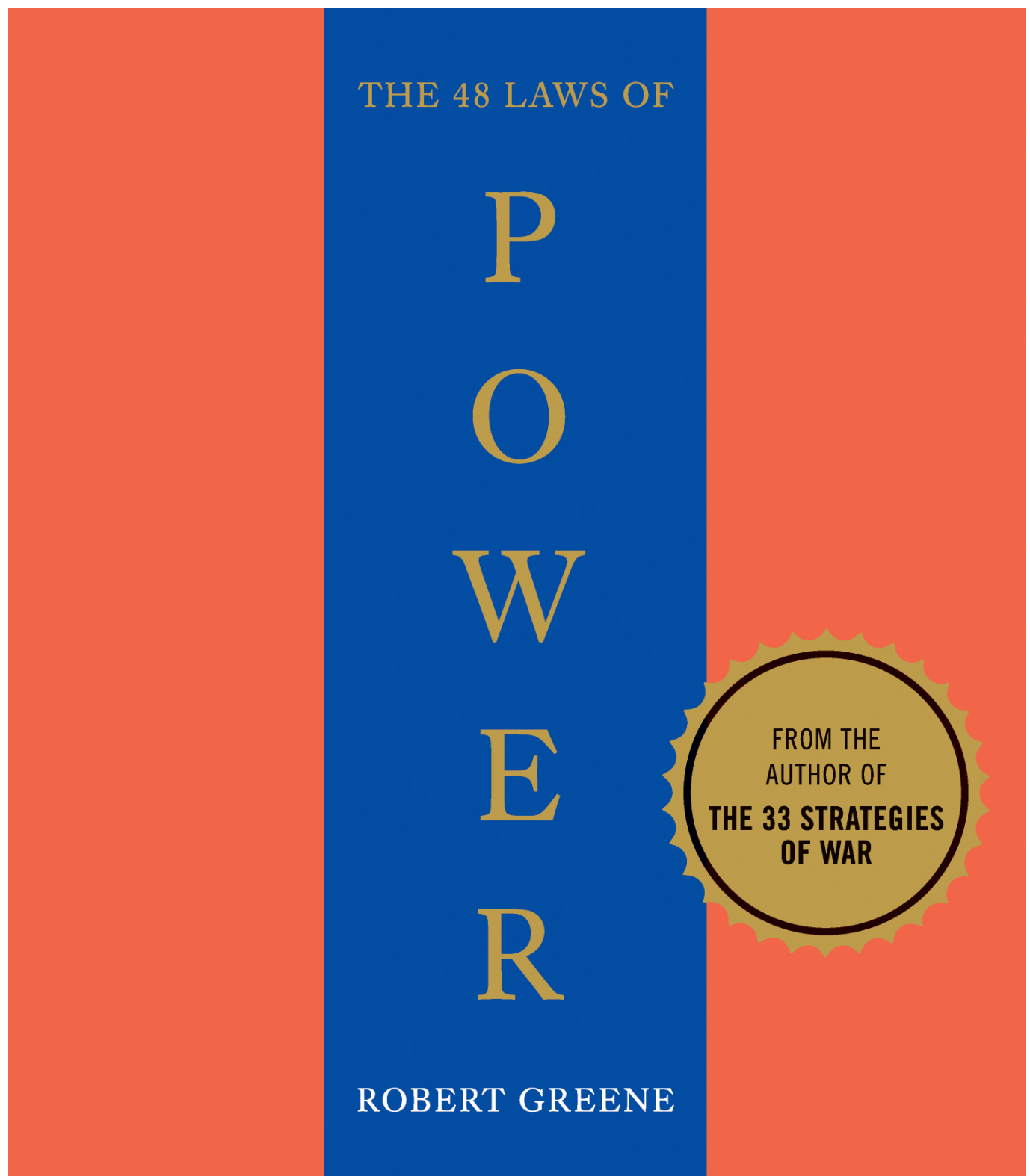


How To Apply The 48 Laws of Power: Machiavellian Social Competencies

Illimitable Men | 25 April, 2014 | by IM



Contents:

- 1.) Introduction
- 2.) The Vocational Toolbox: Necessary Skill Sets
- 2a.) Develop An Analytical Mind

