

UNITED WISDOM

An older person's advice and one's own responsibility

Relationships and Intimacy

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Epigraph

> *Recur frequently to it...*

Mary Wollstonecraft, *Original Stories from Real Life*, XXV; The opening imperative clause of Mrs. Mason's advice concerning the book given to her pupils. The historical characters are minors. This is no requirement for an adult to obey an older person's written advice.

What this article is about

Levon is considering proposing a small program of classes in a craft workshop. His uncle Oleg organized similar activities for many years and advises working as an assistant first, rather than starting a program of his own. Levon sees the value of experience but also hears a familiar certainty: the older person already knows which path suits him. He wants to ask about difficulties and fears the question itself will be understood as handing over the decision. Oleg, conversely, wonders why he should recount his mistakes in detail if his nephew intends to act differently anyway.

This scene is invented. The article examines how to bring another person's experience into one's own consideration without making either age, or protest against age, a ready answer. Useful advice can change a decision; a good person can give unsuitable advice; an autonomous choice can prove mistaken. There is no instruction for launching an enterprise or financial calculation here. Our subject is the distribution of knowledge, participation and responsibility: who supplies material, who accepts a particular obligation, who is affected by consequences, and what cannot be transferred through a simple declaration of trust. Neither success nor complete removal of uncertainty is promised.

I. Seniority and knowledge of a task have different grounds

Oleg genuinely knows a workshop from within: he has seen classes fall through, the time preparation of materials takes, and what happens when roles are not agreed. His experience need not be diminished merely because he is older and speaks confidently. Levon can ask him to describe one such case: what was promised, what became known later, and what conclusion Oleg drew. Particular knowledge then appears, rather than biographical authority alone. Yet the number of years lived does not automatically confirm every detail's applicability to the present task. Conditions, a subject and the limits of what someone actually observed are needed.

An older person may know a former workshop without knowing the current group, premises or his nephew's available time. Levon may know his own intention while underestimating the labor of preparation. These incomplete bodies of knowledge need not compete for the title of most adult. They can be compared by subject: what concerns organizing classes, what concerns personal capacities, and what remains an assumption? If general statements about the world replace a case description, clarification remains appropriate. But an adviser need not conduct an unpaid investigation into the entire new project for their experience to count. They can name the available scope of participation.

In VI.8 of Aristotle's *The Nicomachean Ethics*, practical wisdom is connected not only with general knowledge but also with particular circumstances and experience. The source also makes a historical judgment about youth that cannot be presented as a contemporary measurement of every age's abilities. The question of specific experience is more useful here: what circumstance has a person learned to see? Ancient ethics establishes neither universal infallibility among older people nor the professional status of everyday advice. Age can recall accumulated history, but that history's content still needs to be learned.

Experience can also include an important enterprise that failed. Oleg need not recount victories alone to preserve an older person's dignity. Levon should not treat every mistake as evidence of absent knowledge: someone may have seen a limitation precisely because they encountered it. Yet suffering itself does not make a conclusion infallible. Event, explanation and transfer to a new task need distinction. An account of difficulty can provide a subject for checking without becoming a general law that every similar venture must end the same way or be prohibited beforehand.

II. Asking for advice does not necessarily hand over the decision

Levon can ask Oleg to name the most difficult parts of organizing a course without asking him to choose. If both want this and it is safe, the subject of the request can be identified beforehand. The adviser can also clarify what participation is wanted: an account, appraisal of a plan, practical help or consent to use a shared resource. Without this distinction, advice can easily conceal different arrangements. One person supplies memories, another expects ready permission, and afterward both consider an agreement breached that they never discussed. Clarity does not guarantee agreement, but allows the known request to be examined rather than an imagined transfer of all responsibility.

Oleg can agree only to recount his experience and decline discussion of the entire plan. That makes him neither indifferent nor obliged to continue. Levon can reject his recommendation while thanking him for information. But he should not promise to listen in the sense of inevitably complying if he means only to consider. Nor should prolonged assistance be demanded from Oleg while being portrayed as a simple conversation. Participation costs time, attention and resources. The nephew's own decision should not make another person a compulsory source of knowledge, available regardless of their wishes and capacities.

