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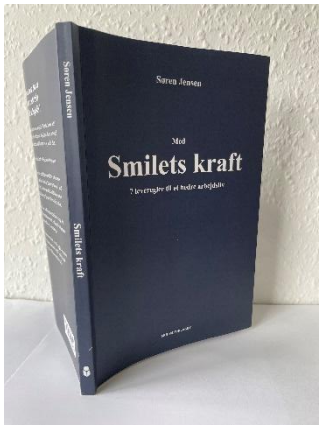
Summary of "Smilets Kraft"



The Power of the Smile

This book presents seven life rules for creating a better working life, drawing on Søren Jensen's experience as a senior coach and former leader in several public institutions, as well as editor of professional journals. It is also a deeply personal story of how the author applied these same tools in his own comeback after major crises in his life.

Where might the red thread be in your working life?

The Danish phrase "red thread" refers to discovering the underlying connection or theme in something complex – like a story, like in your working life.

Far too many people are not thriving in their working lives. How are you doing? To work is also to live. If you are doing well in your working life, you will also do better in life. Occasionally, you should stop and feel how you are doing.

You can do this with the power of your smile and this book's seven rules for life.

Søren Jensen has been on a quest for a good working life at the world's largest personal development event in Florida, "Date with Destiny" with the American coach Tony Robbins, and at the Buddhist leader Dalai Lama's temple in the Himalayas in northern India.

During his quest for a good working life, Søren Jensen physically had the red thread placed in his hand by a Buddhist monk in the Himalayas. He lost the thread – and found it again. The book's content is based on a comprehensive and solid professional foundation and has been documented in practice in coaching courses with over one hundred employees – and in the author's personal life.

Søren Jensen is founder of Power of Smile, senior coach and communications specialist. For more than 25 years, he held leadership positions in the Ministry of Environment, the National Research Centre for the Working Environment, and at three research and educational institutions. He was also the editor of the professional magazines *Danish Environment* and *Welfare in Reality.*

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Academic Foundation and Sources

The book is built upon a comprehensive and solid academic foundation, documented through practical coaching sessions with 110 employees.

Søren Jensen can provide a **detailed overview of the source material**, which includes insights from twenty-five authors, articles from sixty different media and websites, and over thirty highlighted quotes.

While drawing on this extensive research, the author explicitly states that the book is written based on the "**Keep It Simple, Stupid" principle** and is not intended as a scientific publication, acknowledging that science does not provide all answers, especially regarding the wondrous and inexplicable nature of the smile.

A **key finding supporting the book's premise** is that 88% of 110 employees participating in coaching programs at two nursing homes believed they could improve and enjoy their work life more by applying the book's life rules.

These programs involved observation, conversations, workshops, exercises, and theme days, and participants rated them an average of seven out of ten. The author notes that this overwhelmingly positive feedback was surprising, given the natural skepticism towards external solutions.

The core insight from these programs was that focusing on an individual's own behavior, psychology, and communication positively impacts team collaboration, the work environment, and the individual themselves.

The Wondrous Power of the Smile (Chapter 1)

The book highlights a concerning trend: People are smiling less, and statistics for dissatisfaction and stress in workplaces are rising, despite years of efforts to counteract this. It argues that a good work life contributes to a better life overall, and encourages individuals to pause and assess their well-being, happiness, and how much they smile.

The seven life rules offer practical steps to achieve this, primarily by increasing awareness of one's words, thoughts, and focus, promising immediate benefits from the power of smiling. **Research from universities like Oxford and Aarhus** reveals two fascinating insights into how our brains react to stimuli:

1. While conscious perception of what we see takes about 0.3 seconds, our brains are emotionally impacted by visuals in as little as 0.08 seconds.

2. Studies show that our brains instinctively react faster to happy and smiling faces compared to sad or angry ones. Even if we spend more time processing negative information, our brains are initially more drawn to positive stimuli like smiles and positive words.

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The author interprets this as evidence that the power of the smile is stronger between people than the barrage of negative information, making the smile the "shortest path between people".

The book further supports the power of the smile through **various real-world examples and research, for example:**

- Children smile approximately four hundred times a day, a number that steadily declines into adulthood.
- Charles Darwin observed that smiling not only results from feeling good but can also actively make us feel better.
- Some researchers have even quantified the brain's response to a genuine smile, comparing it to the pleasure derived from two thousand chocolate bars or receiving up to £16,000 in cash.
- Biologically, smiling demonstrably reduces stress hormones (cortisol, adrenaline, dopamine) and increases mood-enhancing endorphins, while also lowering blood pressure.