- 2b.) Master Subtextual Communication
- 2c.) Become Eloquently Articulate
- 2d.) Emotional Intelligence & Infiltration
- 2e.) Cold Reading
- 2f.) Superficial Charm
- 3.) Concluding Statements: Misapplying The Laws
- 4.) Relevant Reading

1.) Introduction:

The focus of this piece is on the application of Machiavellian ideas contained within “The 48 Laws of Power.” Numerous people have communicated to me how confounding they find Robert Greene’s best-selling book despite how indisputably excellent it serves as an introduction to the world of Machiavellianism. It appears there is something of a disconnect between the reader’s interest in the book and their ability to utilise the lessons taught within it. If one is to derive maximum benefit from the book and see tangible improvements in their life, the book and its tenets alone are not enough to bring about the outcomes enjoyed by competent Machiavellians. Certain skills must be learnt, methodologies must be developed and a deeper understanding must be obtained.

There are talents which need to be developed by the reader that are irrespective of the book. The book does not teach the importance of qualities which aid in and are fundamental to the successful execution of Machiavellian devices. These are qualities which are necessary, not supplementary. Should one wish to successfully implement the “laws of power” into the fabric of their social interactions, they will need to master said qualities. Having knowledge of the skill sets needed to be a fully competent Machiavellian is vital. Essentially, the scope of this article is to inform the wannabe Machiavellian of the skill sets necessary to successfully apply Machiavellian strategy on a day-to-day basis.

There is much profound information to be found within the depths of The 48 Laws of Power but the book lacks methodology and application. Consider The 48 Laws of Power to be a cookbook of manipulative devices, with the laws acting as the raw ingredients quintessential to the schemes of all great [power games](#). Robert Greene gives you the ingredients necessary to achieve power, but he doesn’t giving you a working blue print (or to keep with the analogy, a recipe.) The book does not educate you on becoming Machiavellian; instead, it matter-of-factly states how certain aspects of Machiavellianism work. It is in this sense that somebody alien to the purview of power, politics and manipulation is spectacularly introduced to an otherwise unfathomably unintelligible world.

With Greene’s reticence to supply methodology there belies an absence of instruction and methodological example. For instance the book never states anything along the lines of: “in contemporary and relatable situation X, you could apply the law in question by doing Y.” You don’t get taught how to apply the laws based on a scenario that the average person will find themselves in. Instead you get a list of psychological ingredients relevant to the pursuit of power that are illustrated by stories from history demonstrating how each ingredient manifests when stakes are high. A mere understanding of the mechanics of power however does not translate into a transferable skill which can be wielded for self-gain. It is for this reason [I have begun work on essays which elaborate on the ideas discussed within The 48 Laws of Power](#).

It was Greene himself who said “*I’d rather the book be used for defence against natural psychopaths rather than be used to hurt people.*” As well as “*psychopaths don’t need this book, most of this stuff is innate for them*” (to paraphrase him.) It is for this reason the book does not give you a step-by-step guide detailing how to specifically apply the laws in your everyday interactions. The book raises awareness and elucidates by encouraging abstract theoretical analysis of Machiavellianism via

storytelling. By opting for a theoretical and passive analysis the book teaches you to understand Machiavellianism as a series of easily remembered nuggets of wisdom that are reinforced in their emphasis by the splendour of extravagant stories. It does not communicate through intellectualisation how to master what is essentially a learnable vocation. It does not instruct how to master the art of strategy and apply it in one's life, which is effectively the goal of most who seek power and prestige. The direction Greene chose not take is the direction I dedicate a large part of this blog to. Where Greene's desire was for his book to be utilised as a shield rather than a sword, I find it equally important to become acquainted with the weaponisation of Machiavellianism.

