

Why are rules important?

Business



In spite of the saying ‘ Rules are made to be broken’, societies do not function without rules. It is true that we often admire people who are mavericks. Perhaps we envy them their willingness to break away from the norm. But rules serve a very useful, indeed essential purpose – they act as guidelines so that we all know what to expect from others, and how to conduct our lives. Rules set boundaries, something that is essential for children to learn.

They have to understand what is acceptable behaviour. But if we demand this of children, we also have to expect that adults continue to follow the rules as much as possible; otherwise we have anarchy. And society cannot function like this. Besides, even the most liberal person would say that some things are unacceptable; without rules, we have an ‘ anything goes’ situation where people are going to be hurt and abused. That said, those rules can change. If they did not, we would still have slavery and women would not have the vote.

To a modern eye, it seems inconceivable that it was ever considered acceptable to own another human being and treat them with cruelty. It is thanks to those people who spoke against this abhorrent practice and who were willing to campaign to change the status quo that the law changed. Rules are based on a general consensus, and what the majority find acceptable can change over time. As a society, we have to evolve and improve. So where it was once considered that women did not have equal rights and that people of colour were not equal, now we rightly believe that everyone should have the same rights regardless of their gender or colour. We also have to consider who makes the rules.

Are they fair and realistic? Laws are essentially rules, and they are made by people in positions of power who may act in their own interests more than in the interests of the people they represent. When it comes to the law, people have to be careful that they do not put their liberty at risk. Yet they also have the right to speak out when they consider the laws to be unjust, and lobby for changes. However, laws have to be respected, otherwise there is little point in them existing. If we wish to change the rules, it is generally better to try to do so in a lawful manner. Other people will not respond if we choose a violent or aggressive path.

Indeed, they may become even more deeply entrenched in their opinions. However, if we explain why we feel changes need to be made, and work to persuade people that our opinions are just, then we stand a greater chance of success. Rules help to organise society. They will vary from one society to another. One country may conduct matters quite differently from another. But the rules of each one help them to function.

Those rules may be enshrined in law, or they may be unspoken. They help to protect people. If people choose to break those rules, they should also accept that there may be consequences. But we must always question whether rules are just, and if they need to be changed. What was appropriate for a society 100 years ago may no longer be relevant.

If we do not review our rules from time to time, we become stagnant. So although it is important to have rules, they should be subject to change – providing that the vulnerable are protected and nobody else is harmed.