

LAW 2

NEVER PUT TOO MUCH TRUST IN FRIENDS, LEARN HOW
TO USE ENEMIES

JUDGMENT

Be wary of friends—they will betray you more quickly, for they are easily aroused to envy. They also become spoiled and tyrannical. But hire a former enemy and he will be more loyal than a friend, because he has more to prove. In fact, you have more to fear from friends than from enemies. If you have no enemies, find a way to make them.

TRANSGRESSION OF THE LAW

In the mid-ninth century A.D., a young man named Michael III assumed the throne of the Byzantine Empire. His mother, the Empress Theodora, had been banished to a nunnery, and her lover, Theoctistus, had been murdered ; at the head of the conspiracy to depose Theodora and enthrone Michael had been Michael's uncle, Bardas, a man of intelligence and ambition. Michael was now a young, inexperienced ruler, surrounded by intriguers, murderers, and profligates. In this time of peril he needed someone he could trust as his councillor, and his thoughts turned to Basilius, his best friend. Basilius had no experience whatsoever in government and politics—in fact, he was the head of the royal stables—but he had proven his love and gratitude time and again.

To have a good enemy, choose a friend: He knows where to strike.

DIANF DE POITIERS, 1499-1566, MISTRESS OF HENRI II OF FRANCE

They had met a few years before, when Michael had been visiting the stables just as a wild horse got loose. Basilius, a young groom from peasant Macedonian stock, had saved Michael's life. The groom's strength and courage had impressed Michael, who immediately raised Basilius from the obscurity of being a horse trainer to the position of head of the stables. He loaded his friend with gifts and favors and they became inseparable. Basilius was sent to the finest school in Byzantium, and the crude peasant became a cultured and sophisticated courtier.

Every time I bestow a vacant office I make a hundred discontented persons and one ingrate.

Louis XIV, 1638-1715

Now Michael was emperor, and in need of someone loyal. Who could he better trust with the post of chamberlain and chief councillor than a young man who owed him everything?

Basilius could be trained for the job and Michael loved him like a brother. Ignoring the advice of those who recommended the much more qualified Bardas, Michael chose his friend.

Thus for my own part I have more than once been deceived by the person I loved most and of whose love, above everyone else's, I have been most confident. So that I believe that it may be right to love and serve one person above all others, according to merit and worth, but never to trust so much in this tempting trap of friendship as to have cause to repent of it later on.
BALDASSARE CASTIGLIONE, 1478-1529

Basilus learned well and was soon advising the emperor on all matters of state. The only problem seemed to be money—Basilius never had enough. Exposure to the splendor of Byzantine court life made him avaricious for the perks of power. Michael doubled, then tripled his salary, ennobled him, and married him off to his own mistress, Eudoxiaingerina. Keeping such a trusted friend and adviser satisfied was worth any price. But more trouble was to come. Bardas was now head of the army, and Basilius convinced Michael that the man was hopelessly ambitious. Under the illusion that he could control his nephew, Bardas had conspired to put him on the throne, and he could conspire again, this time to get rid of Michael and assume the crown himself. Basilius poured poison into Michael's ear until the emperor agreed to have his uncle murdered. During a great horse race, Basilius closed in on Bardas in the crowd and stabbed him to death. Soon after, Basilius asked that he replace Bardas as head of the army, where he could keep control of the realm and quell rebellion. This was granted.

Now Basilius's power and wealth only grew, and a few years later Michael, in financial straits from his own extravagance, asked him to pay back some of the money he had borrowed over the years. To Michael's shock and astonishment, Basilius refused, with a look of such impudence that the emperor suddenly realized his predicament: The former stable boy had more money, more allies in the army and senate, and in the end more power than the emperor himself. A few weeks later, after a night of heavy drinking, Michael awoke to find himself surrounded by soldiers. Basilius watched as they stabbed the emperor to death. Then, after proclaiming himself emperor, he rode his horse through the streets of Byzantium, brandishing the head of his former benefactor and best friend at the end of a long pike.

