✦ IDEA · CHEAT CARD · RELIGION

wu wei

The Taoist ideal of acting without forcing, so that a well-practised person follows the situation instead of fighting it.

How it works

1. A person practises a skill for a long time, often for many years.
2. Practice turns the skill into habit, so each step no longer needs thought.
3. Then the person follows the situation instead of steering every step.
4. Trying hard to be spontaneous fails, because the trying is itself a kind of forcing.

Example

The swimmer at the gorge of Lü

- Confucius sees an old man swimming below a waterfall where no fish can live.
- The swimmer was born among those hills and grew up by the water.
- → He goes down with the whirl and comes up with the eddy.
- → He says he does nothing against the movement of the water.

Use it for

- ✓ Giving a talk or an exam answer you have practised well
- ✓ Playing sport or music when pressure makes you watch every movement
- ✓ Noticing when trying hard to seem natural makes you seem stiff

Watch out

- ✗ Wu wei is not doing nothing: the swimmer practised his whole life first.
- ✗ Effortless action is no guide to what is right or wrong.

Remember When a well-learned skill fails under pressure, stop watching each step.