

RULES

Rules — The Promises You Don't Break

You know that coworker. The one who says yes to every shift, every swap, every favor. Somebody calls in sick. She covers. Somebody needs a ride. She's there. Somebody needs to vent for forty-five minutes in the parking lot. She listens. Every single time.

And you watch her get more tired every week. More irritable. More stretched. She starts snapping at customers. She stops eating lunch. She's running on empty and everybody around her is running on her fuel.

One day she burns out. Completely. Calls in for a week straight. People are shocked. "She was always so reliable. What happened?"

What happened is she had no rules.

Not work rules. Not company policy. Rules with *herself*. Promises her mind made to her mind about what she will and will not allow — no matter what, no matter who's asking, no matter how guilty she feels.

Rules are the agreements you make with yourself so your house can function. Not suggestions. Not goals you hope to reach one day. Non-negotiable lines that keep you aligned with your own direction when everything and everyone around you is pulling you off course.

Without them, the house doesn't collapse from outside pressure. It collapses because it gave itself away one "yes" at a time.

Why Rules Are Not Willpower

Most people hear "rules" and think discipline. Think grinding it out. Think *just be stronger*.

That's not what this is.

Willpower is forcing yourself to do something you don't want to do. It runs out. Every time. Usually by Thursday.

A rule is different. A rule is a line you drew when you were thinking clearly — when you could see the whole house and how it works — so that when you *can't* think clearly, when you're exhausted or emotional or pressured, the line holds even when you can't.

Think of it like this. You're standing at your register. It's the end of a double shift. You're tired. A customer is rude to you — rude. Everything in you wants to fire back. Trust is activated. Autonomy is ready to fight. The words are right there.

But you don't say them. Not because you're strong in that moment. You're not. You're running on fumes. You don't say them because at some point — a long time ago, when you were calm and clear — you decided: *I don't let other people's behavior decide who I am.*

That decision, made once, is holding you together right now in a moment where you have nothing left. That's not willpower. That's a rule doing its job.

Three Kinds of Rules

Rules come in three layers. Like the house itself, they start at the outside and go deeper. Each one protects something different.

1. *Boundary Rules* — What You Don't Let In

These protect the house from the outside. They decide what gets through the door and what doesn't.

"I don't pick up my phone after nine at night."

"I don't lend money I can't afford to lose."

"I don't stay in a conversation where someone is yelling at me."

These sound simple. They're not. Because every time the phone rings at 9:15 and it's someone you care about, Trust says *answer it, they might need you*, and Autonomy says *the line is the line*. And the friction is real. It's uncomfortable. You feel guilty.

But the rule holds the wall. Because you drew that line when you could see clearly. And you who drew it was protecting you who's standing here now, tired and tempted to give in.

Boundary rules don't make you selfish. They keep the house from becoming everyone else's.

2. *Behavioral Rules* — What You Keep Doing

These protect your direction. They're the things you do that keep you moving forward — not because they're exciting, but because you promised yourself you would.

"I eat a real meal on my lunch break. Not at my register. Sitting down."

"I put twenty dollars aside every payday before I spend anything else."

"I say what's bothering me within 48 hours instead of letting it pile up."

None of these are glamorous. Nobody's going to congratulate you for eating a sandwich sitting down. But that behavioral rule — that agreement with yourself — is the thing that keeps Industry running. It keeps the house functional on the days when motivation is gone and all you have left is the promise.

Behavioral rules are not about being perfect. They're about having something that keeps moving when you don't feel like it. A wheel that turns because the track is there, not because someone is pushing it.

3. *Identity Rules* — Who You Are When It Matters

These are the deepest. They don't protect the walls or the routines. They protect *you*.

An identity rule is a promise about the kind of person you are — tested only when it would be easier to be someone else.

"I don't lie. Even when the truth costs me."

"I don't abandon people in a crisis."

"I don't pretend to be okay when I'm not."

These aren't things you do. They're things you *are*. And the difference matters because behavioral rules can bend on a terrible day. Boundary rules can flex when circumstances genuinely change. But identity rules? Those are the bedrock under the foundation. When one of those breaks, you don't just lose a habit or let someone cross a line. You lose the thread of your own story. The Identity resident — the one that asks, "Who am I?" — suddenly has no answer.

You know the feeling. You've seen it in someone — maybe yourself. That moment when a person does something so far from who they thought they were that they look in the mirror and don't recognize what's looking back. That's an identity rule breaking. And it takes a long, long time to rebuild.

Why Rules Matter More Than Goals

Goals are about where you want to go. Rules are about who you are on the way there.

A goal says: "I want to be promoted to department manager."

A rule says: "I don't step on people to get ahead."

The goal might change. The economy shifts, the position disappears, your direction turns. That's fine. Goals are supposed to change.

But the rule stays. Because the rule isn't about the destination. It's about the house. It's about making sure that wherever you end up, you still recognize yourself when you get there.

Most people set goals and forget to set rules. Then they chase the goal, break promises to themselves along the way and arrive at the destination feeling empty — because the house fell apart during the trip.

Rules don't make your life smaller. They make your house solid enough to travel.

The One Thing About Rules

The most important thing about rules is this: they must be yours.

Not your mother's rules. Not your boss's expectations. Not what society says you should do or who social media says you should be.

Yours. Written by the version of you who was thinking clearly, for the version of you who won't be.

Because the world will tilt. The ground will shake. The residents will argue. You'll be tired, you'll be pressured, you'll be standing at the end of a double shift with someone screaming at you.

And in that moment, the only thing standing between you and a decision you'll regret isn't strength. It isn't motivation. It isn't willpower.

It's the promise you already made.