

UNITED WISDOM

Who Bears the Consequences of Someone Else’s Recommendation

Freedom and Action

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Epigraph

> *“common interests”*

Cicero, *De Officiis*, I.VII.20, a short fragment of Walter Miller's 1913 translation. In the historical argument it concerns the distinction between common and private interests. Here it invites attention to affected people; it establishes no contemporary ownership rules or requirement to participate.

What this article is about

Yana wants to tidy several flower containers already standing in her courtyard. Her acquaintance Denis suggests a large shared flowerbed instead. He imagines how attractive the courtyard will look and considers the idea promising. Yet Denis lives elsewhere. Yana and her neighbours would need to make space, discuss its use, maintain it and decide who continues after the first day. The attractive result is immediately visible; the distribution of consequences has received little attention. This scene is fictional. The article offers no gardening, landscaping or current legal guidance.

We examine advice by asking who will live with its consequences. A proposal can be sincere and useful while leaving an important cost outside the conversation. Cicero's historical ethics provides a limited question about personal and common interests; it establishes no contemporary courtyard rules. Our voluntary exercise involves safe discussion on paper alone. Its purpose is to distinguish the expected effect, required participation and people affected, without proving that all outside advice is unreliable or that every consequence can be calculated beforehand.

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I. A proposal does not describe everything that follows it

Denis describes the large flowerbed on the day it is completed: a more striking courtyard, residents seeing the result, participants pleased. This is one possible picture, but the action does not end when that view appears. What happens the following week? Who removes leftover materials, who finds the changed arrangement inconvenient, and who decides what happens next to unused space? Some answers are unknown. The questions already distinguish an appealing result from the arrangements for living with it. Advice can describe the former extensively while saying almost nothing about the latter. Its persuasiveness does not automatically fill that missing part.

Yana needs to clarify which actions the proposal includes. Tidying existing containers and creating a large new flowerbed involve different amounts of work. Denis may call the expansion small because he sees one idea. For the people present, it divides into several additional decisions. Who provides the space? Which previous use changes? Who is willing to participate regularly? This does not require turning every conversation into project documentation. Still, an adjective cannot make a substantial change small. Naming the sequence reveals which part of the advice fits the available time and which part remains someone else's expectation.

After clarification the proposal may become more convincing. Denis might explain how to limit the work and why he expects a benefit. It may become less convincing if nobody has confirmed its continuation. Both outcomes are possible. Examining consequences serves to consider the idea, rather than requiring its rejection. If every new question is treated beforehand as proof that the adviser is unreasonable, the conversation becomes a search for an excuse to decline. The more precise issue is which changes actually accompany the proposed action, and which still lack a suitable basis or agreement. The answer might support a smaller version instead of the original large one.

II. Different people bear different costs

The cost of advice is not always money. In our scene it includes time, space, continuing maintenance, attention to messages and giving up a previous use of part of the courtyard. One participant readily accepts two hours of work; another does not accept an ongoing expectation of availability. Someone barely participates but passes through the changed area daily. These consequences differ in both their subject and the people affected. They cannot simply be added into a single assessment of difficulty, followed by a decision that a small total burden makes each person's agreement unnecessary. Describing the action means examining its distribution, without assigning everyone the same sensitivity to change.

The pleasant effect can also be unevenly distributed. Yana wants a tidier view from her window, another neighbour wants a clear passage, and a third wants a quiet place beside the old containers. This need not involve a conflict of irreconcilable values. A small version might preserve all three interests. They first need to be distinguished, where people are willing to discuss them. A beautiful view for one person does not prove that everyone's situation improves. Nor does one person's inconvenience mean that every shared proposal must disappear. A more precise description has emerged; a settled answer about an acceptable decision process has not.

There are costs the initiator can accept personally. Yana may voluntarily set aside an evening for discussion. Her willingness does not create the same availability in her neighbours. She can offer her own help without promising theirs. Denis can also say that he will visit once but will not participate continuously. These limits do not make people insufficiently generous. They identify the resources actually offered. The missing part should not be concealed behind a promise that someone will certainly turn up after an attractive beginning. Until that person agrees, their future participation remains unknown, even when the idea inspires general enthusiasm.

III. Someone absent from the conversation may still be affected

Yana and Denis can discuss the courtyard together for a long time, but other residents use it. Their absence from the conversation does not mean they have no interests. It also provides no authority to speak for them beforehand. Denis may assume everyone will like the result; Yana may assume nobody wants change. Both assumptions currently need suitable clarification. This article does not establish who has authority over a particular area under current rules. It distinguishes knowing someone's opinion, supposing what it is, and having authority to decide. One confident statement about the neighbours' welfare cannot supply all three.