However, the book also cautions against forced or artificial smiling, especially in service roles, as it can be exhausting and reduce genuine engagement.

Smiling more can also benefit others, making individuals happier, more caring, and empathetic, and reducing anxiety.

For leaders, smiling is portrayed as a tool to maintain positivity, attract people and ideas, improve meeting outcomes, foster better communication, and invite dialogue.

In the context of Danish workplaces, the book points out a "zero-fault culture" and a tendency to adhere to "Law of Jante" - a cultural code common in Scandinavia that discourages people from thinking they are better than others, emphasizing humility and equality - leading to a lack of recognition and appreciation.

The author encourages individuals to take initiative and smile more, offer thanks, and give recognition to challenge these cultural norms.

Without the Spark, You Kill Your Smile (Chapter 2)

This chapter emphasizes that **the more you engage in your work life, the better you thrive as a person**. Global Gallup studies over three decades consistently show that **only about one in five Danish employees is genuinely engaged** in their work and workplace. This is particularly concerning for five reasons:

1. Engagement correlates with better sleep, fewer sick days, and increased happiness.

2. In departments with more engaged employees, overall well-being is higher.

3. Among recently stressed employees, 56% were unengaged, compared to 30% of employees engaged.

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4. Gallup defines engagement as "employees' commitment and enthusiasm in their work and workplace".

5. Europe has the lowest engagement rates globally, and Danish leaders are noted among the worst at fostering employee engagement.

The book points out that **leadership plays a significant role**, determining up to 70% of employee engagement. However, this also means that individuals are responsible for at least 30% of their own engagement. The book categorizes employees into three groups based on Gallup's definitions, using colors for clarity:

- **Green (Engaged - 20%):** These employees are "engaged" and enthusiastic about their work and workplace. They function as "psychological owners," embrace change and innovation, and drive the organization forward. They are willing to go the extra mile, support colleagues, and build strong relationships. An example is a bookstore employee who actively helps a customer find alternatives and orders a book, leading to increased sales.

- **Yellow (Unengaged - 70%):** These employees are not truly "psychologically attached." While they put in their time, they lack significant energy or passion. They may prefer to "fly under the radar" and avoid high-intensity tasks. An example is a bookstore employee who passively states a book is not on the shelf but can be ordered, leading only to the expected sale.

- **Red (Actively Disengaged - 10%):** These employees are not just unhappy but actively angry about their needs not being met. Their negativity can undermine the efforts of engaged colleagues, and they are likely looking for other jobs. An example is a busy, dismissive bookstore employee who provides minimal help, resulting in no sale.

The book stresses that **the "greener" an individual is, the better they will feel**. It encourages maintaining a "green" state or moving towards it from "yellow" or "red".

It highlights that even a small shift in engagement can significantly alter the workplace atmosphere: one "negative and red" person needs **four "positive and green" people to balance the good atmosphere**.

The author suggests that the large group of "yellow" (70%) employees holds significant power to improve the collective work environment by choosing to engage.

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Before You Use the 7 Life Rules (Chapter 3)

This introductory chapter emphasizes five foundational principles before diving into the specific rules:

1. **Small things make a big difference:** Instead of blaming external factors, individuals should focus on their own words, thoughts, and attention. Even a mere 1% improvement can be the decisive factor in achieving significant goals.

2. **Your decisions change your day tomorrow:** The author argues that we often overestimate external influences and underestimate the power of our own decisions and internal beliefs. Drawing on the analogy of a successful rower, optimal collaboration, and internal alignment, rather than individual brute strength, lead to success. This applies to daily work life, where small, conscious decisions can significantly alter one's path.

3. **Avoid the worst mistake you can possibly make:** The book posits that traditional education systems struggle to keep pace with the rapid changes in the world, leading more people to seek self-education and personal development. The worst mistake one can make is neglecting to invest time, energy, and resources in personal development.

4. **Play with your habits – do something different than usual:** Humans are creatures of habit, but even tiny adjustments to daily routines can lead to remarkable results. This aligns with James Clear's idea that "All big things come from small beginnings," emphasizing continuous small improvements over ambitious goals. The author encourages experimenting with small changes, like waking up a few minutes earlier or smiling at a cleaning person, as a fresh start.

5. **Listen to the message of silence:** In a busy world, there is a need for tools to manage mental health. The author suggests exploring mindfulness and meditation techniques to find inner peace and allow the "smile to grow". This involves consciously pausing, observing, and finding moments of quiet awareness to counter the constant mental "noise".