The reverse is possible: Levon really asks someone to decide for him because he is tired and fears making a mistake. Acknowledging this is more honest than calling every request autonomous simply because of his age. Another person can help narrow the question, offer information and discuss the limits of their knowledge. Yet handing over a particular task requires understandable consent and does not give an entire biography a new author. The article does not prohibit delegating an organizational action. It distinguishes agreed delegation from hoping that someone else's confident words will remove the need to understand what one accepted and which consequences affect one's own participation.

III. Good advice is also examined in relation to its purpose

Oleg proposes working as an assistant first. Perhaps this is a reasonable way to learn the work. But one needs to ask which purpose the recommendation concerns. If Levon wants gradually to learn organization, that path can have one meaning. If he has already promised someone to run a particular meeting, another subject appears. If he only wants to try a small format, advice to start nothing before years of preparation may be too broad. Checking the purpose does not refute Oleg beforehand. It shows whether his proposal answers the actual question or another project he considers right for his nephew.

In VI.9 Aristotle distinguishes good deliberation from simply achieving a selected result. One can achieve a purpose through poor reasoning or pursue a bad end; speed and a successful hit do not establish the quality of counsel. This is moral philosophy with its own understanding

of good, rather than a modern project prediction model. Several assessments need separation in our scene: whether the purpose fits, whether the reasons matter, and whether the means of participation are acceptable. A proposal does not become good merely because it ends a conversation and reassures Oleg. Nor does an absence of immediate reassurance establish its unsuitability.

Levon may discover that he formulated his purpose too broadly. He talks of an independent program but does not know whether he wants to teach a craft, organize gatherings or confirm his independence. The article assigns no hidden motive; these possibilities can be checked only through personal consideration. Sometimes an older person's advice is useful precisely through a question exposing uncertainty. Accepting that question does not mean accepting the proposed ready path. The conversation can end with a more precise subject for further inquiry, rather than a decision. Such an outcome has limited value and should not be presented as complete readiness to act.

IV. Historical instruction retains its authority

In XXV of *Original Stories from Real Life*, Mrs. Mason leaves her pupils a book of previous conversations and expects independent practice of acquired rules. She also connects future friendship and her regard to the girls' moral advancement. This is a didactic fictional model of upbringing, rather than a free consultation between two adults. The convenient word independence cannot be extracted while concealing that the mentor has already determined the correct path. Her care and certainty exist within a historical structure of authority that this contemporary article does not accept in full.

For Levon, the scene can serve as a contrast. He is an adult and need not become a candidate for Oleg's regard by complying with every recommendation. If his uncle wants a relationship only on a path of his choosing, that is a separate condition which cannot silently be called knowledge of the workshop. But a literary character cannot determine a real relative's intention. Oleg may impose no such condition at all. Words and actions need examination, rather than explaining someone through a ready historical type. The fictional comparison helps distinguish subjects without establishing the prevalence of pressure or effectiveness of a particular refusal.

In her own Preface, Wollstonecraft requires attention to differences between children and the possibility of discussing grounds as understanding develops. This motif does not cancel the severity of the rest of the educational arrangement. The author does not become a contemporary specialist in adult autonomy here, and the historical language of correction and habits is not used as medical advice. The comparison retains a tension: instruction can seek development of judgment while also demanding a predetermined moral outcome. In today's

conversation, it is useful to learn whether the recipient can still consider reasons without proving gratitude through compulsory agreement in the conclusion.

V. Advice can be accepted without surrendering authorship of a decision

After the conversation, Levon can decide Oleg is right: he really needs to see course preparation from within first. That outcome does not defeat autonomy. He considered the reasons and chose the proposed path under known conditions. An unnecessary story should not be added in which his uncle must now choose every subsequent step. One piece of advice can be accepted without granting permanent authority. Autonomy concerns participation in a decision, rather than requiring an original outcome. If every matching answer is treated as obedience, a person has to reject something useful merely to preserve an image of separation from someone older.

Yet agreement cannot be declared one's own merely because someone uttered the correct formula. Levon may yield out of fear of losing housing or access to a shared enterprise. The conditions of choice do not disappear through an attractive description. They need recognition without blaming the recipient for insufficient will. He can recognize pressure without yet having a safe way to act differently. The article requires no risky act as proof of freedom. It concerns honest consideration of available conditions, rather than demanding an ideally independent decision possible only without needs, relationships or another person's resources.

