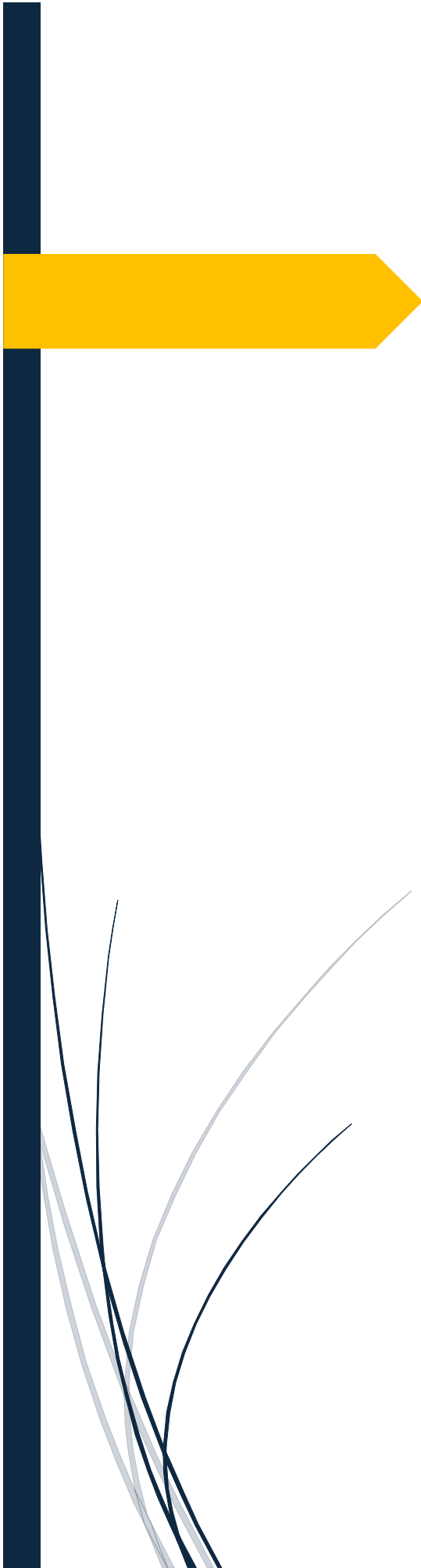




The Male Playbook

What to Keep, What to
Update, and How You Want to
Show Up

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There are a lot of messages about what it means to be a man.

- Be strong
- Provide
- Protect
- Be confident
- Handle your problems
- Don't complain
- Know what you're doing
- Don't back down
- Don't look weak
- Take care of your family
- Figure it out

Some of those messages may have served you well. Some may still be important to you. Others may not work particularly well anymore. And some may leave you wondering:

What exactly am I supposed to do instead?

You Inherited a Playbook

Nobody develops their ideas about being a man from scratch. You learned from:

- Your father
- Your mother
- Grandparents
- Friends
- Coaches
- Teachers
- Sports
- Religion
- Culture
- Workplaces
- Military service
- Movies
- Music
- Social media
- Other men
- Other women
- Relationships
- Successes
- Failures

Some lessons were spoken directly. Others were simply observed. You watched what men were praised for. You noticed what got criticized. You learned what earned respect. You learned what could get you embarrassed. You learned what men were supposed to talk about.

And what they weren't. Over time, those experiences became a kind of: **Male Playbook**

The question isn't whether you should throw it away. The better question is: **Which plays still work and which ones need updating?**

Masculinity Isn't One Thing

There isn't one correct way to be a man.

Men can be:

- Strong
- Quiet
- Competitive
- Gentle
- Ambitious
- Reflective

- Protective
- Creative
- Independent
- Affectionate
- Stoic
- Expressive
- Adventurous
- Cautious
- Leaders
- Caregivers
- Providers
- Teachers
- Listeners
- Builders
- Artists
- Athletes
- Fathers
- Partners
- Friends
- Mentors

There isn't one personality called **masculinity**.

The opportunity is to decide which characteristics matter to **you** and whether your current playbook gives you enough range to use them.

When the Playbook Gets Too Small

Problems can develop when the rules become rigid.

For example:

- **BE STRONG** can become: **Never show vulnerability.**
- **BE INDEPENDENT** can become: **Never ask for help.**
- **PROVIDE** can become: **My value comes from what I earn or produce.**
- **BE CONFIDENT** can become: **Never admit uncertainty.**
- **LEAD** can become: **I need to be in control.**
- **PROTECT** can become: **I need to make decisions for other people.**
- **SOLVE PROBLEMS** can become: **Every problem needs my solution.**
- **DON'T BACK DOWN** can become: **Changing my mind means losing.**

The original characteristic may not be the problem.

The problem may be losing the ability to choose another response when the situation calls for it.