One can start by identifying the changes affecting people without demanding everyone's personal history. A changed passage calls for information about how the passage is used. Regular duties call for understanding who actually accepts that role. It is unnecessary to investigate every motive for declining or produce a general portrait of relationships in the building. The question should concern a specific consequence. This limit protects both accuracy and privacy: useful information about availability provides no permission to interrogate someone about why their life is arranged that way. Sometimes a sufficient answer is that this amount of participation does not currently suit them.

Established access rules and special requirements cannot be replaced by a good conversation. An actual change to shared space would require the relevant permission and checks for that particular situation; these have not been performed here. Even several neighbours' agreement does not prove that all necessary conditions are satisfied. Our small

exercise therefore stays on paper. Possible costs and unresolved questions can be considered without declaring the project ready to carry out. The distinction between discussion and action matters particularly when advice sounds simple: begin first, and people will see and support the rest. The beginning can already affect someone else's conditions.

IV. A common interest is not simply the speaker's convenience

In the selected context of Book I of On Duties, Cicero connects justice with our treatment of others and distinguishes personal interests from common use. He observes that our own good and bad fortune feels closer than other people's. This is ancient normative philosophy with its own ideas about property, duty and social arrangements, rather than contemporary research on advice. It supplies a limited question for our scene: has the effect visible to the speaker become the only part considered? We do not adopt historical justifications of possession, rules of war or a ready rule for cancelling promises. Contemporary participation needs its own consideration and, where necessary, specialist checks. Our paper exercise is not Cicero's practice.

Denis sees the flowerbed during one visit. Yana would encounter the new courtyard arrangement regularly. This difference in proximity to consequences does not make one indifferent and the other unquestionably right. It does point to different information. Yana knows the everyday passage better; Denis may notice an opportunity the residents have overlooked. Their available observations can be brought together without treating an outside viewpoint as having no right to suggest anything, or local experience as final knowledge of every future condition. Each may hold an important part of the picture and make a mistaken extension from that part to the whole.

The common good can easily become a phrase that closes the question. If an idea is declared useful for the courtyard, an objection may look selfish. We first need to understand which change is disputed. A neighbour can support a tidier space without accepting a continuing duty they never offered. They can value a shared result while seeing another way to obtain it. Rejecting one distribution of costs does not mean rejecting every common interest. Moving from a specific objection to a general judgment of character obstructs discovering which version can actually be discussed and what remains unconfirmed.

V. Accepting a cost and predicting an outcome are different actions

Yana can agree to spend an evening preparing a paper plan without asserting that the large flowerbed will succeed. That is a definite allocation of a resource under an unknown outcome. Accepting her own cost does not mean accepting every consequence. A different burden, deadline or personal signature beneath an unverified statement creates a further question. The adviser may see a natural continuation; the participant may see different work. Accuracy requires naming the change. The initial agreement remains real but does not extend to an endless chain of actions merely because they concern one attractive idea.

An unfavourable outcome can also be considered without promising to eliminate it. If some residents do not support the plan, discussion may end without changing the courtyard. Yana can accept that possibility for her own small contribution. She cannot automatically accept disappointment for others or promise they will not regret their time. People differ in how they regard an unfinished attempt. Naming the risk does not make it irrelevant. An emotional guarantee should not be offered where only a limited action is available. Advice remains more honest when it allows a reasonably considered attempt to end without an agreed result.

At the same time, anticipating an unpleasant cost does not establish that it is inevitable. Denis might suggest a small version that barely changes existing arrangements. Yana may learn that others already accept part of the continuation. New information changes the consideration. An initial concern need not be retained as an obligatory position merely to prove independence. Examining consequences can support advice, clarify it or lead to refusal. The result is open. A list of questions is therefore better used to learn than as a list of accusations requiring someone else's idea to look worse than our own regardless of every new answer.

Reversibility is also not a single property of the whole plan. A paper drawing can be set aside, but an evening already spent cannot be recovered. A temporary arrangement may be easily altered, while an expectation that people will provide ongoing care needs a separate conversation. A promise to restore everything if the attempt fails therefore needs a specific subject: what can actually be restored, by whom and with whose participation? Our exercise only asks that these parts be distinguished, without testing them through actual intervention. When an adviser calls an action reversible, that is a useful question about the proposal, rather than permission to begin on behalf of others. A small first step needs consideration of its own cost even before its continuation is chosen.

VI. The adviser's participation needs a separate description

Denis may offer an idea without promising to carry it out. That is a legitimate contribution if both people understand it. His outside position does not automatically make the advice empty. Yana nevertheless needs to distinguish enthusiasm from confirmed help. Saying he will certainly support her could mean one conversation, one visit or continuing work. Until the scope is clarified, it cannot support the same part of a plan as a specific agreement. She can ask him to define the participation he offers and accept a refusal without accusing him of insufficient belief in his own proposal.

