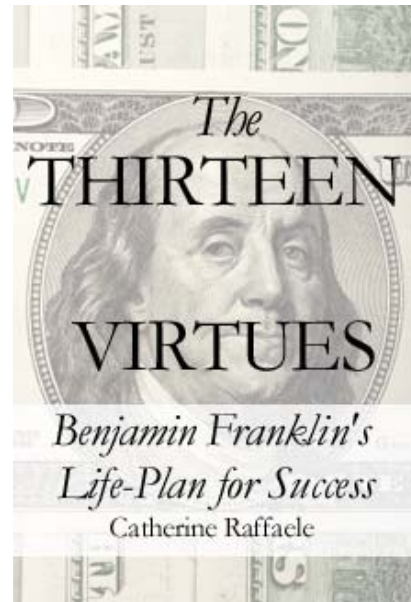


THE THIRTEEN VIRTUES: BENAJAMIN FRANKLIN'S  
LIFE-PLAN FOR SUCCESS

By Catherine Raffaele

**1. Synopsis**

Benjamin Franklin began his working life as a runaway apprentice who became over his 84 years a media baron, one of America's foremost writers and one of the country's most practical and ingenious political leaders. He was a master of wit and wisdom, genius inventor, the originator of civic improvement schemes copied worldwide, an esteemed business strategist and successful diplomat.



As one of the founding fathers, the most accomplished man in an era of giants, Franklin was at the forefront in forging the bedrock American identity that emerged from the Revolution -- a hard-working middle class, its virtues and values of diligence, honesty and frugality, of self-reliance and community service

the inspiration of what made this country the world's greatest nation. As one biographer noted: "He has his fingerprints all over American life."

All through his life, Franklin had immense confidence in the wisdom of the common citizen, as expressed in day-to-day living and through the then novel practice of democracy. Unlike the hubris of many other leaders, in the US and elsewhere, past and present, he always remained a man of the people, more comfortable in an ink-stained leather apron at his printing press with fellow workers than trading political gossip in fashionable Washington salons. As another biographer noted: "Benjamin Franklin is the founding father who winks at us, the one who seems made of flesh rather than marble."

In his late teens, Franklin formulated and diligently practised an all-encompassing self-improvement life-plan, *The Thirteen Virtues* as he called it. In the following decades his own character and successes, which stemmed from the plan, served as a glowing testament to the boundless possibilities of American life. His life-plan contains no theoretical philosophizing and no preference for a particular creed, so that any person of any or no faith can follow its lead in a quest for what Franklin called, "the bold and arduous project at arriving at moral perfection."

*This is a Media Predict book proposal. Please read it over and register your evaluation of the proposal via our prediction markets at [www.mediapredict.com](http://www.mediapredict.com).*

---

In his seventies, while living in Paris, he would take out the thirteen ivory slates on which he marked each of his thirteen virtues and show them to friends, remarking that he continued to use them to guide his daily life. One cried out with admiration as he touched the slates, describing them as, “this precious booklet.”

Franklin’s *Thirteen Virtues* have been the subject of a number of books, mostly as a minor inclusion in a biography or as his self-improvement plan mixed up in a larger examination of his life, but they have never before been set out as simply, succinctly, with examples from his life and commentary from famous contemporary Americans on how each of the virtues has helped and inspired them.

Franklin himself admitted that the path he laid out is not easy, but with “diligent application”, to use his own words, it can lead to significant improvement in a person’s life. He wrote; “I was surprised to find myself so much fuller of Faults than I had imagined, but I had the satisfaction of seeing them Diminish.”

He always carried his list of thirteen virtues with him, and wrote when he was 79 years old that: “It may well be my Posterity should be informed, that to this little Artifice, with the Blessing of God, their Ancestor owed the constant Felicity of his Life.”



*This is a Media Predict book proposal. Please read it over and register your evaluation of the proposal via our prediction markets at [www.mediapredict.com](http://www.mediapredict.com).*

---

Whoever practices these simple but profound thirteen virtues will be following in the footsteps of a man who rose from a lowly position with little apparent chance of lofty success to become one of the nation's greatest sons, hailed world-wide as a true American genius - a very wise, very healthy and wealthy man.

## **2. Method**

The book will begin with an entertaining and instructive introduction giving a cogent summary of Benjamin Franklin's epochal life and his inspirational system of self-improvement, *The Thirteen Virtues*, and how they played a significant role in his developing into the prototypical American.

On the first page of this introduction I will list Franklin's thirteen virtues, double-spaced, explaining that later in the book I will devote a full chapter to each of them. I will advise the readers that the two most important parts of Franklin's life-plan are:

Creating New Habits

and

The Review Process.



*This is a Media Predict book proposal. Please read it over and register your evaluation of the proposal via our prediction markets at [www.mediapredict.com](http://www.mediapredict.com).*

---

Franklin, well aware of the frailties of human nature, explained: “My Intention being to acquire the Habitude of all these Virtues, I judg’d it would be well not to distract my Attention by attempting the whole at once, but to fix it on one of them at a time, and when I should be a Master of that, then to proceed to another.”

I will explain succinctly that Franklin’s system was based on a simple and yet effective rotating 13-week cycle, the great man using it four times each year without a break. He designed it so that he concentrated on striving to improve in his life an individual virtue for each week, and could see at a glance on his chart (see below) how well he was progressing.

I will show in this section how the system also works for those readers who wish to use *The Fortnight System*, concentrating on one virtue each day in the cycle. Other readers may not want to attempt the year-long life-plan, but use the system as a spiritual cleansing at the beginning of each season, or for a fortnight or a month once a year, beginning at any time.