Accepted advice can also be reconsidered when significant new information appears. This does not automatically make earlier consideration false. Oleg can be told what changed if that communication is needed and safe. Yet each revision does not require obtaining permission again unless it concerns a real joint obligation. Personal authorship implies neither absolute consistency nor infallibility. It includes being able to name why participation changed, who is affected by a new step and what remains promised. Memory of the adviser does not replace this consideration, just as memory of a first decision does not prohibit learning something new.

VI. Rejecting advice does not refute all experience

Levon may prefer to begin with one small meeting rather than follow Oleg's general recommendation. It matters to see what was rejected: the assistant's path, assessment of a timetable, a particular warning or his uncle's right to choose the outcome. If experience contains a useful detail about preparing materials, that detail can be retained within a different decision. Another person's thought does not become useless because it did not determine the entire result. Neither must Levon call every comment useful for gratitude's sake. Acknowledgment can be partial, and some information genuinely may not concern today's question.

In XV.22 of *The Analects*, in the accessed James Legge translation's numbering, assessment of a person should not entirely replace assessment of their words. The historical teaching belongs to particular ethics of respect, rather than a neutral marketplace of all opinions. Here it prevents two excessively simple answers: a good older person always gives good advice; an unpleasant adviser can say nothing significant. Yet the weight of words also needs a known subject. A philosophical distinction does not make every text a competent recommendation or establish an obligation to listen to an unsafe interlocutor without limits.

Oleg can remain in disagreement. He need not declare a trial meeting successful in order to recognize his nephew's separate decision. Levon need not secure his uncle's joy before starting any enterprise of his own. But if the project uses his uncle's premises, that participation requires separate agreement. Refusing advice does not cancel another person's ability to decide about their resource under actual conditions. Two grounds should not be mixed: Oleg can refuse to provide premises, but that does not establish that he has acquired all Levon's decisions. The article establishes no rights to a particular workshop and settles no possible contractual dispute.

VII. Responsibility is not distributed through a single sentence

If a meeting goes badly, Levon can say he did everything according to Oleg's advice. That communicates part of the history without determining all responsibility. What exactly did his uncle recommend? What information did he have? What did Levon change? Who accepted the promise to participants? Without these questions, invoking advice transfers an unwelcome outcome to whoever spoke more confidently. The article determines no legal responsibility. It proposes not replacing examination of known actions with the general word trust. The advice could have been poor, one's own execution could also have been poor, and part of the result could have depended on unknown conditions.

Oleg is not released from his own action by invoking his nephew's freedom either. If he gave information as verified despite not knowing it, promised help and disappeared, or concealed a

significant limit of his experience, that requires separate consideration. Levon's right to decide does not make every action by an adviser ethically empty. But an honest, limited communication does not promise success for the entire program. Proportion matters: answer for what one actually said and accepted, neither appropriating another person's whole life nor disowning all personal participation when an inconvenient consequence appears.

Sometimes both people discuss an outcome as a competition over who was right. Even useful new information then becomes a weapon. Levon can notice that preparation took longer without declaring Oleg right in every former dispute. Oleg can recognize a successful meeting without reconsidering every concern. A particular outcome is no full portrait of a wise elder or a mature younger person. Examination of the next step requires what has become known now. If their relationship permits that conversation, it can be useful; if it does not, the article prescribes no joint review as a compulsory condition of adulthood.

An expectation also needs distinguishing from a promise. Oleg may have hoped his nephew would use everything he said although Levon promised only to consider it. Levon may have expected ongoing support although his uncle agreed only to one conversation. Another person's hope has human significance without itself confirming an agreement. If both want to clarify a past exchange, they can identify what was actually said without rewriting an entire history in one participant's favor. The article prescribes neither recording conversations nor collecting admissions. Clarification serves a particular obligation, rather than producing evidence of complete moral correctness.

VIII. Consequences also affect other people

Levon chooses a format, but future participants choose their time and rely on stated conditions. Their existence cannot be dissolved into a conversation about his independence from his uncle. Necessary honesty concerns what he can offer and what he does not yet know. One can remain a beginner without needing to look like a fully prepared expert. Yet not every warning by someone older can be called interference when it identifies a promise affecting others. The significant question is not who is older, but whether the stated scope of action corresponds to real capacities and known limits.

