

It wasn't *Sixteen Candles*.

It wasn't *Stand By Me*.

All of those films have dark moments, yeah, sure, but they're mostly stories of friend-

ship, adventure, and good times.

Being a teenager was NOT good times.

There was no glory, no love.

Just sadness, loneliness, and isolation.

No one ever said, "Hey Adam, shit is going to get BAD. You better be ready for that."

No one told me there was a thing called anxiety that would chew the flesh off my bones like a river full of piranhas.

No one told me what depression was or what it would feel like or how hard it would hit.

I knew depression as some abstract, vague concept, something I'd heard about on TV once or twice.

In school we learned about the Great Depression but no teacher ever warned us about our own Black Thursday, our own Dust Bowl.

No one told me that depression would roll

over me and sweep me up with it and carry me along for years and years and years and keep coming back, keep grabbing hold of me after I figured it was gone.

Yeah, being a teenager can be the worst.

It is a cruel, malicious, ridiculous nightmare for a lot of people, but if you're a teenager and you're entrenched in that particular shitstorm, know this: there are better days ahead.

Just the same, don't delude yourself: there will also be worse days—days so dark and hopeless it feels like the whole world is falling over itself to spit in your face.

The better days, those are worth the pain.

You will get both, but if you figure out how to fight off the various (and diverse) beasts that hunt you, you will notice the better

days become better weeks, better months.

The bad will come less often and you will know how to slap it down when it does.

And I hope you do that.

Slap it down.

Beat its ass.

Beat it right into the ground.

Do this until it knows it should FEAR you.

This is my hope for you.

DO stand up for those who can't stand up for themselves.

Pay attention to the world around you.

People are getting the shit end of the stick everywhere you look.

Some people need a champion.

Maybe you can't be that champion.

Maybe YOU need a champion.

But maybe all it takes to be a champion or a hero is a word, a single deed.

Being a hero doesn't always mean stepping in front of a bullet for someone.

A lot of times it's simpler than that.

(Know this: simpler does not always mean easier.)

If you're any good you will regret the times you didn't step in and come to someone's aid when they needed it most.

DON'T neglect to make that phone call.

This is open to interpretation.

Maybe you know what I mean, maybe not.

But if so, if this is on your mind, pick up
that phone.

DO read every day.

Most of the time there's nothing I'd rather do.

Leave your TV off all day tomorrow.

Try it.

Just one day

Maybe you're there already.

Maybe this particular piece of advice is not for you.

If it is, listen up.

DO watch the clouds pan across the sky like great cottony ships and remember where you came from (even if it's a place you don't love).

Life is a dizzying motherfuck sometimes.

Take time to slow down and level out.

Take time to listen to your heart.

Be quiet.

Make plans.

Reassess your path through life.

Question your motives and motivations.

Are they pure or maybe not so much?

Take some time today to be alone and check in with yourself and see if you're headed in the right direction.

If not, put on your turn signal and begin looking for that spot to flip a U-turn.

Or a left, a right, whatever.

If it's time to change course, start figuring out what that means on a practical level.

DO open doors for people.

I mean actual physical doors.

Stand aside and hold open that door and let them pass through it.

You never know when someone might be waiting for that one act of niceness to keep from putting a bullet through their head.

DO listen to protest songs.

Listen to the cry in the night, the howl in
the wilderness.

That's where you'll find the people who tell
the truth.

You won't find truth and money in the same
place.

Not often.

Sometimes you will.

More often than not, truth and money repel
each other.

Truth and money are like two magnets that
can't get near each other.

Ask yourself: which would you rather be near?

DON'T be afraid to change your rules for living as your life changes.

A philosophy that doesn't evolve is a dead set of vowels and consonants.

A philosophy that doesn't evolve is a planet without oxygen and water.

It's a peanut butter and jelly sandwich without peanut butter and jelly and without bread.

Ideas, like life, should always be allowed room to change.

What is lawful now might not be lawful in the days to come.

Those who hold power now will not always hold power.

What was fair in the past will not always be fair.

Both for good and/or disastrous ill.

Culture will change, humor will change, politics will change, social conventions will change.

Be open to it.

Some of those changes will be catastrophically bad.

Climate is changing and that's not wonderful. We abolished slavery in the US and that's a good step (though it hasn't fixed the damage done).

Keep an eye open and be ready for change.

Help usher in the good and help fight back (or just survive) the bad.

DO lie down on the ground and feel the earth
below you as much as your busy life allows.

When was the last time you did that?

I'm asking myself as well, because I don't
remember.

When was the last time you had your back to
the bare earth, the natural world below you?
Not a bed, not a beach towel, not concrete,
not a couch—the true earth, the GROUND, the
real skin of our planet.

When was the last time?

If you can't answer that, find some time to
do this today: go outside, lie on your back.