As stated in the synopsis, I will then show in the introduction over twenty to thirty pages, using historical anecdotes, how Franklin, more than any other person, invented what we have come to know as the American way of life.

*This is a Media Predict book proposal. Please read it over and register your evaluation of the proposal via our prediction markets at [www.mediapredict.com](http://www.mediapredict.com).*

---

I will follow this introduction with thirteen sequential chapters, each devoted solely to examining one of Franklin's virtues and showing how the readers can improve the practice of this virtue.

In each chapter I will list the virtue on the first page with its individual chart and follow with an explanatory page about each particular virtue. In a racy, colourful and meaningful narrative I will then show with three anecdotal examples from his life what the particular virtue meant to Franklin, and show how it is still relevant to the contemporary reader's life.

I will then use anecdotes to show how other notable people in history exemplified this virtue in their lives.

Following this will be a page or two each given to three esteemed contemporary Americans who will tell the readers, using personal anecdotes, how the particular virtue was important to their lives and their success.

I will then list ten exercises for the readers to incorporate each particular virtue into daily life.

A list of the pitfalls will follow that might result from the readers trying to incorporate the virtue into their life, and how to overcome them.

I will end each chapter devoted to a particular virtue with a page of pithy and relevant aphorisms from Franklin's best-selling *Poor Richard's Almanac*, a once-yearly compendium of his wit and wisdom, as applied to that virtue. Some examples: "He that lies down with dogs shall rise up with fleas ... No gains without pains ... Love your enemies for they will tell you their faults ... Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise ... There was never a good knife made of bad steel ... God helps those who help themselves."

Following the 'virtue' chapters, exercises and aphorisms, I will then include a template of Franklin's easily-followed schematic chart, which readers will be encouraged to photocopy and use for themselves, showing how he divided the chart into the thirteen virtues. His chart has seven red horizontal columns for the days of the week and thirteen vertical rows labelled each of his virtues. Each infraction was marked with a black spot. In the first week he focused on the virtue topping the list, *Temperance*, without worrying about any of the other virtues. With *Temperance* achieved, he moved to the next virtue, *Silence*, while striving to ensure that his observance of a measure of *Temperance* would not waiver. Down the list he went, week by week. Over a full year, he completed the thirteen- week cycle four times.



*This is a Media Predict book proposal. Please read it over and register your evaluation of the proposal via our prediction markets at [www.mediapredict.com](http://www.mediapredict.com).*

---

This is how Franklin described the system:

“I made a little Book in which I allotted a Page for each of the Virtues. I rul’d each Page with red Ink, so as to have seven Columns, one for each Day of the Week, marking each Column with a Letter for the Day. I cross’d these Columns with thirteen red Lines, marking the Beginning of each Line with the first Letter of one of these Virtues, on which Line & in its proper Column I might mark by a little black Spot every Fault I found upon Examination to have been committed respecting that Virtue upon that Day.

“I determined to give a Week’s strict Attention to each of the Virtues successively. Thus in the first Week my great Guard was to avoid every the least Offense against Temperance, leaving the other Virtues to their ordinary Chance, only marking every Evening the Faults of the Day.

“Thus if in the first Week I could keep my first Line marked T clear of Spots, I suppos’d the Habit of that Virtue so much strenghen’d and its opposite weaken’d that I might venture extending my Attention to include the next, and for the following Week keep both Lines clear of Spots. Proceeding thus to the last, I could go thro’ a Course complete in Thirteen Weeks, and four Courses in a Year. And like him who having a Garden to weed, does not attempt to eradicate all the

*This is a Media Predict book proposal. Please read it over and register your evaluation of the proposal via our prediction markets at [www.mediapredict.com](http://www.mediapredict.com).*

bad Herbs at once, which would exceed his Reach and his Strength, but works on one of the Beds at a time, & having accomplish'd the first proceeds to a Second; so I should have (I hope) the encouraging Pleasure of seeing on my Pages the Progress I made in Virtue, by clearing successively my Lines of their Spots, till in the End by a Number of Courses, I should be happy in viewing a clean Book after a thirteen Weeks, daily examination.”

Below is Franklin’s system using the slate for *Temperance* and showing how he marked the chart. The twelve other slates will be given their own page in the proposed book, each containing one of the other virtues.

TEMPERANCE							
Eat not to dullness; Drink not to elevation							
	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
Temperance							
Silence	*	*		*		*	
Order	**	*	*		*	*	*
Resolution			*			*	
Frugality		*			*		
Industry			*				



*This is a Media Predict book proposal. Please read it over and register your evaluation of the proposal via our prediction markets at [www.mediapredict.com](http://www.mediapredict.com).*

Sincerity							
Justice							
Moderation							
Cleanliness							
Tranquillity							
Chastity							
Humility							

Finally, to guide the readers, I will show, again as a schematic chart, Franklin’s inspirational plan for utilising the twenty four hours of each day (below) and reprint his daily prayer for *Powerful Goodness*.

The Morning Question: What Good shall I do this Day?	
5	Rise, wash and address <i>Powerful Goodness*</i> ; Contrive Day’s
6	Business and take the Resolution of the Day; prosecute the present Study; and breakfast?
7	
8	Work
9	
10	
11	
12	Read, or overlook my Accounts, and dine.

*This is a Media Predict book proposal. Please read it over and register your evaluation of the proposal via our prediction markets at [www.mediapredict.com](http://www.mediapredict.com).*

1	
2	Work
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	Conversation.
8	Examination of the Day.
9	
Evening Question: What Good have I done to day?	
10	Sleep
11	
12	
1	
2	
3	
4	

\* Powerful Goodness was one of Franklin's daily prayers. Franklin was fiercely tolerant of other religions, so he would probably have been quite happy for the readers to tailor it to their own religion or to secularise it.