

## LAW 19

### KNOW WHO YOU'RE DEALING WITH—DO NOT OFFEND THE WRONG PERSON

#### JUDGMENT

*There are many different kinds of people in the world, and you can never assume that everyone will react to your strategies in the same way. Deceive or outmaneuver some people and they will spend the rest of their lives seeking revenge. They are wolves in lambs' clothing. Choose your victims and opponents carefully, then—never offend or deceive the wrong person.*

**OPPONENTS, SUCKERS, AND VICTIMS: Preliminary Typology** In your rise to power you will come across many breeds of opponent, sucker, and victim. The highest form of the art of power is the ability to distinguish the wolves from the lambs, the foxes from the hares, the hawks from the vultures. If you make this distinction well, you will succeed without needing to coerce anyone too much. But if you deal blindly with whomever crosses your path, you will have a life of constant sorrow, if you even live that long. Being able to recognize types of people, and to act accordingly, is critical. The following are the five most dangerous and difficult types of mark in the jungle, as identified by artists—con and otherwise—of the past.

*When you meet a swordsman, draw your sword: Do not recite poetry to one who is not a poet.*

FROM A CH'AN BUDDHIST CLASSIC, QUOTED IN THUNDER IN THE SKY, TRANSLATED BY THOMAS CLEARY, 1993

The Arrogant and Proud Man. Although he may initially disguise it, this man's touchy pride makes him very dangerous. Any perceived slight will lead to a vengeance of overwhelming violence. You may say to yourself, "But I only said such-and-such at a party, where everyone was drunk...." It does not matter. There is no sanity behind his overreaction, so do not waste

time trying to figure him out. If at any point in your dealings with a person you sense an oversensitive and overactive pride, flee. Whatever you are hoping for from him isn't worth it.

## THE REVENGE OF LOPE DE AGUIRRE

*[Lope de] Aguirre's character is amply illustrated in an anecdote from the chronicle of Garcilaso de la Vega, who related that in 1548 Aguirre was a member of a platoon of soldiers escorting Indian slaves from the mines at Potosi [Bolivia] to a royal treasury depot. The Indians were illegally burdened with great quantities of silver, and a local official arrested Aguirre, sentencing him to receive two hundred lashes in lieu of a fine for oppressing the Indians. "The soldier Aguirre, having received a notification of the sentence, besought the alcalde that, instead of flogging him, he would put him to death, for that he was a gentleman by birth.... All this had no effect on the alcalde, who ordered the executioner to bring a beast, and execute the sentence. The executioner came to the prison, and put Aguirre on the heast.... The beast was driven on, and he received the lashes. ..."* When freed, Aguirre announced his intention of killing the official who had sentenced him, the alcalde Esquivel. Esquivel's term of office expired and he fled to Lima, three hundred twenty leagues away, but within fifteen days Aguirre had tracked him there. The frightened judge journeyed to Quito, a trip of four hundred leagues, and in twenty days Aguirre arrived. "When Esquivel heard of his presence," according to Garcilaso, "he made another journey of five hundred leagues to Cuzco; but in a few days Aguirre also arrived, having travelled on foot and without shoes, saying that a whipped man has no business to ride a horse, or to go where he would be seen by others. In this way, Aguirre followed his judge for three years, and four months." Wearying of the pursuit, Esquivel remained at Cuzco, a city so sternly governed that he felt he would be safe from Aguirre. He took a house near the cathedral and never ventured outdoors without a sword and a dagger. "However, on a certain Monday, at noon, Aguirre entered his house, and having walked all over it, and having traversed a corridor, a saloon, a chamber, and an inner chamber where the judge kept his books, he at last found him asleep over one of his books, and stabbed him to death. The murderer then went out, but when he came to the door of the house, he

*found that he had forgotten his hat, and had the temerity to return and fetch it, and then walked down the street.”*

THE GOLDEN DREAM: SEEKERS OF EL DORADO, WALKER  
CHAPMAN, 1967

**The Hopelessly Insecure Man.** This man is related to the proud and arrogant type, but is less violent and harder to spot. His ego is fragile, his sense of self insecure, and if he feels himself deceived or attacked, the hurt will simmer. He will attack you in bites that will take forever to get big enough for you to notice. If you find you have deceived or harmed such a man, disappear for a long time. Do not stay around him or he will nibble you to death.

**Mr. Suspicion.** Another variant on the breeds above, this is a future Joe Stalin. He sees what he wants to see—usually the worst—in other people, and imagines that everyone is after him. Mr. Suspicion is in fact the least dangerous of the three: Genuinely unbalanced, he is easy to deceive, just as Stalin himself was constantly deceived. Play on his suspicious nature to get him to turn against other people. But if you do become the target of his suspicions, watch out.

