

**Danville News Column**  
**Robert John Andrews**  
**“Food Fights and Golden Rules”**  
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“In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you.” The Golden Rule. But can we really name it a rule? We can call it ‘golden,’ which suggest something excellent and valuable. But a rule? A regulation with which we must comply?

Fascinating is how the Golden Rule is a universal maxim.

Tobit, a Jewish book, says: *“What you hate, do not do to anyone.”*

Confucius said: *“Never do to others what you would not have them do to you.”*

Hinduism records: *“One should never do that to another which one regards as injurious to one’s own self.”*

Notice, however, how all of these last three versions are expressed as negatives, as prohibitions, as ‘do not’s.’

The Qu’ran twists it: *“None of you truly are believers until he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself.”*

Notice how the negative form of the Golden Rule is much easier to obey. How so? Negatives always are easier.

Do not kill your neighbor. Okay, it’s been a successful day; I didn’t murder John or Wendy across the street.

Do no harm. Okay, that’s cool. Look, I didn’t make anyone worse.

Don’t do ugly things. Okay, I didn’t paint graffiti on the World War II monument today. Isn’t that wonderful?

Don’t bully because you don’t like being bullied. Okay, what a good boy am I. I didn’t beat anyone up today or spread nasty rumors about them on twitter even though they probably deserved it (and about this bullying thing: how about anti-bullying programs include a few sessions on how to love and forgive the bully?).

Don’t be rude because you don’t want them to be rude to you. Okay, aren’t I nice? I didn’t today throw food or swear or call the police even if the teacher was mean or the students were belligerent.

What a sad, calculating, flat, sterile way to live. No passion. All negative. There is no action on your part, just inaction. Hardly a great reason to wake up in the morning if that is all you are going to do. Far better is the positive form, rejecting robustly both a clear cut fundamentalist code of conduct and wishy-washy moral relativism. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

A rule to comply with? Or a vibrant attitude? A yardstick by which to measure what you don't do? Or an incentive to do what is good for you to do? A precept to obey, parsing out what is legal, illegal, permissible, impermissible? Or a higher principle to propel you?

I've belonged to plenty of institutions enforcing plenty of rules: school, church, job. Since when have regulations ever made me better? Since when have prohibitions ever inspired us? Whenever have restrictions or threats made us moral?

Easier is when I simply don't do what I don't want others to do to me. It's easier because then I am responding to what they don't do. They're setting the pace. I just have to copy them.

But if you want to be positive, forget that. I am responsible. I determine how. Positively. I decide, situation by situation. It should not be they who determine my actions, my behavior. Better it is what I, not them, believe is right, as I believe what my faith defines as right. To do right, I must first know what is right.

A young woman I admire heard this Golden Rule as a benediction one worship service. She thought about it and decided to help wash the dishes after coffee hour. That's what she would have wanted.

Don't just not curse, build others up. Don't just avoid bullying them, respect others. Don't just not be rude, be pleasant. Don't just stop doing ugly things, do what is lovely and beautiful. Don't just not hate, love your neighbor (and your enemy). Hatred is a prison. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. It requires risk. And guts.

Here's the recipe for both universal peace. Here's the secret for removing antagonisms between teachers and students. Wouldn't it be great if everyone followed it?

Well, I will if you will.

Of course, that very reply proves me the coward. Since when is my behavior contingent on what they do first? Since when is morality reciprocal?

I make it Golden or I make it Dross. I gave up being responsible and accountable for other people's actions and behaviors a long time ago. And that makes everything a lot easier.