2.) The Vocational Toolbox: Necessary Skill Sets

In paragraph 2 of the introduction I briefly mentioned skills fundamental to the successful implementation of Machiavellianism. In this section said skills will be identified and described in further detail, comprising the meat of the article. The following six components are what effectively make up the vocational toolbox necessary for one to apply the 48 Laws of Power with any consistent degree of competency. Learning the book whilst possessing only a few of the qualities listed will not make you a competent Machiavellian. Without the entire toolbox at your disposal you will lack the vocational competency to put your knowledge into effect. You will be nothing but an "academic" in the realm of power all but powerless to apply your wisdom to the world around you. The book in and of itself is not enough to create a Machiavellian, merely it enables the all but obviously average to correctly identify when they're made subject to manipulative devices. If you wish to become a successful Machiavellian it is therefore imperative you master the following vocational skill sets:

2a.) Develop An Analytical Mind

One should possess an analytical mind; a mind that not only thinks more than it feels, but can subdue feelings with thought. It is imperative that your primary mode of operation is dominated by logic rather than emotion. This is vital if you are to adequately discern, deduce and calculate. Emotive reasoning encourages fallibility, transparency (which is anti-Machiavellian) and self-exposure. Women in particular find this incredibly difficult to master because in essence it is something which goes against the very basis of their nature. Emotional reasoning leads to incorrect deductions, poor judgement and a loss of self-control as the ire of an emotive surge takes hold. Emotive reasoning is inward (solipsistic) whilst logical reasoning is outward (abstract.) In order to analyse one must be looking outward and comprehending the outward with as little confusion from the inward as possible. When this is achieved one will be able to analyse (discern and deduce) with marked precision. In analysis, one's own emotions serve as nothing other than an unwelcome distraction. The analysis of the emotions of others however is crucial, and is discussed more intricately further into the article.

2b.) Master Subtextual Communication

Your mind's perception for the unseen must be sharp. You must develop the muscle of your wit. You should understand people's words and actions on multiple levels: entendre, innuendo, puns; they are the language of rhetoric and subtext. You must be fluent in this language. If you cannot pierce the realm of subtext, you cannot hope to be a successful Machiavellian. If you cannot understand the subtleties and nuances of a person's character then you cannot hope to ever truly comprehend them. The complete nature of their being will fall beyond the limits of your mind's capacity to understand them. Subtext is a realm of communication all of its own. If you are blind to it, it will become your Achilles's heel and your obliviousness will reduce your overall effectiveness.

Communication is multi-layered; you should always understand what is being said, what is truly meant and what may possibly be implied. Do threat/reward assessment and measure the likelihood of each. Balance all three possibilities in your mind, attributing methods of likelihood to each variable based upon

the data available to you. Calculate likelihood, incentive and threat and make your move only when it is advantageous (when you will make a net gain) or necessary (to prevent loss.) You won't make correct choices in your interactions all the time, but you will reduce the number of blunders you make. In the midst of failure you will be able to proactively assess the damage of a poor social choice and adapt a new approach in response. You are allowed to make mistakes, making mistakes is how we refine our methods. Damage control however should be top priority whenever you make any socially dangerous blunders, assuming of course forfeiture of the relationship is inconsequential and thus viable.

2c.) Become Eloquently Articulate

Your quickness of mind must manifest itself through the smooth eloquence of your speech. You need the competency to verbally riposte. Your mastery of language is a weapon, and your voice, a delivery system. This skill is incredibly important, especially as a means of defence to aid with deflection and pressure reversal. It may also however be used as a tool of interrogation should that be one's proclivity. Eloquent articulacy is particularly useful when one finds themselves caught off-guard in psychological ambush. For example, say you are [psychologically tested](#) in full-view of an observing audience where there is surmounting social pressure for you to respond or otherwise incur social penalty. In such a situation quick wits will safeguard your reputation; an inability to pass the test will lower your station by damaging your reputation. A successful Machiavellian knows how to, and is sufficiently able to defend themselves from the devices of others. In a world where physical violence is unlawful we must prioritise the composition of our well-being's defence via psychological assets. Inversely, such a talent can be used to influentially persuade others.

2d.) Emotional Intelligence & Infiltration

You must develop sophisticated emotional intelligence. This is where women with their preference for emotional communication make up for their weakness as identified in section 2a. This doesn't mean you should analyse with emotion but rather that you must be capable of communicating with it and inspiring with it. There is no charm in robotic behaviour. You must understand the relationship between emotions by learning how they invoke and relate to neighbouring emotions. Likewise to be capable of this you should have an intricate grasp of the characteristics and depth of each emotion.

