

THE RULES

"In many cases, people are confused not because they lack knowledge, but because they are not aware of what game is being played".

The first rule: Identify the situation: "What game are we playing?" Name the system, think, reflect.

The second rule: Know the rules of "what is going on" (whether you agree or not): Gather information, research, find out how to get involved.

The third rule: Know your choices under these rules (whether you agree or not). Create a detailed list of choices in accordance with the rules. Take control, be empowered.

The fourth rule: Choose a course of action that is in my personal interest, take responsibility for my own fate.

By using this approach, I was able to simplify many of the new strange and complex problems I encountered. I viewed life as a game composed of many games within it and each of these games had their own rules that they followed, so I found it important to know what game was being played so that I could find out what the rules were using various methods to solicit information, and then I could determine my options and then devise a plan of action.

The first rule challenges me to think and reflect on what is happening. My job is to determine what I think is happening (what I perceive the system is) and there is a possibility that I could be wrong, but the more I do it, the more accurate I become at identifying what system I am in. I have taught this method to patients struggling with adapting to different situations and seeking tools within my practice. The simplicity and repeatability of the method impressed them.

The second rule challenges me to seek information and become well informed about what is occurring irrespective of what my opinion may be. It asks me to suspend judgement and realize that although my opinion may be relevant, ultimately what is more critical and would help me adapt is my knowledge of the rules of the system and how they apply to me and my situation.

The third rule empowers me and challenges me to take control by clarifying my choices under the rules. Adapting to the system means selecting the choice or choices available to me under the rules. I choose the one that aligns with my goals to adapt.

The reality is that even if I wanted to change the system, I still had to understand the rules. Again, surprisingly I discovered that although my opinions of my choices were relevant, understanding these choices and making a list of them was more critical if I wanted to adapt.

The fourth rule highlights the fact that once I have arrived at step 3 procrastinating is a waste of my time. Among all the choices, I need to decide which one aligns with my intended direction. Even the wrong choice is still better than no choice at all. When I refuse to choose all, I am doing is asking the system to choose for me and I lose control of my direction.

By exercising my choices, I am in charge and responsible for my own destiny. It does not guarantee success, but it makes it more likely to occur.

Over the years, I have found these rules work much better when the individual's ability to think deeply or carefully (reflect) on what the situation was is not impaired. The more insight the person has the more likely they are to succeed with this method.

It is imperative that I work at my own pace and only deal with what I am comfortable with at a time (don't bite off more than I can chew). My ability to handle more complex situations and systems increased as I repeated and reinforced the method.

For me, a system is anything that involves interaction with a defined set of rules that govern this interaction. Initially, I had trouble understanding that although I am part of a system, my individual needs are secondary to the integrity of that system.

My responsibility is to adapt to the system, not the other way around. While functional adaptation is required for success within the system, it is not a requirement to be a member.

Rule #1: Name the system.

Forming an accurate impression of what is happening requires accurate perception. Playing the "game" requires a starting point, which is naming the game. If I have misnamed it, I can correct it through my re-evaluation as more information becomes available.

It is not a step I spend very much time on, since it consists simply of recognizing what is going on and addressing it in the next step. The most important aspect of this step is realizing that I need to recognize what's going on.

For me to live a functional existence, I think of life as a game made up of many other games that I must master. The first step towards playing a game properly is to identify the game we are engaged in at any given time. After all, if the game is Monopoly, playing it with Poker rules doesn't make sense.

At any given time, identifying the game we're in could be difficult or easy, but it should never be a long process. It's simply a matter of recognizing exactly what's going on and we should be able to describe it with a word or sentence. The game could be as simple as walking my dog or as complex as investing under complicated terms. Whatever the case may be, it is important to first make an assumption about the game. As well, sometimes the game changes shortly after I identify it, so it is still important to review every now and then to make sure I'm still in the game I think I'm in.

It is not uncommon for me to mentor people who are extremely frustrated with their lack of results and seeming inability to proceed in their chosen direction. However, the problem becomes obvious with this first question because it is often the case that they are playing a completely different game than they think they are.

My goal with Rule #1 is to help them define what they perceive the system to be. It is okay if the initial assumption is wrong as it is easy to correct this as more information becomes available. In my experience, this step usually takes just a few seconds of time. However, it is interesting how

often it is ignored. So rather than adapting to the system, time and energy is spent trying to make the system adapt to them.

To survive and thrive, I must understand how to manage my energy wisely and efficiently at any given time. I am significantly more capable of adapting when I think deeply and carefully about things. The words reflect, consider, review, and contemplate accurately describe this process. Finding out what system I am in or what game I am playing improves my chances of utilizing my energy more wisely and reducing frustration. Whenever I try to control something that is potentially uncontrollable, I experience frustration.

If someone was playing scrabble and I thought it was monopoly, how frustrating would that be? How likely is it that I will be productive? Do I have a chance of bonding with the other players? Though this may seem overly simplified, my clinical experience has taught me that often it is the simple things that get us in trouble, because they are so simple, we often ignore or don't see them as important.

I have mentored parents and their rebellious teenagers and realized that they are operating in completely different systems but continue to communicate as if they were in the same one. Sometimes, a few questions revealed that the parent thought they were operating within the "parent & child system", but their communication was that of friends, so the child responded appropriately to the frustration of the parent.

Many times, when people are confused, it's not because they lack the ability to understand, but because they lack a true understanding of what game is being played. This is why I consider this the first rule or step to becoming functional within a system.

This step is the same regardless of how simple or complex the system is, as the first rule does not attempt to analyze the system (the other rules explain that), just to identify it.