If Denis agreed to help once, future support should not be described as secured indefinitely. If Yana understood a larger contribution, she can clarify the original expectation. Such a discrepancy does not necessarily mean deceit. People sometimes use the same words for different amounts of work. Once the difference is noticed, changing the plan is more useful than preserving a pleasant uncertainty. His contribution can remain small, the overall idea can shrink, or other resources can be sought. The last option does not guarantee they will be found. An attractive account should not be demanded as actions the person never actually agreed to perform.

The adviser is responsible for his own message. If Denis claims to know access conditions he has not checked, that confident statement needs reconsideration. If he honestly offers only a view of a drawing, his contribution does not become a promise that the entire project will succeed. Referring to Yana's independent choice does not erase specific inaccurate information Denis supplied. Referring to his proposal does not erase decisions Yana made herself. The article assigns no legal liability. It retains separate subjects: what was stated as known, what was offered, what was confirmed, and which part of the action each person actually performed.

VII. Refusal does not require proving the result worthless

Yana can acknowledge that the large flowerbed would look attractive and decline the proposed amount of work. She need not first prove that the result has no value. Something valuable to an observer may be unacceptable to the person carrying it out under the given conditions. Denis can regret that the idea did not happen and retain a favourable view of it. His regret does not confirm someone else's willingness to work. This boundary makes the refusal specific: this form of participation does not currently suit the person. It permits discussing other options if both want to, without obliging an immediate alternative as the price of declining the first plan.

The refusal can concern only part of the idea. Yana is willing to tidy the containers and discuss a paper drawing but not to organise her neighbours regularly. Denis may think the large project

cannot work without coordination. That is an important limit of the idea itself. It does not automatically make coordination Yana's duty. They can acknowledge that the present group lacks an accepted role. The project then shrinks, waits or never begins. The absence of a necessary participant describes a possibility of the undertaking, rather than a character flaw in someone unwilling to become that participant just because they first asked for advice.

Under pressure, a safe conversation may cease to be available. If declining becomes grounds for threats, punishment or demands for private disclosures, our joint exercise is not prescribed. A person need not prove the accuracy of their list of consequences before ending the discussion. An actual danger calls for appropriate help for the real place and issue, neither of which has been checked here. In an ordinary situation the conversation can simply end with the question open. Not every unsuccessful exchange of advice needs further discussion until full agreement. Ending a conversation does not abolish someone else's opinion, but limits its continuation with our participation.

VIII. After a decision, there is no single author of every consequence

Suppose a small plan was considered and some work took place. Some neighbours liked the new view; others found it inconvenient. The task is now to discover which consequence actually follows a specific change. Denis should not be made the author of everything that happens merely because he first suggested the idea. His contribution should not disappear from the account either. What information did he provide, what changed in discussion, and which conditions did participants confirm? A poor outcome alone does not prove dishonest advice. A good one does not retrospectively make earlier unverified claims accurate. Later assessment needs to retain the timing of knowledge and action.

Correction also has limits and participants. Yana might propose restoring part of the previous arrangement if that is permitted and the necessary people agree. She need not promise that nobody will remain dissatisfied. Denis can help reconsider a paper drawing without claiming authority to change the courtyard independently. Someone affected by inconvenience may reject the proposed correction. A good intention then does not close the question. An available next step needs consideration, or it must be acknowledged that no shared solution currently exists. The article offers no universal way to compensate consequences and replaces neither real rules nor specific checks of a change.

Useful information should also be retained. If a small version proved convenient, the conditions that helped can be identified without declaring every future piece of Denis's advice correct. If it did not suit, a worthwhile idea within it can be recognised without denying the need for change. A result concerns a particular action rather than providing a complete portrait of

participants. This consideration may reduce the wish to argue about who was right in general, but it does not promise calm. Its narrower task is to distinguish consequences, actions and grounds so that the next step does not again substitute one confident adviser's standing for the overall result.

IX. An important cost cannot be made completely visible

Even careful discussion does not reveal every consequence. Someone cannot know their future free time; someone cannot describe beforehand how the use of space will change. Some effects appear only after an action. A precise list is therefore no guarantee against damage or inconvenience. It shows what has currently been considered and what remains unknown. If the unknown part involves serious stakes, a paper conversation is insufficient. An appropriate check is needed, or the action must be declined until sufficient clarity exists. The article sets no general acceptable level of risk and does not derive one from the number of questions asked of an adviser.