Build a Bigger Playbook

You don't necessarily need to replace the old plays.

Add more.

- Instead of: **STRONG OR VULNERABLE** try: **STRONG AND VULNERABLE**
- Instead of: **INDEPENDENT OR CONNECTED** try: **INDEPENDENT AND CONNECTED**
- Instead of: **LEADER OR COLLABORATOR** try: **LEADER AND COLLABORATOR**
- Instead of: **PROVIDER OR CAREGIVER** try: **PROVIDER AND CAREGIVER**

- Instead of: **CONFIDENT OR UNCERTAIN** try: **CONFIDENT ENOUGH TO SAY, "I DON'T KNOW."**
- Instead of: **PROBLEM SOLVER OR LISTENER** learn how to: **SOLVE AND LISTEN**

The skill is knowing **which play the moment requires.**

Strength Can Have Range

Strength doesn't have to mean one thing.

Strength might be:

- Holding your ground. **And** sometimes changing your mind.
- Protecting someone. **And** sometimes letting them solve their own problems.
- Handling something yourself. **And** sometimes asking for help.
- Remaining calm. **And** sometimes saying you're hurting.
- Taking responsibility. **And** sometimes admitting you don't know what to do.
- Standing up for yourself. **And** sometimes making room for someone else.

Strength isn't always: **"I've got this."**

Sometimes it's: **"I don't have this yet, but I'm willing to work on it."**

Emotional Range Is Information

Some men become very fluent in a small emotional vocabulary:

- | | |
|-------------------|---------------------|
| • Good | • Frustrated |
| • Fine | • Pissed |
| • Stressed | |

Those emotions are real. But sometimes there's more underneath them.

"I'm pissed" might also contain:

- | | | |
|----------------|---------------|-------------|
| • Disappointed | • Unimportant | • Ashamed |
| • Dismissed | • Overwhelmed | • Powerless |
| • Embarrassed | • Afraid | |
| • Rejected | • Lonely | |

And emotional range isn't only about difficult emotions.

It also includes:

- Proud
- Grateful
- Excited
- Hopeful
- Affectionate
- Connected
- Tender
- Loved

The goal isn't to become **more emotional**. It's to become better at recognizing the information emotions provide.

Compare: "**I'm pissed.**" with: "**I'm frustrated because I felt dismissed.**"

The second statement gives you and the other person more information to work with.

You Don't Have to Fix Everything

Being capable is useful. Problem-solving is useful. Knowing things is useful. Being able to take action is useful. But sometimes those strengths become the automatic play.

Someone tells you about a problem.

Your brain says: **SOLVE IT**. So you explain. Teach. Correct. Troubleshoot. Offer a strategy. Tell them what you would do. Sometimes that's exactly what's needed.

Sometimes it isn't.

Before going into **Expert Mode**, try asking: "**What does this moment need from me?**"

Maybe:

- A solution
- Information
- Encouragement
- Listening
- Empathy
- Curiosity
- Help taking action

Or simply company.

A useful question can be: "**Do you want my thoughts, or do you want me to listen?**"

Competence doesn't disappear when you don't use it. You're simply choosing the right tool for the situation.

Curiosity Is a Capability

You don't have to know everything. You don't have to immediately understand another person's experience. You don't even have to agree with it. **You can get curious.**

Try:

- "Tell me more."
- "What was that like for you?"
- "What am I missing?"
- "How are you seeing it?"
- "What would be helpful from me?"
- "I hadn't thought about it that way."

Curiosity creates room for information you don't already have. Sometimes leadership means having an answer. Sometimes leadership means being willing to hear one.

Pay Attention to Power

Power exists in most human systems.

It can come from:

Physical size.

- Money
- Expertise
- Position
- Confidence
- Age
- Experience
- Social status
- Communication ability
- Control of resources
- Gender
- Authority

Power isn't automatically good or bad. The important question is: **What happens to other people's voice when I have more power in the room?**

Healthy use of power might mean:

- Making room.
- Inviting disagreement.
- Sharing decisions.
- Listening.
- Protecting without controlling.
- Using influence responsibly.
- Not needing to win every disagreement.
- Helping someone else have a voice.

Having power doesn't require pretending you don't have it.

It requires becoming aware of **how you use it.**

Influence Doesn't Mean Losing

Relationships require influence in both directions. Sometimes another person will challenge:

- Your opinion.
- Your behavior.
- Your assumptions.
- Your priorities.
- Your interpretation.
- Your way of doing something.

Being influenced doesn't mean you're weak. It doesn't mean the other person won. It means new information entered the system.

- You can listen.
- Consider it.
- Decide what fits.
- Change something.
- Change nothing.
- Find something in between.

Flexibility isn't surrender. It's having enough confidence to consider another play.

