



*The Lucifer Effect* by Philip Zimbardo

## **The Power of Rules To Shape Reality**

Rules are formal, simplified ways of controlling informal complex behavior. They work by externalizing regulations, by establishing what is necessary, acceptable, and rewarded and what is unacceptable and therefore punished. Over time, rules come to have an arbitrary life of their own and the force of legal authority even when they are no longer relevant, are vague, or change with the whims of the enforcers.

Some rules are essential for the effective coordination of social behavior, such as audiences listening while performers speak, drivers stopping at red traffic lights, and people not cutting into queues. However many rules are merely screens for dominance by those who make them or those charged with enforcing them. Naturally, the last rule, as with the Stanford Prisoner Experiment rules, always includes punishment for violation of the other rules. Therefore, there must be someone or some agent willing and able to administer such punishment, ideally doing so in a public arena that can serve to deter other potential rule breakers.