

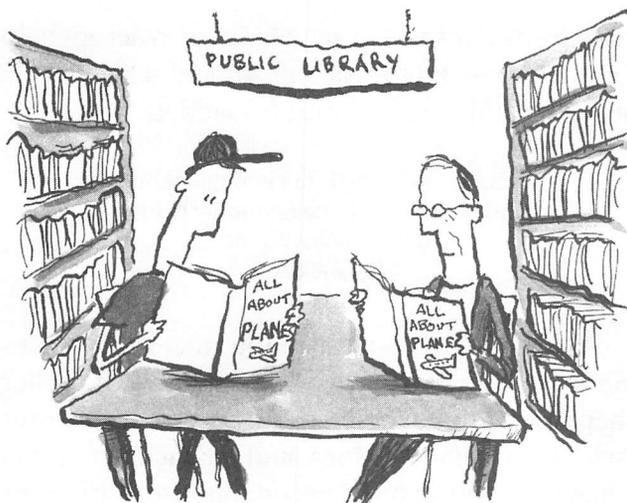
16 Ways to Become Wise

1. Learn from experience. This includes positive and negative experiences. Let suffering and mistakes become your teachers; remember that mistakes teach you about things that *don't* work so you can discover what *does* work. Allow suffering to teach you patience, compassion, caring, and sharing with others. Reflect on the things that happen to you and the things you do. Accept responsibility for the choices you make—and the consequences.

“Wisdom is not to be obtained from textbooks, but must be coined out of human experience in the flame of life.”

Morris Raphael Cohen

2. Develop your mind. Learning doesn't end at 17 (or 18, or 21, or whatever age you stop going to school). Wise people are lifelong learners. Keep an open mind to new information and stay “teachable.” Seek knowledge, ideas, cultures, and “to go boldly where no one has gone before” (to quote Captain Jean-Luc Picard of “Star Trek: The Next Generation”). Your mind has enormous power and potential; never be afraid to strengthen and stretch it even more.



“The excitement of learning separates youth from old age. As long as you're learning you're not old.”

Rosalyn S. Yalow

3. Care for your body. You know that it's important to stay healthy. Eat well, get enough sleep and exercise, keep your body clean, and avoid harmful habits like smoking and drinking alcohol.

4. Care for your spirit. Your inner self needs TLC, too. Feed your spirit (or “mind,” or “soul,” or whatever you prefer to call it) with meditation or prayer. Exercise it with service to others; rest it with quiet contemplation . . . and time spent watching the clouds go by.

5. Know yourself and what you can become. Follow your interests and passions; explore and develop your talents. Knowing yourself also means acknowledging and accepting your limitations. If you don't enjoy hockey and you're not very good at it, you don't need to feel guilty about not trying out for the hockey team. On the other hand, if you *love* hockey and you're not very good at it, you know what to do: Learn. Get help. And practice, practice, practice.

“The most excellent and divine counsel . . . is to study and learn how to know ourselves.

This is the foundation of wisdom and the highway to whatever is good.”

Pierre Charron

6. Have confidence in your worth. Don't rely on others for approval and acceptance; your power comes from within. Don't count on others to get you going; be a self-starter.

7. Seek and build relationships with others. How you relate to others depends on how you relate to yourself. When you accept and appreciate yourself, it's easier to accept and appreciate others. Get to know other people and grow close to them—at home, at school, in your neighborhood and community. Be willing to learn from them. You may discover that people in your everyday life—your parents, grandparents, next-door neighbor, teachers, favorite aunt or uncle, best friend, youth group leader—are full of wisdom.

8. Seek and build relationships with the world.

All of nature produces music together, like the members of an orchestra. Wise people are those who flow with nature's melody—with the forces of weather, animals, and the world's creatures. Learn to share, balance, and walk *with* nature. This means that you don't go out and wantonly shoot birds with your new BB gun. You respect the animals and other living things around you.

9. Develop your intuition. When you're intuitive, you're able to feel or sense the feelings, beliefs, wants, and needs of others. Not everyone is naturally intuitive, but you can work to become more intuitive. One way to do this is by trying to imagine how other people feel. Put yourself in their place; walk in their moccasins.

10. Use your common sense. Often, common sense is simply a matter of thinking before you act—of drawing on what you already know without having to figure it out. Common sense is a kind of “folk wisdom.” It's not sophisticated; it's not profound. Common sense tells you not to walk into the street in front of a moving car. It tells you to close the window when it's raining. It tells you that if you don't like being called names or bullied, other people don't like it either.

11. Make plans and decisions based on fairness and truth. Be tolerant of other people and ideas. Try not to judge them. Gather as much information as you can before forming an opinion.

12. Try to see the “big picture.” When you can imagine what a puzzle might look like when it's put together, it's easier to see where individual pieces fit. *Example:* You understand that *all* people have a need to feel loved and accepted. You can't reach out to everyone in the world, but you can reach out to the individuals around you—people of all ages, races, religions, cultures, sizes, shapes, and so on. Seeing the “big picture” also means that you're better prepared for surprises and possible setbacks. You can see the tornado before the funnel cloud appears.

“The most pathetic person in the world is someone who has sight, but has no vision.”

Helen Keller

13. Be flexible and adaptable. When your grandfather was young, he probably started a job or career that he stayed with for his entire working life. You might need to make three or four career changes over your lifetime. Today and increasingly in the future, the people who succeed are those who change, learn, and grow. Be open to new ideas.

“In a time of drastic change it is the learners who inherit the future.”

Eric Hoffer

14. Be willing to delay your wants. You need to wait until you're old enough for certain things you want to have and do—buy a car, stay out past curfew, get your own apartment, and so on. Kids who can't wait to get what they want might steal, quit school, or run away. Adults who can't delay their wants might buy a home that's more than they can afford. If you're willing to work hard, build the skills you need, and wait for the right time, you can earn the good things you want, and that's part of wisdom.

15. Dare to take risks or look foolish. To become wise, you need the courage to look at things from different angles and challenge accepted ideas and usual ways of doing things. At times, people might make fun of you. Christopher Columbus looked silly to the rest of Europe when he challenged the idea that he'd drop off the edge of the earth if he sailed straight west.

“Without risks, there is no chance of reward.”

Richard Bangs

16. Give and take. Wise people know to accept help from others—and to reach down and take another person's hand as they climb life's ladder.

“Knowledge alone is not enough. It must be leavened with magnanimity before it becomes wisdom.”

Adlai Stevenson

You've probably noticed that this list includes many of the character traits discussed in earlier chapters of this book. You might want to create your own list of traits, qualities, and characteristics you believe are important to becoming wise. Carry your list with you and refer to it from time to time. Make changes and additions as you grow in wisdom.