THE SNAKE, THE FARMER, AND THE HERON

A snake chased by hunters asked a farmer to save its life. To hide it from its pursuers, the farmer squatted and let the snake crawl into his belly. But when the danger had passed and the farmer asked the snake to come out, the snake refused. It was warm and safe inside. On his way home, the man saw a heron and went up to him and whispered what had happened. The heron told him to squat and strain to eject the snake. When the snake snuck its head out, the heron caught it, pulled it out, and killed it. The farmer was worried that the snake's poison might still be inside him, and the heron told him that the cure for snake poison was to cook and eat six white fowl.

"You're a white fowl," said the farmer. "You'll do for a start." He grabbed the heron, put it in a bag, and carried it home, where he hung it up while he told his wife what had happened. "I'm surprised at you, " said the wife.

"The bird does you a kindness, rids you of the evil in your belly, saves your life in fact, yet you catch it and talk of killing it. She immediately released the heron, and it flew away. But on its way, it gouged out her eyes.

Moral: When you see water flowing uphill, it means that someone is repaying a kindness.

AFRICAN FOLK TALE

Interpretation

Michael III staked his future on the sense of gratitude he thought Basilius must feel for him. Surely Basilius would serve him best; he owed the emperor his wealth, his education, and his position. Then, once Basilius was in power, anything he needed it was best to give to him, strengthening the bonds between the two men. It was only on the fateful day when the emperor saw that impudent smile on Basilius's face that he realized his deadly mistake.

He had created a monster. He had allowed a man to see power up close—a man who then wanted more, who asked for anything and got it, who felt encumbered by the charity he had received and simply did what many people do in such a situation: They forget the favors they have received and imagine they have earned their success by their own merits.

At Michael's moment of realization, he could still have saved his own life, but friendship and love blind every man to their interests. Nobody believes a friend can betray. And Michael went on disbelieving until the day his head ended up on a pike.

Lord, protect me from my friends; I can take care of my enemies.
Voltaire, 1694-1778

OBSERVANCE OF THE LAW

For several centuries after the fall of the Han Dynasty (A.D. 222), Chinese history followed the same pattern of violent and bloody coups, one after the other. Army men would plot to kill a weak emperor, then would replace him on the Dragon Throne with a strong general. The general would start a new dynasty and crown himself emperor; to ensure his own survival he would kill off his fellow generals. A few years later, however, the pattern would resume: New generals would rise up and assassinate him or his sons in their turn. To be emperor of China was to be alone, surrounded by a pack of enemies—it was the least powerful, least secure position in the realm.

In A.D. 959, General Chao K'uang-yin became Emperor Sung. He knew the odds, the probability that within a year or two he would be murdered ; how could he break the pattern? Soon after becoming emperor, Sung ordered a banquet to celebrate the new dynasty, and invited the most powerful commanders in the army. After they had drunk much wine, he dismissed the guards and everybody else except the generals, who now feared he would murder them in one fell swoop. Instead, he addressed them: "The whole day is spent in fear, and I am unhappy both at the table and in my bed. For which one of you does not dream of ascending the throne? I do not doubt your allegiance, but if by some chance your subordinates, seeking wealth and position, were to force the emperor's yellow robe upon you in turn, how could you refuse it?" Drunk and fearing for their lives, the generals proclaimed their innocence and their loyalty. But Sung had other ideas: "The best way to pass one's days is in peaceful enjoyment of riches and honor. If you are willing to give up your commands, I am ready to provide you with fine estates and beautiful dwellings where you may take your pleasure with singers and girls as your companions."

The astonished generals realized that instead of a life of anxiety and struggle Sung was offering them riches and security. The next day, all of the generals tendered their resignations, and they retired as nobles to the estates that Sung bestowed on them.