**The Serpent with a Long Memory.** If hurt or deceived, this man will show no anger on the surface; he will calculate and wait. Then, when he is in a position to turn the tables, he will exact a revenge marked by a cold-blooded shrewdness. Recognize this man by his calculation and cunning in the different areas of his life. He is usually cold and unaffectionate. Be doubly careful of this snake, and if you have somehow injured him, either crush him completely or get him out of your sight.

**The Plain, Unassuming, and Often Unintelligent Man.** Ah, your ears prick up when you find such a tempting victim. But this man is a lot harder to deceive than you imagine. Falling for a ruse often takes intelligence and imagination—a sense of the possible rewards. The blunt man will not take the bait because he does not recognize it. He is that unaware. The danger

with this man is not that he will harm you or seek revenge, but merely that he will waste your time, energy, resources, and even your sanity in trying to deceive him. Have a test ready for a mark—a joke, a story. If his reaction is utterly literal, this is the type you are dealing with. Continue at your own risk.

# TRANSGRESSIONS OF THE LAW

## Transgression I

In the early part of the thirteenth century, Muhammad, the shah of Khwarezm, managed after many wars to forge a huge empire, extending west to present-day Turkey and south to Afghanistan. The empire's center was the great Asian capital of Samarkand. The shah had a powerful, well-trained army, and could mobilize 200,000 warriors within days.

In 1219 Muhammad received an embassy from a new tribal leader to the east, Genghis Khan. The embassy included all sorts of gifts to the great Muhammad, representing the finest goods from Khan's small but growing Mongol empire. Genghis Khan wanted to reopen the Silk Route to Europe, and offered to share it with Muhammad, while promising peace between the two empires.

Muhammad did not know this upstart from the east, who, it seemed to him, was extremely arrogant to try to talk as an equal to one so clearly his superior. He ignored Khan's offer. Khan tried again: This time he sent a caravan of a hundred camels filled with the rarest articles he had plundered from China. Before the caravan reached Muhammad, however, Inalchik, the governor of a region bordering on Samarkand, seized it for himself, and executed its leaders.

Genghis Khan was sure that this was a mistake—that Inalchik had acted without Muhammad's approval. He sent yet another mission to Muhammad, reiterating his offer and asking that the governor be punished. This time Muhammad himself had one of the ambassadors beheaded, and sent the other two back with shaved heads—a horrifying insult in the Mongol code of honor. Khan sent a message to the shah: "You have chosen war. What will happen will happen, and what it is to be we know not; only God knows." Mobilizing his forces, in 1220 he attacked Inalchik's province, where he seized the capital, captured the governor, and ordered him executed by having molten silver poured into his eyes and ears.

Over the next year, Khan led a series of guerrilla-like campaigns against the shah's much larger army. His method was totally novel for the time—his

soldiers could move very fast on horseback, and had mastered the art of firing with bow and arrow while mounted. The speed and flexibility of his forces allowed him to deceive Muhammad as to his intentions and the directions of his movements. Eventually he managed first to surround Samarkand, then to seize it. Muhammad fled, and a year later died, his vast empire broken and destroyed. Genghis Khan was sole master of Samarkand, the Silk Route, and most of northern Asia.

## Interpretation

Never assume that the person you are dealing with is weaker or less important than you are. Some men are slow to take offense, which may make you misjudge the thickness of their skin, and fail to worry about insulting them. But should you offend their honor and their pride, they will overwhelm you with a violence that seems sudden and extreme given their slowness to anger. If you want to turn people down, it is best to do so politely and respectfully, even if you feel their request is impudent or their offer ridiculous. Never reject them with an insult until you know them better; you may be dealing with a Genghis Khan.

### THE CROW AND THE SHEEP

*A troublesome Crow seated herself on the back of a Sheep. The Sheep, much against his will, carried her backward and forward for a long time, and at last said, "If you had treated a dog in this way, you would have had your deserts from his sharp teeth." To this the Crow replied, "I despise the weak, and yield to the strong. I know whom I may bully, and whom I must flatter; and thus I hope to prolong my life to a good old age.*

FABLES, AESOP, SIXTH CENTURY B.C.

