

If You Have to Live by the Rules...

Write better rules...

That principle came to me recently in a personal illustration.

Cheryl and I love to travel, and we have done a lot of it together. Several years ago we realized that we were getting close to visiting all 50 states. Friends of ours had that as a goal of theirs, so we adopted it. Again, our goal was simple: visit all 50 states together. Since then we've planned many of our vacations around trying to get to all 50 states. At present count we are missing 9 states.

Cheryl needs a plan, so we needed some criteria in her mind for the visits. So we developed the "rules" for a state to be considered "visited". There were only two rules:

- We had to be in the state together.
- We had to spend the night there.

Pretty simple, right?

Recently we were on vacation attempting to cover a few more states. Our plan would allow us to mark four states off our list. As we started planning, however, we realized we could mark five states off our list, if only we didn't have to "spend the night there". Our own rule got in the way. As anxious as we are to mark off all 50 states, especially since we are so close, we still had a rule to follow.

Then the thought occurred to me. They were our rules. We could change them if we want to. We could say we had to eat a meal there. Or we could say we had to spend 6 hours there. But, the point I'm making:

We could change the rules and still not alter our original goal...to visit together all 50 states.

It was a huge relief. Cheryl agreed. We added the fifth state to our list. As it turned out, we were able to spend the night there, but not out of the pressure to obey a rule, but because we wanted to.

Now that's a silly example, but it illustrates a much bigger problem we face in many churches and organizations.

Sometimes we confuse our rules for our goals.

Rules aren't goals. Goals aren't rules.

rule  [ruːl]  [Show IPA](#) ,*noun, verb*, ruled, rul·ing.

noun

1. a principle or regulation governing conduct, action, procedure, arrangement, etc.: *the rules of chess*.
2. the code of regulations observed by a religious order or congregation: *the Franciscan rule*.

Rules are meant to help us attain goals, not keep us from them. We need rules. They guide our way to progress.

As much as rules are a part of the process...

Why live by rules that keep us from accomplishing our goals?

Many times we limit ourselves to doing things strictly according to rules we've set for ourselves, or others have set for us, but they actually hinder progress. Instead, we don't need to change our end goal. We don't need to lower our standards. Many times we really just need to write better rules.

Read more from Ron [here](#).