There are many who think therefore that a wise prince ought, when he has the chance, to foment astutely some enmity, so that by suppressing it he will

augment his greatness. Princes, and especially new ones, have found more faith and more usefulness in those men, whom at the beginning of their power they regarded with suspicion, than in those they at first confided in. Pandolfo Petrucci, prince of Siena, governed his state more by those whom he suspected than by others.

NICCOLÒ MACHIAVELLI, 1469-1527

In one stroke, Sung turned a pack of “friendly” wolves, who would likely have betrayed him, into a group of docile lambs, far from all power.

Over the next few years Sung continued his campaign to secure his rule. In A.D. 971, King Liu of the Southern Han finally surrendered to him after years of rebellion. To Liu’s astonishment, Sung gave him a rank in the imperial court and invited him to the palace to seal their newfound friendship with wine. As King Liu took the glass that Sung offered him, he hesitated, fearing it contained poison. “Your subject’s crimes certainly merit death,” he cried out, “but I beg Your Majesty to spare your subject’s life. Indeed I dare not drink this wine.” Emperor Sung laughed, took the glass from Liu, and swallowed it himself. There was no poison. From then on Liu became his most trusted and loyal friend.

At the time, China had splintered into many smaller kingdoms. When Ch’ien Shu, the king of one of these, was defeated, Sung’s ministers advised the emperor to lock this rebel up. They presented documents proving that he was still conspiring to kill Sung. When Ch’ien Shu came to visit the emperor, however, instead of locking him up, Sung honored him. He also gave him a package, which he told the former king to open when he was halfway home. Ch’ien Shu opened the bundle on his return journey and saw that it contained all the papers documenting his conspiracy. He realized that Sung knew of his murderous plans, yet had spared him nonetheless. This generosity won him over, and he too became one of Sung’s most loyal vassals.

A brahman, a great expert in Veda who has become a great archer as well, offers his services to his good friend, who is now the king. The brahman cries out when he sees the king, “Recognize me, your friend!” The king answers him with contempt and then explains: “Yes, we were friends before, but our friendship was based on what power we had.... I was friends with you, good brahman, because it served my purpose. No pauper is friend to

the rich, no fool to the wise, no coward to the brave. An old friend—who needs him? It is two men of equal wealth and equal birth who contract friendship and marriage, not a rich man and a pauper.... An old friend—who needs him?

THE MAHABHARATA, C. THIRD CENTURY B.C.

Interpretation

A Chinese proverb compares friends to the jaws and teeth of a dangerous animal: If you are not careful, you will find them chewing you up. Emperor Sung knew the jaws he was passing between when he assumed the throne: His “friends” in the army would chew him up like meat, and if he somehow survived, his “friends” in the government would have him for supper. Emperor Sung would have no truck with “friends”—he bribed his fellow generals with splendid estates and kept them far away. This was a much better way to emasculate them than killing them, which would only have led other generals to seek vengeance. And Sung would have nothing to do with “friendly” ministers. More often than not, they would end up drinking his famous cup of poisoned wine.

Instead of relying on friends, Sung used his enemies, one after the other, transforming them into far more reliable subjects. While a friend expects more and more favors, and seethes with jealousy, these former enemies expected nothing and got everything. A man suddenly spared the guillotine is a grateful man indeed, and will go to the ends of the earth for the man who has pardoned him. In time, these former enemies became Sung’s most trusted friends.

Pick up a bee from kindness, and learn the limitations of kindness.

SUFI PROVERB

And Sung was finally able to break the pattern of coups, violence, and civil war—the Sung Dynasty ruled China for more than three hundred years.

In a speech Abraham Lincoln delivered at the height of the Civil War, he referred to the Southerners as fellow human beings who were in error. An elderly lady chastised him for not calling them irreconcilable enemies who must be destroyed. “Why, madam,” Lincoln replied, “do I not destroy my enemies when I make them my friends?”

KEYS TO POWER

It is natural to want to employ your friends when you find yourself in times of need. The world is a harsh place, and your friends soften the harshness. Besides, you know them. Why depend on a stranger when you have a friend at hand?

