

Few people actually grow wiser as they age. Even if we do, we all feel like we’re walking around in our parents’ clothes pretending to be adults. Ninety percent of the time when an adult chides a teenager for something, the adult had the exact same idea. But they know they have to sound like an adult, so they mumble the admonishments they think they’re obligated to repeat. Most of the “wise,” “adult” things you hear adults say, especially the lame and irrelevant ones, are just them parroting what they heard growing up.

Ultimately, most adults journey through their lives jettisoning all the things that are truly wonderful about youth: passion, creativity, freedom, spontaneity, and loyalty; while also clinging to the very weaknesses they hoped to outgrow: insecurity, pettiness, jealousy, gossip, and selfishness. It all looks very “grown-up” from the outside, but that’s just window-dressing. Don’t let the nicer clothes and more expensive toys fool you. Unless you choose your friends and your path very carefully, most of adulthood is just a larger version of the high school cafeteria, but the cliques are more stratified and their members are more tired.

Some people, however, manage to become adults without ever becoming “grown-ups” (a patronizing word I’ve never liked). Over the years, I’ve tried to figure out their secret, and tried to incorporate what I could into my own life.

So, for all my younger friends and friends who hope to stay young, here is my advice for how to become an adult without selling out to a system that never grew-up but insists that you should:

1. When confronted with doing something new or doing a familiar task differently, ask “Why not?” instead of “Why?” If you can’t think of a good reason not to, then do it.
2. You will constantly hear people say, “I always wanted to…” or “I wish I could…” When faced with those statements, ignore their excuses for why they didn’t/couldn’t/won’t and start thinking about how you can/will/must!
3. Remember that most people are unhappy, most people are unfulfilled, and most people are not in control of their own lives. With that in mind, doing things the way most people do them is insanity. If you’re not weird, you’re wasting your life.
4. Pay attention. Most people don’t. Train yourself to look for patterns in the way the world works, and then take advantage of those patterns to gain more freedom for yourself and control of your environment.
5. Morality is often the opposite of what you think it is. Most people define “morality” as “doing the same things they do.” They allow any compromises that they, themselves, make, and scorn anyone who doesn’t avoid the same things they avoid.

Real morality is very different, very rare, and most often found where you least expect it. Truly moral people have an inflexible code when it comes to two things: betraying another’s trust, and harming someone else for their own gain.

Everything else is bullshit.

6. “Achievement” is a meaningless goal in and of itself. Even the greatest achievements – landing on the moon, curing polio – are infinitesimal when you look at them on a cosmic scale. It’s the small decisions that will ultimately lead up to your greatest achievements. In whatever space you are given, make the choices that will improve the lives of the people around you.

There will be days when crooking your arm so a baby can sleep more comfortably will be your greatest achievement. It seems a small thing, but being someone who makes others safe and comfortable is an amazing accomplishment and a tremendous legacy.

7. Do not waste time or energy on unhealthy people. Only a small number of people are worth making your close friends. This bears repeating. Choose your friends very, very carefully. They can, and should, be different from you in myriad ways, but they must be people who value: *Loyalty*, *Integrity*, *Kindness*, *Generosity*, and *Intentionality*. There is no room for flexibility on these things. Be kind to everyone, but you should only entrust your friendship to those rare people whose lives are defined by those five traits.
8. Stand up to bullies, of every kind and in every place.
9. If you don’t find yourself occasionally saying, “Fuck ’em if they can’t take a joke,” then the joke is on you.
10. Remember that the silly stuff, the painful stuff, the embarrassing stuff, the icky stuff – that is where ALL of the magic in the world is to be found. Not some of it, ALL of it. If you pretend that stuff doesn’t exist, you will lead a life devoid of magic.

If you insist on seeking out those things, if you celebrate them, if you deal with them honestly and publicly you will scare people, but magic is not for the timid and afraid. “Adults” become masters of pretending that stuff doesn’t exist. Don’t ever buy into that.