You need to understand the nature of each individual emotion so that this can be leveraged to influence people into predictable outcomes. If you can feel as others feel you will be able to glean intimate knowledge on how to best influence them. Do not act out of constraint instinctually to the shared emotion you feelings will demands of you. Instead, use this emotion and all that pertains to it as a data point. Data that is vital in understanding how best to influence the individual you are dealing with; who unlike yourself is constrained by the imperative of their emotional state. To better summarise: you must experience how others feel and feel how they feel, whilst being detached from how the imperative of that emotion would typically compel a lesser mind to behave. You must feel as others feel but unlike them you must not instinctually act upon your feelings.

With this knowledge you can strategise in many ways. For example with an understanding of what emotionally propels a person you can fill their emotional void by reshaping yourself into the source of their desires. (Relevant: [law 11 – keep people dependent on you.](#)) Not only that, but shared emotions build both trust and rapport. With enough knowledge of a particular character anyone can be a source of emotional sustenance for another regardless of their wealth or status. This ability to fluidly transform into an emotional object of desire (much like water changes shape to fill volume) can allow for emphatic social influence. The importance of this point is most emphatically not to be underestimated. Men especially can be flippant in matters of emotion, but they would do well to refine and ultimately master their understanding of such an area. Especially when dealing with women, for a woman's emotional state

no matter how fleeting is her reality whilst it presides. Emotional intelligence combined with an understanding of a person's social relationships can be utilised to identify an individual's emotional weak spots. Those in turn can be leveraged for self-gain should you opt for a more aggressive approach; the world's the limit so use these "newfound powers" wisely.

2e.) Cold Reading

You must develop the ability to cold read. Cold reading is the ability to detect, comprehend and decipher subtle non-verbal cues such as vocal tonality, posture/body language, eye/facial movements, choice of clothing/accessorization, accent/lingual register etc. This allows you to deduce someone's state of mind and make inferences about what they're thinking/immediately prioritising without needing to overtly enquire. Knowing how people feel about you regardless of what they say is invaluable. Having the ability to make accurate generalisations about a person without even psychologically probing them gives you a massive advantage over those untalented in the discernment of non-verbal cues. Cold-reading is undoubtedly a prerequisite for any budding Machiavellian as it contributes vastly to the effectiveness of one's deductive capabilities. A good book recommended by my readers on this topic is Joe Navarro's [**"What Every BODY is Saying: An Ex-FBI Agent's Guide to Speed-Reading People."**](#)

2f.) Superficial Charm

Machiavellianism requires constant in-field analysis and ample socialisation. Every interaction you have should have meaning to it. In your conversations you should be summing people up and collecting information on them so that you may better understand their nature. If you can do this you can calibrate your demeanour to their tastes and successfully socialise with a diverse range of characters. Likewise in the process of doing so you may also happen upon valuable information which has the potential to grant you power over said people (e.g.: secrets, admissions in confidence etc.)

We live in a time where the average man and woman will greet you with an inauthentic version of themselves, their fabled social representative. It is this learned defence mechanism people commonly employ that you will need to overcome in order to become properly acquainted. In light of this one should realise that Machiavellianism is executed best with an air of charm and humour. Mentally, charm is the anaesthesia of suspicion; it allows you to probe deeply into the psyche of others without causing pain or paranoia. It is in matters of a more physical nature that sedatives allow doctors to operate on a person in much the same way. Here however the internal adjustment being made to "the patient" is cognitive rather than mechanical. If people do not feel they can trust you because you lack the ability to make them feel comfortable then the interrogative nature of Machiavellianism can result in ill-feeling and alienation. For best results one should always apply charm. Charm is necessary for comfort and comfort is necessary to trust. Without trust, your options for mutual co-operation are limited. A good book for fortifying your charm is Dale Carnegie's best-selling [**"How To Win Friends and Influence People."**](#) Well worth a read if charm (or a lack of it) is one of your underlying social weaknesses.