Men are more ready to repay an injury than a benefit, because gratitude is a burden and revenge a pleasure.

TACITUS, c. A.D. 55-120

The problem is that you often do not know your friends as well as you imagine. Friends often agree on things in order to avoid an argument. They cover up their unpleasant qualities so as to not offend each other. They laugh extra hard at each other's jokes. Since honesty rarely strengthens friendship, you may never know how a friend truly feels. Friends will say that they love your poetry, adore your music, envy your taste in clothes—maybe they mean it, often they do not.

When you decide to hire a friend, you gradually discover the qualities he or she has kept hidden. Strangely enough, it is your act of kindness that unbalances everything. People want to feel they deserve their good fortune. The receipt of a favor can become oppressive: It means you have been chosen because you are a friend, not necessarily because you are deserving. There is almost a touch of condescension in the act of hiring friends that secretly afflicts them. The injury will come out slowly: A little more honesty, flashes of resentment and envy here and there, and before you know it your friendship fades. The more favors and gifts you supply to revive the friendship, the less gratitude you receive.

Ingratitude has a long and deep history. It has demonstrated its powers for so many centuries, that it is truly amazing that people continue to underestimate them. Better to be wary. If you never expect gratitude from a friend, you will be pleasantly surprised when they do prove grateful.

The problem with using or hiring friends is that it will inevitably limit your power. The friend is rarely the one who is most able to help you; and in the end, skill and competence are far more important than friendly

feelings. (Michael III had a man right under his nose who would have steered him right and kept him alive: That man was Bardas.)

PROFITING BY OUR ENEMIES

King Hiero chanced upon a time, speaking with one of his enemies, to be told in a reproachful manner that he had stinking breath. Whereupon the good king, being somewhat dismayed in himself, as soon as he returned home chided his wife, "How does it happen that you never told me of this problem?" The woman, being a simple, chaste, and harmless dame, said, "Sir, I had thought all men breath had smelled so." Thus it is plain that faults that are evident to the senses, gross and corporal, or otherwise notorious to the world, we know by our enemies sooner than by our friends and familiars.

PLUTARCH, C. A.D. 46-120

All working situations require a kind of distance between people. You are trying to work, not make friends; friendliness (real or false) only obscures that fact. The key to power, then, is the ability to judge who is best able to further your interests in all situations. Keep friends for friendship, but work with the skilled and competent.

Your enemies, on the other hand, are an untapped gold mine that you must learn to exploit. When Talleyrand, Napoleon's foreign minister, decided in 1807 that his boss was leading France to ruin, and the time had come to turn against him, he understood the dangers of conspiring against the emperor; he needed a partner, a confederate—what friend could he trust in such a project? He chose Joseph Fouché, head of the secret police, his most hated enemy, a man who had even tried to have him assassinated. He knew that their former hatred would create an opportunity for an emotional reconciliation. He knew that Fouché would expect nothing from him, and in fact would work to prove that he was worthy of Talleyrand's choice; a person who has something to prove will move mountains for you. Finally, he knew that his relationship with Fouché would be based on mutual self-interest, and would not be contaminated by personal feeling. The selection proved perfect; although the conspirators did not succeed in toppling Napoleon, the union of such powerful but unlikely partners generated much interest in the cause; opposition to the emperor slowly began to spread. And from then on, Talleyrand and Fouché had a fruitful working relationship.

Whenever you can, bury the hatchet with an enemy, and make a point of putting him in your service.

As Lincoln said, you destroy an enemy when you make a friend of him. In 1971, during the Vietnam War, Henry Kissinger was the target of an unsuccessful kidnapping attempt, a conspiracy involving, among others, the renowned antiwar activist priests the Berrigan brothers, four more Catholic priests, and four nuns. In private, without informing the Secret Service or the Justice Department, Kissinger arranged a Saturday-morning meeting with three of the alleged kidnappers. Explaining to his guests that he would have most American soldiers out of Vietnam by mid-1972, he completely charmed them. They gave him some “Kidnap Kissinger” buttons and one of them remained a friend of his for years, visiting him on several occasions. This was not just a onetime ploy: Kissinger made a policy of working with those who disagreed with him. Colleagues commented that he seemed to get along better with his enemies than with his friends.

