

DAVID BROOKS

The Greatest Life Hacks in the World (for Now)

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We here at Opinion Headquarters don't merely offer you controversial opinions on world events; we offer priceless life hacks to help you float effortlessly through the miasma of modern existence. These are the kind of bits of golden wisdom that get earned over decades of experience but that can be shared for free.

We're inspired by the legendary tech journalist Kevin Kelly, who, for his [68th](#), [69th](#) and [70th](#) birthdays, shared his life learnings on his Technium blog. Here are some of Kelly's life hack gems (I've reworded several for concision):

When you have 90 percent of a large project completed, finishing up the final details will take another 90 percent.

Anything you say before the word "but" does not count.

Denying or deflecting a compliment is rude. Accept it with thanks.

Getting cheated occasionally is a small price to pay for trusting the best in everyone, because when you trust the best in others, they will treat you the best.

When you get invited to something in the future, ask yourself, Would I do this tomorrow?

Purchase a tourist guidebook to your hometown. You'll learn a lot playing tourist once a year.

The thing that made you weird as a kid could make you great as an adult.

It's not an apology if it comes with an excuse.

Just because it's not your fault doesn't mean it's not your responsibility.

Ignore what they are thinking of you because they are not thinking of you.

If you think you saw a mouse, you did, and if there is one, there are others.

Something does not need to be perfect to be wonderful, especially weddings.

The biggest lie we tell ourselves is, "I don't need to write this down because I will remember it."

Bravo to Kevin Kelly. Everybody learns life lessons. Not everyone clarifies them with such precision and shares them with such generosity. But even Kelly does not have a monopoly on practical wisdom.

For example, over the last few years I have embraced, almost as a religious mantra, the idea that if you're not sure you can carry it all, take two trips.

A friend shares the advice: "Always make the call. If you're disturbed or confused by something somebody did, always pick up the phone."

A search around the world of online advice givers uncovers some other diamonds of practical wisdom, both prosaic and profound:

Job interviews are not really about you. They are about the employer's needs and how you can fill them.

If you can't make up your mind between two options, flip a coin. Don't decide based on which side of the coin came up. Decide based on your emotional reaction to which side came up.

Take photos of things your parents do every day. That's how you'll want to remember them.

Build identity capital. In your 20s do three fascinating things that job interviewers and dinner companions will want to ask you about for the rest of your life.

Marriage is a 50-year conversation. Marry someone you want to talk with for the rest of your life.

If you're giving a speech, be vulnerable. Fall on the audience members and let them catch you. They will.

Never be furtive. If you're doing something you don't want others to find out about, it's probably wrong.

If you're traveling in a place you've never been before, listen to an album you've never heard before. Forever after that music will remind you of that place.

If you're cutting cake at a birthday party with a bunch of kids howling around you, it's quicker and easier to cut the cake with dental floss, not a knife. Lay the floss across the cake and firmly press down.

When you're beginning a writing project, give yourself permission to write badly. You can't fix it until it's down on paper.

One-off events usually don't amount to much. Organize gatherings that meet once a month or once a year.

Make the day; don't let the day make you. Make sure you are setting your schedule, not just responding to invitations from others.

If you meet a jerk once a month, you've met a jerk. If you meet jerks every day, you're a jerk.

Never pass up an opportunity to hang out with musicians.

Don't try to figure out what your life is about. It's too big a question. Just figure out what the next three years are about.

If you've lost your husband (or wife), sleep on his (or her) side of the bed and it won't feel so empty.

Don't ever look up a recent photo of your first great love.

If you're trying to figure out what supermarket line is fastest, get behind a single shopper with a full cart over two shoppers each with a half-full cart.

Low on kitchen counter space? Pull out a drawer and put your cutting board on top of it.

You can always tell someone to go to hell tomorrow.

That last one I got from Warren Buffett. If you follow the life hacks above, you may not wind up as rich as he is, but you may wind up as serene.

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