Respect Doesn't Require Agreement

You can disagree without:

- Dismissing
- Mocking
- Interrupting
- Lecturing
- Correcting every detail.
- Raising your volume.
- Trying to win.

Walking away every time things become uncomfortable.

You can say:

- "I see that differently."
- "I don't agree, but I understand what you're saying."
- "Let me think about that."
- "I can see why that mattered to you."
- "I hadn't considered that."

Respect doesn't require agreement. It requires recognizing that another person gets to have a perspective too.

Accountability Isn't Weakness

Everyone gets it wrong sometimes.

You may:

- Misread a situation.
- Say something poorly.
- Become defensive.
- Lose your temper.
- Withdraw
- Interrupt
- Dismiss someone's experience.
- Try to fix something that didn't need fixing.
- Use your influence poorly.

Being accountable doesn't require deciding: "**I'm a bad man.**" It can simply mean: "**That wasn't how I wanted to show up.**"

Then: **Own it. Repair it. Learn from it. Do different next time.**

A useful apology doesn't need a courtroom defense attached to it. Sometimes: "**You're right. I didn't handle that well.**" is enough.

Men Need Other Men Too

A partner can't be your entire emotional support system. Neither can work. Men benefit from relationships with other men that go beyond: Sports. Work. Politics. Projects. Jokes. Activities.

Those things can create connection. But friendship can also include:

- What's going well?
- What's hard?
- What are you worried about?
- How's your relationship?
- How are you doing?
- What are you working toward?
- What do you need?

You don't have to turn every friendship into therapy. You can simply allow the friendship to have **more range.**

Review the Old Rules

Consider some of the rules you learned about being a man. Maybe:

- Don't cry.
- Don't complain.
- Handle it yourself.
- Provide
- Protect
- Never quit.
- Don't look weak.
- Know the answer.
- Take care of everyone.
- Don't ask for help.
- Win
- Be tough.
- Keep your problems to yourself.

Then ask: **Does this rule still serve me?**

Maybe the answer is:

- **KEEP IT** - This still reflects who I want to be.
- **UPDATE IT** - The idea matters, but I need more flexibility.
- **USE IT SELECTIVELY** - This works in some situations but not others.
- **RETIRE IT** - This rule no longer helps me become the person I want to be.

You don't have to reject where you came from to decide where you're going.

Write Your Own Definition

Instead of allowing society, social media, your childhood, your relationships, or someone else's expectations to completely define masculinity for you, ask:

What kind of man do I want to be?

Maybe:

- Capable
- Reliable
- Strong
- Emotionally aware
- Curious
- Protective without controlling.
- Confident without needing superiority.
- Able to lead.
- Able to follow.
- Able to provide.
- Able to receive.
- Able to solve.
- Able to listen.
- Able to stand alone.
- Able to connect.
- Able to compete.
- Able to cooperate.
- Able to hold boundaries.
- Able to respect someone else.

Able to say:

- "I don't know."
- "I need help."
- "Tell me more."
- "I was wrong."
- "That hurt."
- "I've got you."

Your definition doesn't need to match anyone else's. But it should help you become someone **you** respect.

DO MORE / DO LESS

DO MORE

- Decide which masculine characteristics matter to you.
- Get curious about the rules you inherited.
- Expand your emotional vocabulary.
- Listen before automatically solving.
- Ask what someone needs from you.
- Notice how you use power and influence.
- Allow yourself to be influenced.
- Admit when you don't know.
- Ask for help when help makes sense.
- Build meaningful friendships with other men.
- Take accountability without turning mistakes into shame.
- Practice repair.
- Develop both independence and connection.
- Add new plays to your existing strengths.

DO LESS

- Assuming strength requires emotional silence.
 - Treating every conversation as a problem to solve.
 - Believing you always need the answer.
 - Confusing leadership with control.
 - Confusing disagreement with disrespect.
 - Treating influence as losing.
 - Explaining when curiosity would work better.
 - Measuring your worth only through work, income, status, or achievement.
 - Expecting your partner to be your entire support system.
 - Defending every mistake.
 - Using one version of masculinity for every situation.
 - Deciding that struggling means you're failing at being a man.
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The Bottom Line

You inherited a playbook. Some of it may have made you: Strong. Capable. Independent. Reliable. Protective. Resilient. Driven. Those are worth keeping if they matter to you.

But life may require additional plays. Curiosity. Emotional awareness. Vulnerability. Collaboration. Receiving. Repair. Flexibility. Connection.

The objective isn't to become **less of a man**. It isn't to become someone else's version of a man either.

It's to build a bigger playbook. Keep what works. Update what doesn't. Add what you're missing.

And continue asking: **What kind of man do I want to be and is the way I'm showing up helping me become him?**