Without enemies around us, we grow lazy. An enemy at our heels sharpens our wits, keeping us focused and alert. It is sometimes better, then, to use enemies as enemies rather than transforming them into friends or allies.

Mao Tse-tung saw conflict as key in his approach to power. In 1937 the Japanese invaded China, interrupting the civil war between Mao’s Communists and their enemy, the Nationalists.

Fearing that the Japanese would wipe them out, some Communist leaders advocated leaving the Nationalists to fight the Japanese, and using the time to recuperate. Mao disagreed: The Japanese could not possibly defeat and occupy a vast country like China for long. Once they left, the Communists would have grown rusty if they had been out of combat for several years, and would be ill prepared to reopen their struggle with the Nationalists. To fight a formidable foe like the Japanese, in fact, would be the perfect training for the Communists’ ragtag army. Mao’s plan was adopted, and it worked: By the time the Japanese finally retreated, the Communists had gained the fighting experience that helped them defeat the Nationalists.

Years later, a Japanese visitor tried to apologize to Mao for his country’s invasion of China. Mao interrupted, “Should I not thank you instead?” Without a worthy opponent, he explained, a man or group cannot grow stronger.

Mao's strategy of constant conflict has several key components. First, be certain that in the long run you will emerge victorious. Never pick a fight with someone you are not sure you can defeat, as Mao knew the Japanese would be defeated in time. Second, if you have no apparent enemies, you must sometimes set up a convenient target, even turning a friend into an enemy. Mao used this tactic time and again in politics. Third, use such enemies to define your cause more clearly to the public, even framing it as a struggle of good against evil. Mao actually encouraged China's disagreements with the Soviet Union and the United States; without clear-cut enemies, he believed, his people would lose any sense of what Chinese Communism meant. A sharply defined enemy is a far stronger argument for your side than all the words you could possibly put together.

Never let the presence of enemies upset or distress you—you are far better off with a declared opponent or two than not knowing where your real enemies lie. The man of power welcomes conflict, using enemies to enhance his reputation as a surefooted fighter who can be relied upon in times of uncertainty.

Image: The Jaws of ingratitude. Knowing what would happen if you put a finger in the mouth of a lion, you would stay clear of it. With friends you will have no such caution, and if you hire them, they will eat you alive with ingratitude.

Authority: Know how to use enemies for your own profit. You must learn to grab a sword not by its blade, which would cut you, but by the handle, which allows you to defend yourself. The wise man profits more from his enemies, than a fool from his friends. (Baltasar Gracián, 1601-1658)

REVERSAL

Although it is generally best not to mix work with friendship, there are times when a friend can be used to greater effect than an enemy. A man of power, for example, often has dirty work that has to be done, but for the sake of appearances it is generally preferable to have other people do it for him; friends often do this the best, since their affection for him makes them willing to take chances. Also, if your plans go awry for some reason, you can use a friend as a convenient scapegoat. This “fall of the favorite” was a trick often used by kings and sovereigns: They would let their closest friend at court take the fall for a mistake, since the public would not believe that they would deliberately sacrifice a friend for such a purpose. Of course, after you play that card, you have lost your friend forever. It is best, then, to reserve the scapegoat role for someone who is close to you but not too close.

Finally, the problem about working with friends is that it confuses the boundaries and distances that working requires. But if both partners in the arrangement understand the dangers involved, a friend often can be employed to great effect. You must never let your guard down in such a venture, however; always be on the lookout for any signs of emotional disturbance such as envy and ingratitude. Nothing is stable in the realm of power, and even the closest of friends can be transformed into the worst of enemies.