## Transgression II

In the late 1910s some of the best swindlers in America formed a con-artist ring based in Denver, Colorado. In the winter months they would spread across the southern states, plying their trade. In 1920 Joe Furey, a leader of the ring, was working his way through Texas, making hundreds of thousands of dollars with classic con games. In Fort Worth, he met a sucker named J. Frank Norfleet, a cattleman who owned a large ranch. Norfleet fell for the con. Convinced of the riches to come, he emptied his bank account of \$45,000 and handed it over to Furey and his confederates. A few days later they gave him his “millions,” which turned out to be a few good dollars wrapped around a packet of newspaper clippings.

Furey and his men had worked such cons a hundred times before, and the sucker was usually so embarrassed by his gullibility that he quietly learned his lesson and accepted the loss. But Norfleet was not like other suckers. He went to the police, who told him there was little they could do. “Then I’ll go after those people myself,” Norfleet told the detectives. “I’ll get them, too, if it takes the rest of my life.” His wife took over the ranch as Norfleet scoured the country, looking for others who had been fleeced in the same game. One such sucker came forward, and the two men identified one of the con artists in San Francisco, and managed to get him locked up. The man committed suicide rather than face a long term in prison.

Norfleet kept going. He tracked down another of the con artists in Montana, roped him like a calf, and dragged him through the muddy streets to the town jail. He traveled not only across the country but to England, Canada, and Mexico in search of Joe Furey, and also of Furey’s right-hand man, W. B. Spencer. Finding Spencer in Montreal, Norfleet chased him through the streets. Spencer escaped but the rancher stayed on his trail and caught up with him in Salt Lake City. Preferring the mercy of the law to Norfleet’s wrath, Spencer turned himself in.

Norfleet found Furey in Jacksonville, Florida, and personally hauled him off to face justice in Texas. But he wouldn’t stop there: He continued on to Denver, determined to break up the entire ring. Spending not only large sums of money but another year of his life in the pursuit, he managed to put



all of the con ring's leaders behind bars. Even some he didn't catch had grown so terrified of him that they too turned themselves in.

After five years of hunting, Norfleet had single-handedly destroyed the country's largest confederation of con artists. The effort bankrupted him and ruined his marriage, but he died a satisfied man.

## Interpretation

Most men accept the humiliation of being conned with a sense of resignation. They learn their lesson, recognizing that there is no such thing as a free lunch, and that they have usually been brought down by their own greed for easy money. Some, however, refuse to take their medicine. Instead of reflecting on their own gullibility and avarice, they see themselves as totally innocent victims.

Men like this may seem to be crusaders for justice and honesty, but they are actually immoderately insecure. Being fooled, being conned, has activated their self-doubt, and they are desperate to repair the damage. Were the mortgage on Norfleet's ranch, the collapse of his marriage, and the years of borrowing money and living in cheap hotels worth his revenge over his embarrassment at being fleeced? To the Norfleets of the world, overcoming their embarrassment is worth any price.

All people have insecurities, and often the best way to deceive a sucker is to play upon his insecurities. But in the realm of power, everything is a question of degree, and the person who is decidedly more insecure than the average mortal presents great dangers. Be warned: If you practice deception or trickery of any sort, study your mark well. Some people's insecurity and ego fragility cannot tolerate the slightest offense. To see if you are dealing with such a type, test them first—make, say, a mild joke at their expense. A confident person will laugh; an overly insecure one will react as if personally insulted. If you suspect you are dealing with this type, find another victim.

### Transgression III

In the fifth century B.C., Ch'ung-erh, the prince of Ch'in (in present-day China), had been forced into exile. He lived modestly—even, sometimes, in poverty—waiting for the time when he could return home and resume his princely life. Once he was passing through the state of Cheng, where the ruler, not knowing who he was, treated him rudely. The ruler's minister, Shu Chan, saw this and said, "This man is a worthy prince. May Your Highness treat him with great courtesy and thereby place him under an obligation!" But the ruler, able to see only the prince's lowly station, ignored this advice and insulted the prince again. Shu Chan again warned his master, saying, "If Your Highness cannot treat Ch'ung-erh with courtesy, you should put him to death, to avoid calamity in the future." The ruler only scoffed.

Years later, the prince was finally able to return home, his circumstances greatly changed. He did not forget who had been kind to him, and who had been insolent, during his years of poverty. Least of all did he forget his treatment at the hands of the ruler of Cheng. At his first opportunity he assembled a vast army and marched on Cheng, taking eight cities, destroying the kingdom, and sending the ruler into an exile of his own.

#### Interpretation

You can never be sure who you are dealing with. A man who is of little importance and means today can be a person of power tomorrow. We forget a lot in our lives, but we rarely forget an insult.