3.) Concluding Statements: Misapplying The Laws

Not all of Robert Greene's laws of power apply to each and every situation. There are laws in the book which starkly contradict each other. This is often a source of confusion for wannabe Machiavellians and younger readers alike. Greene likes to inverse laws by flipping them on their head and showing how a reversal of a law can be just as, if not more effective than the law itself. It is up to your analytical mind to deduce whether or not the law should be applied as it is presented or if the nuances of the situation at hand would benefit you more if you were to instead reverse a law. It is your responsibility to understand the situation you find yourself in and how you must behave in regard to that. You must be able to comprehend the people who make up the social landscape you are in (their statuses, usefulness, opinions of and relations with one another, their motives, desires etc.) The book is giving you

ingredients that you can use to attain power, but it is not hand-holding you. Generally speaking the easier your life has been up until this point the harder you will find it to employ the books teachings effectively. The power of pain is in the exuberance of its energy. Pain is a cataclysm for change that opens the mind to otherwise closed or unneeded possibilities.

With thorough analysis of your social environment you can build up a picture of what's going on behind the scenes and selectively utilise laws which complement the situation at hand. Essentially, one must tailor how they implement laws to the target of their devices, bearing in mind the scenario and the implications/consequences that applying the law will have. For example, [**law 34 \(act royal in your own fashion\)**](#) and [**law 1 \(don't outshine the master\)**](#) are largely speaking, contradictory laws. You could not typically apply both laws to the same person at the same time. To act pompous and royal is to inevitably outshine, trying to be both things at once would send out mixed signals. You'd arouse suspicion with the dichotomous perversion evident in your demeanour's erratic duality. Using law 34 on a narcissist or on someone with more power than yourself is going to put them on guard and inspire them to defensively analyse you as a means of self-preservation. Whereas implementing this law in your interactions with people of low Machiavellian intelligence and narcissism will inspire respect and even admiration for your show of grace. Using law 1 on a superior, a narcissist or a person with high Machiavellian intelligence will lower their guard and build trust. On the other hand implementing law 1 in your interactions with someone of low Machiavellian intelligence (or a social inferior) will inspire them to write you off as being even lowlier than they.

To simplify this: the strong want to believe you are weak, so fulfil their beliefs by playing to their wants. It is in this way you can get the strong to accept you. A competent Machiavellian should not allow the strong to perceive them as competition until it is too late. Only when the competition can do nothing to stop the emergence of a Machiavellian's devices does a Mach make his grand entrance ([**Law 28: Enter Action With Boldness.**](#))

The strong desire your passivity because they wish to retain their dominance; their primary motive is to preserve their power. They are players, and competition means a threat to their power. The weak on the other hand want you to be strong because they are fearful and seek to anchor themselves to the powerful. They have no fear of maintaining power and prestige as they have very little, if any. Their fear is of ensuring their survival when lacking the power necessary to forge their own destiny. It is for this reason the weak anchor themselves to the strong, seeking direction, guidance and comfort. If you are strong or powerful already you must be wary of this. This can turn into a form of emotional parasitism where such a relationship is unwelcomed; although effectively this is what law 34 (act royal in your own fashion) exploits when applied to the average, who in their averageness, are weak.

The misapplication of the laws of power will result in social failure rather than success. If you misapply the laws clumsily they will not have the intended effect, at the very worst they will ruin your reputation. Likewise you need to adopt and master particular skill sets in order to be proficient enough to apply the laws. Finally, some word of advice: in your quest to refine the vocational skill sets required for Machiavellian proficiency you should practice the refinement of your art on those you care little for. That way when you inevitably ruin said relationship through Machiavellian experimentation, its disposable nature will mean no

significant value will have been lost.

4.) Relevant Reading:

Purchase the 48 Laws of Power:

[Buy “The 48 Laws of Power” in the USA](#)

[Buy “The 48 Laws of Power” in the UK](#)

[Buy “The 48 Laws of Power” in Canada](#)

Other book(s) on Machiavellianism:

[Buy “The 33 Strategies of War” in the USA](#)

[Buy “The 33 Strategies of War” in the UK](#)

[Buy “The 33 Strategies of War” in Canada](#)

[Buy “The Art of Wordly Wisdom” in the USA](#)

[Buy “The Art of Wordly Wisdom” in the UK](#)

[Buy “The Art of Wordly Wisdom” in Canada](#)

[Buy “The Craft of Power” in the USA](#)

[Buy “The Craft of Power” in the UK](#)

[Buy “The Craft of Power” in Canada](#)

[Buy “The Prince” in the USA](#)

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