My Guidelines for Government

Government has been giving me guidelines for decades. "Just say no." "If you see something, say something." "Put your tray table up and your seat in the upright position." During Covid, though, the government guidelines started to feel all-encompassing. "Wear a face mask at all times." "Wash your hands regularly." "Keep six feet of distance." "Get vaccinated." "Bring your vaccine card." "Avoid gatherings." "Get boosted."

At risk of sounding arrogant, I've always found government guidelines to be banal at best, and tyrannically absurd at worst. As a result, I don't think I should listen to any existing government.

Instead, they should listen to *me*.

Until now, however, I've never really told the world's governments what they ought to be doing. My bad, but I'm ready to make amends. Here, in no particular order, are my Guidelines for Government.

Guidelines for Government

1. Never ask for more than you want. Don't say, "Wear a mask at all times" if you allow people to remove their masks to eat and drink.
2. When you discover that a rule is ineffective or counter-productive, end it *immediately* and *loudly*. If small electronics don't really crash planes, don't make travelers put away their small electronics during takeoff and landing for an extra decade. If you determine that fomite transmission is negligible, don't quietly deemphasize the danger. Instead, tear down all the propaganda about sanitizing surfaces, and try to put people's minds at ease.
3. Don't seek a reputation for sticking with established rules come hell or high water. Instead, seek a reputation for scrupulous self-correction. Emerson was right: "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds."
4. Think before you preach. Ask yourself, "What reason do I have to believe that I know better than most people?" If you have no compelling answer, shut up and do nothing.
5. Count when you think. Don't just say, "This rule makes people safer." Ask, "How much safer? And at what cost?"
6. Measure what counts! Before you wage a war to save lives, measure both the lives you'll save and the lives you'll destroy. Before you require masks, measure the risk reduction.
7. Always consider the convenience of the ruled. Due to Social Desirability Bias, explicitly valuing convenience is awkward. Government should shield the public from this awkwardness by habitually asking, "Isn't this too inconvenient?" on the public's behalf.

8. Avoid hyperbole. "Two weeks to flatten the curve" was a strangely honest slogan. "Together we can defeat Covid-19" was not.
9. Don't move the goalposts. If you ask for two weeks to flatten the curve, then in two weeks you should loudly announce, "Your two weeks are up. Time to go back to work."
10. Develop emergency plans in advance so you don't flip out in the face of disaster. That's the main point of having an emergency plan, after all – to figure out the best course of action when you have ample time to calmly think.
11. When emergency strikes, stick to your original plan. Decision-making under stress is notoriously terrible. When you "pivot," you're probably pivoting for the worse.
12. If your original plan was to do nothing, do nothing. Don't freak out and succumb to Action Bias.
13. Don't repeat the obvious: "We're in a pandemic!" "This is war!" Give dissenters a little credit. They almost always know there's a problem; they just disagree with your remedies. Maybe with good reason.
14. Whenever you feel self-righteous, try to feel some self-doubt instead. Why? Because self-righteousness comes naturally to everyone, but self-doubt usually requires impulse control.
15. Whenever you adopt a new rule, abolish two old rules.
16. If this seems like a long list of guidelines for government to follow, think about how many guidelines government expects others to follow.
17. Never forget the Spiderman Principle: "With great power comes great responsibility." The more power you have over society, the more responsibility you have to second-guess your own wisdom and respect for the rights of innocent bystanders.

If you know how to start looping my guidelines over every government P.A. system on Earth, please make it happen.