

What Does it Mean to Live Free?

It's hard to own every choice and respect others enough to expect the same from them.

It's easy to lazily slip into appeals to duty, what's "normal", guilt, or shame instead of relying entirely on mutual exchange of value.

If I'd like my wife to come on a walk with me, I can change my tone of voice to imply I'll have hurt feelings if she doesn't. I can say, "I always come on walks with you!". I can try to make her feel weird, like other normal people go on walks. I can appeal to the fact that we're family, and imply that she owes me a walk because of it.

All of these can be effective. But they're lesser versions of the person I want to be. I don't want to make choices in my life based on these things. Why should I ask her to? I want to live free and I want to treat her as a free person.

This forces me to get creative. It forces me to create value. It forces me to have a strong sense of self. I've got to ask her to join me in a way that makes it in her unmanipulated interest to say yes, but in a way that makes clear she can freely say no.

It doesn't mean I have to hide my feelings. It's the opposite. I can't allow myself to hide my motives and desires under layers of false reason. Living free and treating others as free people forces honesty.

Humans are good at adding layers of justification and passive aggression to our words and actions. Pretty soon, it's impossible to identify our own desires. Denying yourself the use of manipulative tactics forces you to come to terms with your thoughts and feelings. Why do I want her to go on a walk with me? How much do I value it? Why might she value it? What could make it more valuable than her alternatives?

It sounds cold and mechanical when broken down like this, but in practice it's clean and true. It's so much better than vague entreaties layered with ambiguous emotional consequences.

This is just one small part of living free. But it changes everything. Never accepting the role of victim. Never believing anyone owes you anything, or you owe anyone anything (except what you've freely agreed to). These force you to treat each interaction as between free people.

It forces you to break the shackles of your own bullshit.