The presence of others nevertheless does not make Oleg their sole representative. He can notice a significant risk but can also assign expectations to participants that they have not expressed. Information about them should be obtained appropriately rather than guessed from his certainty or Levon's optimism. The article provides no safety protocol for a craft class and does not replace necessary specialist examination of particular conditions. Its distinction is limited: consequences for others have a subject of their own, which can neither be ignored in the name of freedom nor used as unlimited authority to control another adult.

If there is immediate danger, an ordinary dispute about accepting advice is insufficient. Action and support appropriate to the actual subject and location are needed, neither of which has been checked here. If the adviser creates danger through threats or punishment for refusal, a joint exercise is likewise not prescribed. Levon need not reveal plans or argue as proof of maturity. Everyday safe consideration can be limited to one task. In unsafe conditions, a limit may initially remain private understanding alone. Its value does not depend on an immediate ability to utter the ideal response and secure acceptance.

IX. Uncertainty does not always need another piece of advice

Levon can gather many recommendations without receiving a ready decision. Different people have seen different enterprises, defend different values and possess different information. The number of recommendations does not establish quality, and a majority does not replace examination of a specific subject. Sometimes a particular missing fact is needed; sometimes a person seeks a promise that nobody will be disappointed. The article does not diagnose why someone repeatedly asks. It proposes noticing one's own question: what still needs learning, and what cannot be guaranteed? Someone else can communicate experience without necessarily removing every consequence of risk, choice and other people's responses.

A limited task for further inquiry can be set: check preparation time, understand the available premises, clarify an existing promise. This is no ready launch program or proven decision technique. Its meaning lies in specifying the subject. An answer may require a new question; resources may prove insufficient; disagreement between participants may remain. Yet endlessly gathering others' permissions need not become a condition of any movement. The limits of consideration are chosen in relation to the actual task, seriousness of consequences and available means of checking, rather than a promise finally to obtain a complete absence of doubt.

Oleg can also leave a question open. He can say he does not know whether his former experience fits present conditions. Such honesty does not make him useless. It can preserve an important boundary between observation and assumption. Levon can accept that boundary without demanding an immediate confident recommendation. If a person is needed only as a source of a final answer, their experience becomes a function for removing someone else's uncertainty. Respect allows another outcome: we learned some things, do not yet know others, and nobody promised to become the infallible director of another person's entire subsequent life.

X. One's own outcome can contain another person's thought

After the conversation, Levon makes a small plan for further inquiry. It contains Oleg's observation about preparation, his own assessment of time and a remaining question about premises. This plan is no pure expression of solitary will. It arose in relationships with people and circumstances. Yet others' participation does not require transferring all authorship to them. What was received, which reasons were accepted and which obligation remains one's own can be named. Autonomy here does not require hiding help to look independent. Nor does it require making an adviser responsible for every subsequent choice that grew from a conversation.

If Levon postpones the program, that is not necessarily his uncle's victory. If he starts it, it is not necessarily the nephew's victory. Either outcome can have reasonable or weak grounds requiring separate consideration. The relationship need not receive a final report card awarding wisdom to one person and adulthood to another. Oleg can retain his experience and the limits of his participation. Levon can retain gratitude and the possibility of another outcome. This does not guarantee closeness, but leaves room for a conversation where knowledge does not become a permanent office and personal choice requires no overall disparagement of someone older.

At first the question concerned whether one could ask without losing the decision. A more precise answer concerns the arrangement of particular participation. Advice remains material when its subject, limits and conditions are understood, and action has not silently been handed over. Real delegation needs consent and a clear scope. A joint obligation needs separate grounds for both people. Threats call for available safety. Neither age, trust nor a wish for independence cancels these distinctions. Personal responsibility begins not with rejecting every other person's thought, but with attending to what was actually accepted and is known.

An attitude toward advice can change without a new decision. Levon can initially be angry at a confident tone and later notice useful content. Oleg can first welcome a request and later realize he does not want to undertake the proposed task. These changes do not automatically make either person an inconsistent deceiver. They nevertheless require attention to accepted promises if any existed. One can recognize one's changed state without portraying it as the sole fact of the past. A feeling helps identify a question but does not itself establish the advice's correctness or the scope of another person's duty to continue participating.

