



*“Good words are worth  
much and cost little.”*

George Herbert

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In his book *The Four Agreements*, Don Miguel Ruiz distills the essence of Toltec wisdom into four principles for living a life of value:

- ❖ Be impeccable with your word.
- ❖ Don't take anything personally.
- ❖ Don't make assumptions.
- ❖ Always do your best.

These agreements are deceptively simple, yet difficult to apply. With practice, they provide a way to experience inner peace and happiness. Each agreement is self-directed, teaching us how to respond appropriately to others' difficult behaviors and maintain smoother work relationships.

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1

***Be impeccable with your word.***

*Speak with integrity. Say only what you mean. Avoid using words to speak against yourself or to gossip about others. Use the power of your word in the direction of truth and kindness.*

Words are powerful, and your speech establishes (or undermines) your credibility and trustworthiness. This first agreement requires you to make honest, positive statements that reflect who you really are, letting go of the “fake” persona that may occasionally creep into your communication.

Just as your word can form solid relationships, it also has the potential to destroy them. When we abuse the power of words—spreading verbal poison as we express anger, jealousy, envy or hate—our gossip pulls others down, creating a climate of fear and doubt.

Remember: Your opinion is nothing but *your* point of view—and not necessarily true. It reflects your beliefs and ego. We spread gossip and opinions so we can defend our point of view.

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*“Whatever games are played  
with us, we must play no games  
with ourselves.”*

Ralph Waldo Emerson

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2

***Don't take anything personally.***

*Nothing others do is because of you. What others say and do is a projection of their own reality, their own dream. When you are immune to the opinions and actions of others, you won't be the victim of needless suffering.*

Each of us lives in our own world, in our own mind, set off from the larger worldview. When we take something personally, we assume others know what's in our world—and we then try to impose our world on theirs.

Even when a situation *is* personal, insulting you directly, it has nothing to do with you. What someone says or does is merely his opinion.

If you buy into this opinion, you eat their emotional garbage, which then becomes *your* garbage. Refuse to take it personally, and you're free to act in accordance with your values—not theirs.

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*“When we feel stuck, going  
nowhere -- even starting to slip  
backward -- we may actually be  
backing up to get a running  
start.”*

Dan Millman



3

***Don't make assumptions.***

*Find the courage to ask questions and to express what you really want. Communicate with others as clearly as you can to avoid misunderstandings, sadness, and drama. With just this one agreement, you can completely transform your life.*

We make assumptions about everything, believe them to be true and then act upon them. You do, however, have a choice: Clarify and question.

It may feel risky to admit you don't know something with 100% certainty. You may try to avoid conversations in which you must reveal your assumptions, leading others to perceive you as less than brilliant. Consequently, you miss opportunities to strengthen relationships.

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*"Do what you feel in your heart to be right - for you'll be criticized anyway."*

*Franklin D. Roosevelt*

4

***Always do your best.***

*Your best is going to change from moment to moment; it will be different when you are healthy as opposed to sick. Under any circumstance, simply do your best, and you will avoid self-judgment, self-abuse, and regret.*

When we put forth our best efforts, our colleagues know they can rely on us. We appear fully engaged in our tasks and passionate about our work.

Doing your best will bring out the best in others.

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*"Do not follow where the path may lead. Go instead where there is no path and leave a trail."*

*Ralph Waldo Emerson*

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**Practice.**

It may be difficult to learn and apply the four principles simultaneously. But conscious attention to them will help you learn alternative ways to react to difficult people and situations.

Instead of trying to change another person, make an impact on someone you can really change: yourself.

**Recommended Reading**

Ruiz M. (1997) *The Four Agreements*. Amber Allen Publishing, San Rafael, CA.

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*Roxanne Kaufman  
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