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The Seven Life Rules

The seven life rules themselves are presented as **simple tools** that are easy to understand and apply. The book contends that simplicity is precisely what is needed in an increasingly complex world, asserting that **simple solutions are ubiquitous**, despite our brains' tendency to favor complicated ones.

The book then outlines seven specific rules, each designed to empower the individual:

Life Rule 1: You become what you say

This rule emphasizes the **power of words, both internal (self-talk) and external (communication with others)**. It suggests choosing words with love and care, as they shape our reality and how the world perceives us. It encourages being aware of one's inner critic and intentionally using positive language.

The concept of "message in a bottle" is introduced: Sending heartfelt, detailed messages to important people to show appreciation, emphasizing that the thought matters more than the gift.

It also advises preparing both a "red speech" (factual and boundary-setting for difficult, unresolvable situations) and a "green speech" (listening and seeking solutions for situations where reasonable dialogue is possible) to manage challenging interactions, especially in professional or private settings where criticism is encountered.

Life Rule 2: Attack your negative thoughts

This rule addresses the significant challenge of "information pollution," where people are overwhelmed with irrelevant, unreliable, and unauthentic information, negatively impacting society and mental well-being.

It highlights that our **brains are not equipped to manage the vast amount of information received daily** (up to 80,000 thoughts, with a majority being negative) and tend to remember negative experiences more than positive ones.

The rule urges individuals to **recognize and actively combat this mental pollution** by controlling what information they consume and where they focus their thoughts.

It introduces the "Control Circle" as a tool to focus energy on what one can control or influence, rather than dwelling on uncontrollable circumstances. It also encourages shifting focus to positive aspects and celebrating small victories.

Practical tricks include visualizing positive aspects of the day in the morning, actively moving away from negative conversations during the day, and reflecting on the best moments of the day in the evening.

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Life Rule 3: Look people more in the eyes

This rule stresses the vital importance of **personal relationships for happiness and health**, citing the "Harvard Study of Adult Development" which concluded that good relationships lead to happier, healthier, and longer lives.

It warns that the modern world, with its digital distractions and remote work, can hinder these crucial connections. Small acts of connection, like a pat on the shoulder or a kind note, can significantly boost mood.

The rule encourages deliberately **making small efforts to interact with others**, such as smiling at strangers, engaging in small talk, or actively seeking opportunities to connect with colleagues.

It highlights the loss of non-verbal cues (like eye contact and body language, which constitute up to 90% of communication) in digital interactions and suggests **prioritizing phone calls or in-person meetings** when genuine connection and understanding are essential. The key is to "Look up" when entering a room and be fully present with the people you meet.

Life Rule 4: Change mood in two minutes

This rule addresses the common experience of mood dips caused by daily events, whether big or small. It asserts that our **behavior is a direct result of our mental state**, and this state can be consciously changed.

The book advocates taking **short, deliberate pauses (even just two minutes)** during the day to reset one's mood and mental state.

Five methods are suggested for these two-minute resets:

1. **Shifting focus** away from negative thoughts.
2. P**laying with one's words** (positive self-talk)
3. M**oving one's body** (e.g., power poses, brisk walks)
4. **Changing physical surroundings** (e.g., walking to another room)
5. **Asking for help**.

It also encourages observing and appreciating the beauty in one's immediate surroundings to shift perspective.

Life Rule 5: Put your heart and body in the calendar

This guideline emphasizes personal responsibility in handling stress, while promoting self-care as a key way to prevent burnout. It proposes scheduling a "meeting with yourself" for an hour each week to review upcoming plans and consciously **prioritize activities that align with your passions ("heart") and physical well-being ("body")**.

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The book highlights the physical toll of sedentary work, noting that many Danish employees sit for at least 10 hours a day, leading to various health issues and increased stress. Even **20-60 minutes of physical activity per week can positively impact mental well-being**.

It encourages finding enjoyable forms of movement and integrating small physical activities into daily routines, shifting away from a performance-driven mindset for exercise.

Studies by Franklin Covey suggest that a significant portion of work time (over 40%) is spent on non-important tasks or wasted entirely. The rule therefore challenges individuals to **consciously reallocate time from non-urgent, non-important tasks to activities that truly bring joy and support physical health**.

