

Doug's Rule of Life #17

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Rule #17

You've been doing "something" a certain way for a while. Someone comes along and shows you a new way to do that "something."

If the new way seems as good or even almost as good as the old way, the new way is superior.

If the new way seems to be definitely or even slightly better than the old way, it is absolutely positively far superior to the old way.

Why is this rule in a guitar technique article?

We are constantly trying to improve our guitar playing, our technique. To improve, we often have to try new or different ways of playing. It could be an adjustment to our sitting or hand position, a new fingering, a change of tempo or dynamics, a new way to memorize—all kinds of things. But we tend to get comfortable with the way we do things. We get a little too set in our ways. I see it in my students and I see it in myself. It's part of being human.

But to improve, we have to be willing to accept change. That's where Rule #17 comes in. I find it to be true 100% of the time and not just in playing the guitar.

For example, when you have played a certain left-hand fingering for months, it becomes part of your neuromuscular memory—it becomes "natural". When you introduce a new fingering (possibly because the old one isn't reliable or maybe doesn't sound good for some reason) and it falls into Rule #17 (feels almost as good or better than the old), you have to look at your perspective.

Your brain, muscles, and nerves have all accepted and are used to the old way. For the new way to come anywhere close to the old means that it is powerful enough to overcome months of habit and internal programming. That is very significant.

A new way of doing something usually has to have some tremendous benefit to overcome an old habit enough for the brain to say, "You know, this new way feels pretty good."

Again, looking at habit and perspective, *for a new way to triumph over months of programming and habitual practice of the old way, it has to be very powerful and far superior to be perceived as even almost as good by the neuromuscular system.*

So when someone suggests a new way of playing a piece, or you think you have a better way to execute a phrase, follow Rule #17 and you will know right away if you should pursue the new path. It will help you see clearly and keep you on a continuous track of improvement.