What this means in practice

If the question fits and is safe, choose one particular piece of advice. In a private note, separate the adviser's observation, their conclusion and the proposed action. Identify which circumstances match your task, which have changed, and what you do not yet know. Do not infer competence from age alone or declare all experience outdated because of one error. This voluntary note is not a verified psychological technique. It can be postponed or omitted. Health, law and other specialist risks require appropriate checking that a general philosophical text cannot replace.

Then clarify your request: is it for information, assessment, help or transfer of a particular task? Do not assume another person's consent before they respond. Consider known promises and consequences for participants separately. A useful part can be accepted, an overall recommendation declined, or a decision revised when reasons appear. No option guarantees a successful outcome. If the conversation continues, do not turn consideration into an examination of obedience or gratitude. If it is unsafe, joint explanation and disclosure of plans are not prescribed.

After acting, examine available facts: what became known, which promise was fulfilled or needs revision, and who actually participated. Do not transfer all responsibility to an adviser through declarations of trust or erase their particular participation through declarations of your freedom. Failure may require a separate correction without automatically proving every previous instruction by an older person right. Success does not prove warnings were always unnecessary either. The next question is considered under its present conditions, acknowledging help and the limits of what each person can honestly take on.

Key quotation

> *...genuine sentiments of your hearts*

Mary Wollstonecraft, *Original Stories from Real Life*, XXV, a fragment of Mrs. Mason's request concerning letters. In the fictional scene, candor exists alongside a condition of moral advancement; the article does not prescribe an adult's disclosure of feelings to obtain an older person's regard.

Connections between traditions

Comparison	Similarity and substantial boundary
Aristotle VI.8 ↔ an older person's particular experience	Particular circumstances matter; the historical judgment of youth does not measure every present person.
Aristotle VI.9 ↔ the purpose and grounds of advice	A successful outcome does not exhaust good deliberation; ancient good does not equal any chosen end.
Wollstonecraft's own Preface ↔ discussion of grounds	Development of understanding matters; historical pedagogy for minors does not equal adult consultation.
Mrs. Mason XXV ↔ independent practice and conditional regard	A literary structure links development to a predetermined rule; it is a critical contrast rather than a norm of allegiance.
The Analects XV.22 ↔ the weight of words apart from a person	Particular words can be considered; historical ethics does not establish compulsory unsafe listening.
The author's distinction between advice, delegation and promise ↔ personal responsibility	Each participation has a subject; no legal calculation, success guarantee or transfer of an entire biography is made.

The map preserves different arrangements of knowledge and authority. A didactic story, philosophy of practical reasoning and Confucian teaching do not become one proven decision technology. The practice is an authorial ethical application rather than a result of effectiveness research.

Sources

1. Mary Wollstonecraft, *Original Stories from Real Life*, own Preface, Introduction, XXV. The underlying work dates to 1788; the accessed Henry Frowde, London edition is from 1906, with a separate introduction by E. V. Lucas and illustrations by William Blake; Les Bowler transcription, Gutenberg36507. The author's Preface, opening scene and XXV were read in full; adjacent XXIV was also read, rather than the entire book. Only short fragments of Mrs. Mason's own speech in Wollstonecraft's text are quoted, rather than Lucas's introduction or illustration captions.

2. Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.8–9. The English version at the linked files address of Gutenberg8438 explicitly credits D. P. Chase in its header; released July 10, 2003, updated

March 27, 2021. This identifies the accessed version rather than every PG8438 variant; the underlying print edition remains unresolved. Both chapters with nearby context were read completely. Normative philosophy of experience, purpose and deliberation; historical dietary examples are not used as medical advice.

3. *The Analects of Confucius*, XV.22. James Legge translation from *Chinese Classics*, Gutenberg3330, accessed numbering. The short chapter and surrounding XV.18–41 context were read in this batch. Authorial paraphrase, neither the entire corpus nor modern age or competence research.

Tags

advice, older person, experience, age, knowledge, competence, decision, responsibility, autonomy, trust, delegation, promise, participation, purpose, argument, checking, circumstances, uncertainty, help, consent, refusal, gratitude, resource, consequences, safety, powers, instruction, Wollstonecraft, Aristotle, Confucius, United Wisdom

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