Life Rule 6: Avoid digital traps

This rule acknowledges that our digital lives come with a price. It identifies three "digital traps":

1. **Wandering attention when with people:** The constant urge to check phones, emails, and social media can lead to a lack of full presence in personal interactions, causing a loss of genuine connection. The counter-tool is to "Look up" when entering a room, making eye contact and being fully present.

2. **Screens controlling too much:** Multitasking with screens leads to reduced concentration, deeper processing, and efficiency, as it takes significant time (e.g., 15 minutes for Microsoft employees) to regain full attention after interruptions. The rule suggests **consciously deciding whether to allow one's attention to wander** and communicating that choice to others.

3. **Frustration and stress from digital systems:** The rapid pace of technological development means people often feel overwhelmed and "10-15 years behind" in understanding new systems. This can lead to feeling "stupid" or pressured to appear proactive. Extensive digital documentation requirements (e.g., for SOSU employees) can also be a significant stress factor, leading to fear of mistakes and a focus on compliance over care. Furthermore, digital systems are not always accurate or reliable. The rule proposes four reactions when digital systems cause problems: **Accept** (understand only what is necessary), **ask for help** (not stupid questions), **be critical** (point out inefficiencies to responsible parties), or **decide if it can wait until tomorrow**. The goal is to avoid prolonged frustration and quickly move on.

Life Rule 7: Stop at a red light

This is presented as the simplest yet hardest rule, focusing on **breaking habitual negative reactions** when faced with tricky situations.

It explains that our brain’s process stimuli instantly based on pre-programmed beliefs and habits, leading to instinctive emotional reactions and actions (e.g., irritation, sadness, defensiveness).

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If a situation triggers negative emotions for the third time and yields poor results, it is a signal to "stop at a red light" and change the reaction. The rule encourages learning one's "trigger thoughts" – specific thoughts that initiate rumination.

The "BOLD" tool is introduced for a 10-second pause: **B**REATHE (deep breaths), **O**BSERVE (what's happening now), **L**ISTEN (have I experienced this before?), **D**O or **DO NOT** (make a conscious decision to act or refrain from acting).

If a decision is hard in 10 seconds, the best action might be to do nothing or as little as possible. The core message is to gain control over automatic negative responses.

Chapter 5: Belief Moves Mountains

This chapter emphasizes the **profound power of belief** in both professional and personal life. It opens by posing questions about what one loves, believes in, and whether one believes in the "power of the smile".

The core message is that **belief is crucial for success and well-being**: If you believe you cannot do something, you likely will not, but believing in your capability can lead to surprising achievements, as illustrated by the author's own yoga experiences.

The chapter highlights that even **medical science acknowledges the power of belief** through phenomena like the **"placebo effect"**, where belief in a treatment (even a non-active one) can improve outcomes. This is further supported by an example where participants perceived the same wine differently based on their belief about its origin and price.

The concept of **"narrative medicine"** is introduced, showing how patients' own stories and their interpretation of events can possess healing power. The author shares his personal experience of reframing the traumatic apartment fire as an opportunity for a new beginning, demonstrating how **changing one's own narrative can radically shift mental states**.

Despite the author's scientific background, the chapter acknowledges that **science does not have all the answers** regarding the complexities of the human brain or the inexplicable energies that exist.

It suggests that the "power of the smile" is ancient wisdom, simple yet profound, that can transform tricky situations, even when scientific explanations are lacking.

The chapter concludes by urging readers to embrace this belief, emphasizing that **daily decisions and small actions, rooted in belief, can lead to significant positive changes** in one's life. It challenges the reader to consider what they choose to believe in, especially the inherent power of their own smile.

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Losing and Finding the Red Thread: The Author’s Inner Journey

Søren Jensen's life was turned upside down by **job loss, business failure, divorce, and a house fire** in which he lost nearly everything. During this challenging period, he searched for a deeper meaning, which he called "the red thread".

His quest led him to a **Dalai Lama temple in India, where a monk physically gave him a "red thread"**. In the devastating fire, he lost this thread, spiraling into mental distress.

He found his way back through **yoga** and decided to continue his coaching work, realizing "to work is also to live". He went on a two-month yoga and writing retreat in Italy to complete this book.

He implemented the **seven life rules** in his own life (exemplified by ten personal experiences in the book) to change his mental state and regain his smile.

One day, the **physical "red thread" mysteriously reappeared**, in one of very few personal boxes rescued from the fire.

This reinforced his belief in its significance — and in the idea that the fire had been an opportunity for a new beginning.

And perhaps — he reflects — some of these events were more than mere coincidences.
He attributes them to *the power of the smile.*