

**FOUR AGREEMENTS**

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**WARNING:** Read this article at your own risk. You are in immediate jeopardy of ending parts of your life! These important parts may include but are not limited to guilt, negativity, blame, self-judgment, fear, worry, anger, false beliefs, and being a victim. See the end of the article for replacement parts.

Sadly, we have all learned well the lessons taught to us by significant adults in our lives. These well intended, loving people taught us to do and act the way we do. We have learned what's right or wrong, what's beautiful or ugly, what to believe or not, what's good or bad, and how to behave in society. All of these messages have become part of our self-image and the "agreements" by which we live. In learning and accepting these patterns, we have largely given up our rights to be happy, to accept love, to enjoy, and to share our love. We must dig very deeply inside to find that beautiful, fun-loving freedom we knew as children. Just imagine a child-like Sweet Adeline life with no concern for the past or future, no fear about pleasing other people, and no worries about being perfect!

Today you can break out of those old limiting patterns, get out of your own way, get out of the insanity cycle of doing the same things over and over and expecting different results. Of course, if things are going to change in your life, you must be willing to make the open-minded, open-hearted choice to change your thoughts, and thus your behavior.

Imagine embracing new break-through patterns, bringing new "agreements" into your daily life. Consider incorporating into your life The Four Agreements described by Don Miguel Ruiz in his book by the same name. If you dare to risk transforming your life, read on.

**1. Be Impeccable with Your Word.**

This agreement sounds simple but is very powerful. It speaks to the beautiful or destructive power of our language and how we use it, and choose it to communicate with other people as well as with ourselves. Speak with integrity, take responsibility for yourself without the personal poison of blame, judgment or anger towards yourself or others, (even baritones who sing flat!) Say what you really mean, without negative exaggerations like 'always' or 'never.' Eliminate words like 'can't,' 'but', 'try', 'if only', 'should' and 'impossible.' Misusing the word often results in put-downs to ourselves and others, sometimes inadvertently. Remember that 68% of the people who leave association memberships leave because someone was rude or indifferent to them. Lying, negative self-talk and the harmful intent of gossip are eliminated by being impeccable with your word. Instead of looking in mirror and thinking "old, fat, ugly, stupid, not good enough," choose messages of loving yourself unconditionally, making your life light, easy and joyful, forgiving everyone including yourself, and releasing the past with love and acceptance.

**2. Don't Take Anything Personally**

One of the most difficult revelations for every human being is, "It's not all about me!" Our egos jump in to protect us and we make the selfish assumption that we are the center of everyone else's universe. (Picture yourself on the contest stage!) We impose our world on their world, when in fact, nothing others do is because of you. What others say and do is a projection of their own reality. You are never responsible for the actions of others, only for yourself. Releasing the temptation of taking things personally (including contest

scores) allows you to be immune to the opinions and actions of others and not be the victim of needless suffering. Remember no person (director), place (contest stage), thing (costume) or condition (weather, traffic, grocery lines) can take your personal power unless you give it away. There are only two kinds of problems in the world: my problems and not my problems. Figure out which you really own and imagine the relief you'll feel when you give up trying to control the whole world (or the whole chorus!)

### **3. Don't Make Assumptions**

Assumptions have the appearance of truth and we tend to believe them. We make an assumption, we misunderstand, we take it personally, and we create a whole drama for nothing. This trap can be avoided by simply communicating, asking questions for clarification, having the courage to express what you really want and need. When friends, members, directors, spouses don't do what we assume they should do, we feel hurt and say, "You should have known!" Choose freedom from guessing. If 'they' don't tell us something, we make an assumption to fulfill our need to know. We assume because we don't have the courage to ask questions. We assume everyone sees life the way we do. Get the facts and you will avoid misunderstanding, conflict, and many relationship issues among your members.

### **4. Always Do Your Best**

This looks like the easiest agreement for all of us over-achieving Sweet Adeines, but take a closer look. This is not about perfection.; it's about taking action on the other three agreements. Accept the fact that your best changes from moment to moment. Acknowledge that your 'best' can be affected by your sickness or health, morning or night, whether you're feeling wonderful and happy, or upset, angry or jealous. Too often if we do less we feel frustration, self-judgment, the self-imposed pain of guilt and regrets. Just check to be sure your attitude hasn't negatively affected your ability to do your best. To do your best you need to take action. Do what you do because you love it, not because you are expecting rewards, salary or Sweet Adeline medals. Do what you love, what makes you happy, not for others, and rewards will come. As you build the habits of the four agreements, your 'best' will continually become 'better' Doing your best, you learn to accept and love yourself exactly the way you are right now. You must be present to win.... And that has nothing to do with attendance at chorus rehearsals! Keep your attention on today and take action in the safety and beauty of the present moment. The past is where the drama is; the future is where the dreams are; the present is where the action is. Only this moment is real.

You won't immediately be able to transform your life by simply reading about the four agreements. Don't expect to always be impeccable with your word, never take things personally, never make assumptions, but you can always do your best. But if you give the time and attention to try these new agreements on, old habits and patterns will get weaker. You'll become more aware of those self-destructive traps, and you'll become better able to transcend the obstacles that surface in your life. Whether you believe you deserve it or not, give yourself a new chance every day to be the happy, free person you were born to be.

Here are the replacement parts you were promised: They include, but are not limited to freedom, personal power, love, communication, honesty, achievement, positive self-image, justice and truth. They are all yours already. Just make the agreements to accept them.