That's it.

Very simple.

Just lie there and see what happens.

DON'T let the people around you fail.

Hold them up if they need a strong arm, even if they're a stranger (especially if they're a stranger).

I hate when someone says, "Oh, just let them fail."

Letting people fail is an inhuman action and if you believe in that I don't want to know you.

If you believe in that we are not friends and we will never be.

Ayn Rand was always wrong and her Objectivism is a heartless ideology.

Rather than Randian Objectivism or Libertarian Isolationism, study the concept of mutual aid, which is less an intellectual abstraction than you might think and more so a gentle, simple, healthy way to live.

Mutual aid comes natural when you are motivated by needs rather than wants.

It comes when you realize your needs and other's needs are mostly the same, and that obtaining those needs can be done in tandem with people and not in competition.

DON'T ever slow your intake of knowledge but know the difference between school and learning.

I'm not saying don't go to school.

But know that most people in school are not there to learn.

They are there because they were told to be there and they are there because they want to figure out how to make as much money as possible.

If you go to school to learn I want to be your friend.

If you drop out of school to learn I want to be your friend.

If you want to learn I want to be your friend.

DON'T read the same books as everyone else or you won't have as many original ideas as you might otherwise.

This has nothing to do with school.

In school you SHOULD follow the reading list because it's healthy to be forced to learn outside the (often narrow) sphere of your interests.

Reading outside of your sphere of interests expands your field of vision.

In life outside of school, build your own curriculum from diverse sources.

Don't just read something because everyone else is.

Take a chance on that weird book at the thrift store.

If you're anything like me, chances are your heroes didn't follow the path of their peers.

DO listen to people who don't need anything from you.

Those are the ones who will tell it to you straight.

Benefit from the purity of those with no agenda.

Don't listen to anyone who gives you that deep-down bad instinctual feeling.

If you feel like they have bad eyes, they're probably bad-run, or at least walk fast in the opposite direction and put a good solid door (real or otherwise) between you and them.

DO make a list of the reasons you have for living.

Do this when you're in a good, healthy, positive place so you have something to read when you're not.

Don't make this list when you're not doing well.

It doesn't work the same way.

Make that list when you're "okay."

I mean this in the most literal sense.

Make a list.

On paper.

Write it out.

Put that list somewhere you can find easily when you need it.

Stick it on the wall.

Use a thumbtack.

Go back to it when the world is crashing down

around you.

It helps.

DON'T forget all the sweet things people have done for you.

Remember those things when it feels like there's no one good left.

Remember kind words and good deeds, remember the times you were helped, complimented, soothed, protected, saved...

Those good moments can act as a new battery when yours is worn out.

DON'T talk down on what people do for a living unless it hurts someone or fucks up the Earth.

We're all trying our best.

It's hard enough to be anything.

DON'T forget how much we still have to learn.

I mean "we" as humans.

We in the great modern age.

We don't know anything.

We are sightless birds in a wild storm.

Think of all the things we'll know one day.

That's exciting to me.

The future is exciting.

Of course there will also be awful things that come in the future, things that wreck our fundamental reality, genocide, war, life-crushers, demoralizers.

But there will be good things as well.

They might be small things but they will come.

DO breathe deeply.

Do this now...

Place your hand over your heart.

Feel your heart beating.

Feel your blood pumping.

You know what?

Right now you are alive.

You won't always be.

But, for now, you are.

This is something good.

You are alive.

I am alive.

We are ALIVE.

Suggested reading list taken from my bookshelf. There is something in each of these books that will make you feel better about the world, though most have their dark spots.

How Music Works, David Byrne

The Smartest Bear in the World and His Brother Oliver, Alice Bach (this is a children's book)

David Copperfield, Charles Dickens

Big Diamond zine series, Liam Ira Christian

Woman Hollering Creek, Sandra Cisneros

In the Aeroplane Over the Sea, 33 1/3 book series, Kim Cooper

The Pulse Between Dimensions and the Desert,

Rios de la Luz

Itzá, Rios de la Luz

The Gastronomical Me, MFK Fisher

Midland, Honor Gavin

Next Stop Adventure, Matt Gauck

Les Misérables, Victor Hugo

Love in the Time of Cholera, Gabriel Garcia
Marquez

If Nobody Speaks of Remarkable Things, Jon
McGregor

Crapalachia, Scott McClanahan

The Way Cities Feel to Us Now, Nathaniel Ken-
non Perkins

Sangre, Leroy V. Quintana

Born to Run (the book), Bruce Springsteen

Travels with Charley, John Steinbeck

The Green and the Gold, Bart Schaneman

Salvage the Bones, Jesmyn Ward

HELLO

Thanks for reading this. If you ever need
help I'm here gnadegnadegnade@gmail.com Don't
hesitate.

Love,

-Adam Gnade