There are some systems (games) that are quite easy to identify, while others can be a little more challenging because they are made up of several systems with their own rules. For example, appropriate interactions between the opposite sex have its own set of rules that may differ when you interact with the opposite in a workplace when they are your

supervisor, and some behaviours that may be appropriate in a particular setting (e.g. socially) may not be appropriate in another circumstance with the same person, e.g. at work.

Individuals who are functional may be able to identify these different systems and adapt, but individuals with difficulty recognizing subtle changes may have difficulty doing so. Having the ability to identify "what game is being played" is crucial to the ability of anyone to function appropriately, and society is passionate about teaching us this skill.

As we are presented with increasingly complex information to sort through, categorize, and master, we often forget or ignore the simple principles that allow us to get the most out of complex information.

Rule # Two: Know the Rules Of The System (whether or not you agree with them).

There are rules for every game, and most of us understand this concept, so we wouldn't complain at a poker game if no one was playing Monopoly. In my practice, I often see this happen when people become frustrated and fail to recognize that they aren't following the rules of that system, when we wouldn't expect to be accommodated in those circumstances. Our frustration comes from trying to control something that is potentially uncontrollable, and it is understandable that people who are oblivious to the rules often fail in their attempts to succeed.

Contrary to what some people may believe, I am responsible for educating myself about the rules and the system rarely cares about my individual needs. My performance in any system depends on a lot of factors, some of which I have control over and some of which I don't, the goal is to focus more on the areas where I do have control and be aware of the areas where I don't have control, but not dwell on them.

As much information as possible is gathered and I strive to remain unbiased. Whether I like the information or not isn't critical to my success. Knowing the system, the intricacies, the traditions, the regulations, and how it works will empower me to choose a path that will benefit me.

My process involves gathering information from as many sources as possible over a reasonable period and verifying that the information is

accurate and valid. Interesting enough, sometimes those in authority within a system may not fully grasp the rules and how they apply to them, which can work in your favor.

The internet has made this rule very attainable and easy to fulfill and I use it often, but I also remember that the information I receive from the internet is as good as the site, so we need to check the credibility of the site and verify the information before adopting it.

Withholding my opinions about information until I have gathered all the information, I need makes it much easier to gather and review it objectively. If I did not do this, my opinions would often affect how I gather and review information. Knowing and understanding the rules, rather than my opinions, determines how functional I am within that system, and provides me with the best chance to survive and thrive.

It has often surprised me how little people knew about a system they complained bitterly about and how they would present unreliable second information as fact. Often, they were not successful within these systems and became very frustrated and angry as a result.

When I worked as a physician within the worker's compensation system, I often encountered angry injured workers who viewed the system as a living entity and the case manager as someone out to get them.

Upon further questioning, they would have no idea about the policies and procedures of the system and the fact that it was public information and easily accessible; they often had little knowledge of case management and how to navigate it more effectively.

Providing them with the opportunity to learn the rules of the system made them more willing to participate in their own recovery.

Gathering information on the rules of the system can take a variety of methods and times, depending on the complexity of the system. Sometimes it may only take a few moments to identify all the rules, while at other times extensive research may be necessary. You should always check "Rule #1" to ensure that the system has not changed or evolved because of the information you gathered.

I often found that I felt less frustrated during my transition to the Canadian system when I had a clearer understanding of the obstacles I was facing. The more information I had, the more empowered I felt and was. Discovering and gaining access to the information resulted in significant growth and helped me orient myself towards my choices and the changes I needed to make.

Rule #3: Know Your Choices Under the Rules (Whether or not you agree with them) Make a detailed list of all the choices under the rules.

In accordance with the rules, I create a detailed list of all the choices that are available to me, and I do this without assessing whether the choices are desirable or acceptable. It is my goal to be objective when listing my choices to avoid overlooking anything. Keeping my focus and conserving my energy requires me to consider only the options that are permitted under the rules.

Without knowing and understanding the rules, it is impossible for me to fully understand and be aware of all my choices. The number of choices I have when I use this approach always surprises me, even when the situation seems dire.

While I don't always like my choices, knowing them and having a list of them allows me to accomplish rule number 4.

Rule #4: Choose and Move On

From rule #3, I choose the option that gives me the greatest chance of invariably getting the results I want. The only thing worse than a bad decision is no decision at all. By not choosing, I am asking the system to choose for me, and this greatly reduces my chances of getting the results I want. A choice can be overwhelming, and it can be easy to get stuck. When I am overwhelmed, I tend to cross the line from thoroughness to procrastinating.

In my head, as I review these rules, I am always checking to ensure that they haven't changed since sometimes, simply by resolving rule 2 or 3, I am encountering a whole new set of rules and choices that I have to learn. Once I accepted that change is ongoing and constant, it became

easier for me to view things as constantly changing and focus more on adapting to them.

My failure to observe rule 4 at times was a result of my unduly focused attention on how unhappy I was with the choices I made and my failure to stabilize things at that level eventually deteriorated to the point where the original choices I was dissatisfied with looked pretty good if I could get them back.

Points to remember:

Rule #1: Name the system - “what is the game being played?” Be aware of the system, think, reflect.

Rule #2: Know the rules of “what is going on” (Whether or not you agree) Information gathering, do some work, research, find out how to be involved.

Rule #3: Know your choices under these rules (Whether or not you agree) Make a detailed list of choices consistent with the rules, take control, be empowered.

Rule #4: Choose and move on I pick a choice from rule #3 that is in the direction I want, take responsibility for my own destiny.