

## 10 Lessons from Solitaire

Chalice reflection for Rites of Passage Sunday

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During graduation festivities like this, it is customary for some old person like myself to offer advice on life to the graduates, their families and other captive members of the audience.

I think it's a little self-important to offer advice based on *my* life – after all, I'm not through with it yet, so I don't know how it's going to turn out. Instead, let's talk about Playing Games.

Is that too simple a thought? I don't think so. We learn a lot of life lessons from simple experiences, like how to win or lose gracefully. And that, just as in games like *Uno* or *Sorry*, what "goes around comes around" –in other words, play nice, or you'll pay for it later.

And then of course there's Kenny Rogers' advice in his song *The Gambler*:

"You got to know when to hold 'em, know when to fold 'em,

Know when to walk away, and know when to run."

But some advice is contradictory. People tell us "It isn't whether you win or lose, but how you play the game that counts" but also "Winning isn't everything, it's the **ONLY** thing."

So to keep it *really* simple, let me tell you what I've learned from Solitaire (WARNING – you CAN apply these lessons to other problems!)

Like other people who sit in front of a computer for what seems like months at a time, I sometimes take a break from work to play solitaire. And I think I've actually learned some things that apply to the rest of my life.

1. My biggest insight is that something as simple as solitaire, a dead-end, pointless game, can still offer food for thought. Lessons from solitaire, for example, apply to other problem-solving situations.
2. Sometimes the answer is waiting right in front of us. We know more than we think we know, and we see less than there is to see.
3. Noticing the patterns can be more useful than noticing the actual cards.
4. Assuming that an answer is waiting for us produces a *lot* more progress than if we assume the problem is impossible. Our subconscious becomes open and receptive to answers.
5. The very obstacles that stump us also hint at the answer to a problem; answers are actually *part* of the problem, when seen from the right angle, not something we force on it by persistence or blunt force (or even creative genius, really).
6. Losing a game can be a not-so-subtle hint that it's time to do something useful, like have lunch, or get back to work.
7. The game doesn't care if you get mad at it – but it doesn't get any easier, either, and your temper can get in the way of your progress.

8. Sometimes you just have to try anything to shake things up. Sometimes you have to back up and take a new approach.
9. Sometimes what you choose NOT to do is more important than what you choose to do.
10. Sometimes unintended results are more useful and far-reaching than the ones you were working so hard for.

Are these thoughts really helpful? Are they part of the Zen toolkit for “the complete well-equipped Graduate?” For me they are, almost every day, so maybe when you’re facing a problem, one of these notions could help you. If it does help, that’s pretty cool. And if not, well, maybe you’ll get a chuckle out of it anyway. And that’s not a bad thing, either.