The unforeseen can be distinguished from the unexamined. If a possible change to a passage was known but excluded from discussion as unimportant, that is one account. If a new circumstance could genuinely not be discovered through an available means, that is another. The distinction should not be decided solely by how unpleasant the result feels. It needs specific information about what was known and offered. Even goodwill does not remove that need for accuracy in our fictional scene. At the same time, nobody must invent a complete causal account before recognising a particular inconvenience and considering an available correction. Some parts can remain open beside a definite next action.

Incomplete knowledge does not restore permission to speak for those absent. Yana can say she does not know the neighbours' views. Denis can limit his advice to his observation if he does not know how the courtyard is used daily. These qualifications do not make a proposal unworthy of discussion. They help identify a proportionate next question. Sometimes a paper drawing can be considered with those it affects. Sometimes continuation does not suit. The result may be declining expansion without proving that the idea is always bad. Uncertainty is retained honestly, serving neither as a promise of success nor as a demand to attempt the plan at someone else's expense.

X. Advice is considered where it would be carried out

At first Denis saw an attractive large flowerbed. Clarification produces a fuller subject: the desired appearance, necessary conditions, people, available contributions and continuation after the first day. His idea may remain, shrink or never be carried out. The conversation need not decide who understands life better in general. What matters is that the proposal meets the setting of its possible execution. Outside advice can be valuable, but an outside position does not remove the need to examine what a short visit leaves unseen. Local conditions add substance to the consideration, rather than merely obstructing someone else's imagination.

The connections with related questions are specific. Substitution of a request asks which result is being discussed at all. Authorship of a decision helps a person accept or reject appropriate recommendations. This article concentrates on the distribution of costs and consequences for those who act or live alongside the action. Advice from an older person more broadly concerns age, experience, delegation and personal responsibility; age has no role in this argument. These distinctions help readers choose another article. Sharing the word advice does not erase these different questions.

The substantive result stays limited: more is known about whose resources and conditions the proposal relies on. This may help a person accept a small part, seek necessary clarification or decline. Acceptance does not guarantee a good outcome; refusal does not generally refute Denis's competence. Responsibility concerns actual messages, confirmations and actions. Where consequences cannot be fully known, preserving their open status is more honest than substituting someone else's confidence or making one person promise to answer for everything. Advice gains a clear place in a decision when both an attractive possibility and the people who will encounter its cost are visible.

What this means in practice

If you wish, choose one proposal with small, safe stakes and consider it on paper alone. Do not make an actual change to shared space for the exercise. Note the expected result, two actions following it, and the people each affects. Separately mark your own confirmed participation, someone else's unconfirmed participation and what is unknown. Do not assign people motives or infer agreement from silence. Legal, health, safety and other specialist requirements need the appropriate competent process, which this exercise does not replace.

If a conversation suits, ask the adviser to clarify one important limit: what they know about the conditions and what they actually offer to do themselves. The answer can change the plan or leave the question open. You may accept a useful part, decline the entire proposal or end the discussion. The note stays private; it need not be shown as proof of anyone's irresponsibility. The limited result is a clearer distinction between effect, participation and consequences for

others. Stop the exercise under pressure, threat or a demand for private disclosure. Leaving it unfinished creates no obligation to obtain general approval, and considering a plan on paper is not permission to carry it out.

Key quotation

> *“other people's affairs”*

Cicero, *De Officiis*, I.IX.30, Miller's translation. In this passage the author contrasts the closeness of our own concerns with insufficient attention to others. The short fragment explains neither Denis's motives nor an obligation to accept every proposal made by another person.

Connections between traditions

Cicero's historical ethics and our fictional courtyard scene have different grounds. His discussion of common and private interests helps raise a question about people omitted from a conversation. It establishes no contemporary rights to space, measures no adviser's sincerity and demonstrates no effectiveness of the suggested record. Ancient social and political hierarchies are not adopted as rules for relationships between adults. Our editorial distinctions between advice, consent, distributed participation and subsequent maintenance retain their own status: they can be considered, revised or left unused.

Sources

• Marcus Tullius Cicero. De Officiis, Book I, VII–X, §§20–33. English translation by Walter Miller; London: William Heinemann; New York: The Macmillan Co., 1913; Project Gutenberg 47001. Actual reading covered edition metadata and the continuous selected English context §§20–33 on common and private interests, action and nonintervention, and attention to others' affairs. This was not the entire book or all corresponding Latin passages. Historical normative ethics, rather than contemporary behavioural research or legal guidance. Gutenberg's territorial conditions establish no verified worldwide permission; this article uses two short reader fragments and bounded paraphrase.

Tags

advice, recommendation, consequences, participation, responsibility, consent, common interest, private interest, affected people, absent participants, distributed burden, continuation, maintenance, promise, expectation, right to refuse, uncertainty, unknown information, verification, conditions, resources, reversibility, revision, safety, private information, courtyard, fictional scene, Cicero, ethics, United Wisdom

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