How was the ruler of Cheng to know that Prince Ch'ung-erh was an ambitious, calculating, cunning type, a serpent with a long memory? There was really no way for him to know, you may say—but since there was no way, it would have been better not to tempt the fates by finding out. There is nothing to be gained by insulting a person unnecessarily. Swallow the impulse to offend, even if the other person seems weak. The satisfaction is meager compared to the danger that someday he or she will be in a position to hurt you.

## Transgression IV

The year of 1920 had been a particularly bad one for American art dealers. Big buyers—the robber-baron generation of the previous century—were getting to an age where they were dying off like flies, and no new millionaires had emerged to take their place. Things were so bad that a number of the major dealers decided to pool their resources, an unheard-of event, since art dealers usually get along like cats and dogs.

Joseph Duveen, art dealer to the richest tycoons of America, was suffering more than the others that year, so he decided to go along with this alliance. The group now consisted of the five biggest dealers in the country. Looking around for a new client, they decided that their last best hope was Henry Ford, then the wealthiest man in America. Ford had yet to venture into the art market, and he was such a big target that it made sense for them to work together.

The dealers decided to assemble a list, “The 100 Greatest Paintings in the World” (all of which they happened to have in stock), and to offer the lot of them to Ford. With one purchase he could make himself the world’s greatest collector. The consortium worked for weeks to produce a magnificent object: a three-volume set of books containing beautiful reproductions of the paintings, as well as scholarly texts accompanying each picture. Next they made a personal visit to Ford at his home in Dearborn, Michigan. There they were surprised by the simplicity of his house: Mr. Ford was obviously an extremely unaffected man.

Ford received them in his study. Looking through the book, he expressed astonishment and delight. The excited dealers began imagining the millions of dollars that would shortly flow into their coffers. Finally, however, Ford looked up from the book and said, “Gentlemen, beautiful books like these, with beautiful colored pictures like these, must cost an awful lot!” “But Mr. Ford!” exclaimed Duveen, “we don’t expect you to buy these books. We got them up especially for you, to show you the pictures. These books are a present to you.” Ford seemed puzzled. “Gentlemen,” he said, “it is extremely nice of you, but I really don’t see how I can accept a beautiful, expensive present like this from strangers.” Duveen explained to Ford that the reproductions in the books showed paintings they had hoped to sell to

him. Ford finally understood. “But gentlemen,” he exclaimed, “what would I want with the original pictures when the ones right here in these books are so beautiful?”

## **Interpretation**

Joseph Duveen prided himself on studying his victims and clients in advance, figuring out their weaknesses and the peculiarities of their tastes before he ever met them. He was driven by desperation to drop this tactic just once, in his assault on Henry Ford. It took him months to recover from his misjudgment, both mentally and monetarily. Ford was the unassuming plain-man type who just isn't worth the bother. He was the incarnation of those literal-minded folk who do not possess enough imagination to be deceived. From then on, Duveen saved his energies for the Mellons and Morgans of the world—men crafty enough for him to entrap in his snares.

## KEYS TO POWER

The ability to measure people and to know who you're dealing with is the most important skill of all in gathering and conserving power. Without it you are blind: Not only will you offend the wrong people, you will choose the wrong types to work on, and will think you are flattering people when you are actually insulting them. Before embarking on any move, take the measure of your mark or potential opponent. Otherwise you will waste time and make mistakes. Study people's weaknesses, the chinks in their armor, their areas of both pride and insecurity. Know their ins and outs before you even decide whether or not to deal with them.

Two final words of caution: First, in judging and measuring your opponent, never rely on your instincts. You will make the greatest mistakes of all if you rely on such inexact indicators. Nothing can substitute for gathering concrete knowledge. Study and spy on your opponent for however long it takes; this will pay off in the long run.

Second, never trust appearances. Anyone with a serpent's heart can use a show of kindness to cloak it; a person who is blustery on the outside is often really a coward. Learn to see through appearances and their contradictions. Never trust the version that people give of themselves—it is utterly unreliable.

Image: The Hunter. He does not lay the same trap for a wolf as for a fox. He does not set bait where no one will take it. He knows his prey thoroughly, its habits and hideaways, and hunts accordingly.

Authority: Be convinced, that there are no persons so insignificant and inconsiderable, but may, some time or other, have it in their power to be of use to you; which they certainly will not, if you have once shown them contempt. Wrongs are often forgiven, but contempt never is. Our pride remembers it for ever. (Lord Chesterfield, 1694-1773)

## **REVERSAL**

What possible good can come from ignorance about other people? Learn to tell the lions from the lambs or pay the price. Obey this law to its fullest extent; it has no reversal—do not bother looking for one.