

How to Win Friends and Influence People in the Digital Age ~ Dale Carnegie Associates

Why Carnegie's Advice Still Matters

Notes

In 1936, Dale Carnegie made a compelling statement to his readers: "Dealing with people is probably the biggest problem you face." This is the foundation of *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, and it is still true today.

Messaging speed is instantaneous. Communication media have multiplied. Networks have expanded beyond borders, industries, and ideologies. Yet rather than making the principles in this book obsolete, these major changes have made Carnegie's principles more relevant than ever.

If you don't begin with the right foundation, it is easy to send the wrong message, to offend, or to fall embarrassingly short of your objective. "Precision of communication," insisted American writer James Thurber, "is important, more important than ever, in our era of hair-trigger balances, when a false, or misunderstood, word may create as much disaster as a sudden thoughtless act."

Consider the era of hair-trigger balances in which we live today, more than fifty years after Thurber penned the phrase. The stakes are higher. Amid the amalgam of media, distinction is more difficult. Every word, every nonverbal cue, every silent stare is scrutinized as it has never been before.

"The art of communication is the

language of leadership," said the presidential speechwriter James Humes.

There is no such thing as a neutral exchange. You leave someone either a little better or a little worse. The best among us leave others a little better with every nod, every inflection, every interface. This one idea embodied daily has significant results.

It will improve your relationships and expand your influence with others, yes. But it will do so because the daily exercise elicits greater character and compassion from you.

"You can make more friends in two months by becoming more interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get people interested in you." Carnegie's assertion remains relevant, albeit counterintuitive, because it reminds us the secret to progress with people is a measure of selflessness swept under the drift of the digital age.

We witness allegedly leaked sex videos create overnight celebrities. We watch talking heads and political pundits tear down their competition and elevate their ratings. We are daily tempted to believe that the best publicity strategy is a mix of gimmick and parody run through the most virally proficient medium. The temptation is too much for many. But for those who understand the basics of human relations, there is a far better, far more reputable, far more sustainable way to operate.

More Than Clever Communication

Communication is simply an outward manifestation of our thoughts, our intentions, and our conclusions about the people around us. "Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks." ⁴ These internal drivers are the primary differentiator between today's leader and today's relational leech. The two highest levels of influence are achieved when (1) people follow you because of what you've done for them and (2) people follow you because of who you are. In other words, the highest levels of influence are reached when generosity and trustworthiness surround your behavior.

Every medium you use must be filled with messages that build trust, convey gratitude, and add value to the recipients. The one thing that has not changed since Carnegie's time is that there is still a clear distinction between influence that is borrowed (and is difficult to sustain) and influence that is earned (and is as steady as earth's axis). Carnegie was the master of influence that is earned.

Consider a few of his foundational principles— don't criticize, condemn, or complain; talk about others' interests; if you're wrong, admit it; let others save face. Such principles don't make you a clever conversationalist or a resourceful raconteur. They remind you to consider others' needs before you speak. They encourage you to address difficult subjects honestly and graciously. They prod you to become a kinder, humbler manager,

spouse, colleague, salesperson, and parent. Ultimately, they challenge you to gain influence in others' lives not through showmanship or manipulation but through a genuine habit of expressing greater respect, empathy, and grace.

Your reward? Rich, enduring friendships. Trustworthy transactions. Compelling leadership. And amid today's mass of me-isms, a very distinguishing trademark.

The irony is that Carnegie would not endorse all of today's self-help advice. He extolled action that sprang from genuine interest in others. He taught principles that flowed from an underlying delight in helping others succeed. Were the book recategorized, *How to Win Friends* would be more appropriately deemed the bestselling soul-help book in the world. For it is the soulful underpinning of the Golden Rule that Carnegie extracted so well.

Starting Soft

Does the hard-skilled manager who sits in lofty obscurity lording over his reports trump the hard-skilled manager who walks among his people, who is known, seen, and respected by his people? While the former might win some success by forcing his hand for a time, his influence is fatally flawed because his power is not bestowed on him by his people. His influence is only a veneer of leverage with a short shelf life.

We lose the faith of friends, family members, and others when we follow the steps of relational success without feeding the essence of the relationships—the measuring and meeting of human needs.

What makes so many well-meaning people get this wrong? Perhaps the ethereal nature of soft skills leads us astray. We can lean unilaterally on what is measurable.

Hard skills can be tested, taught, and transferred. Most business books are written with this in mind because we can pinpoint hard skill progress—individually and corporately—with charts, metrics, and reports.

Not so of soft skills. They can be difficult to reduce to steps. They are often messy and only crudely quantifiable through better responses and improved relationships. Yet aren't these the best measurements of all? What good is a list of accomplishments if they have led to relational regress? When any progress is bookended by self-promotion and self-indulgence, it will not last.

On a small scale, do we keep friends whose actions regularly demonstrate the relationship is about them? When we learn a person's behavior has an ulterior motive, he has less influence with us than someone we've met only once. The relationship is doomed unless he confesses and makes a change. Even then, a residue of skepticism will remain.

On a large scale, do we remain loyal to brands that regularly demonstrate either an inability or an unwillingness to embrace our needs and desires? Gone are the days when the majority of companies tell consumers what they need. We live in a day when consumers hold the majority on design, manufacturing, and marketing decisions. "Going green" was once a small, well-meaning ad campaign for a handful of products. The collective consumer voice has made it a

mandatory marketing mantra.

Individuals and companies insensitive to soft skill success miss the mark today.

Some insist you can't teach soft skill instincts. It is true if you approach soft skills with a hard skill methodology. Carnegie didn't make this mistake. He discovered that altruistic instincts rise to the surface not from shrewd step-by-step strategy but from the exercising of core desires. When we behave in ways that befriend and positively influence others, we tap a deeper well of inspiration, meaning, and resourcefulness.

Hardwired into all of us is the desire for honest communication—to understand and be understood. Beyond that, for authentic connection—to be known, accepted, and valued. Beyond that still, for successful collaboration—to work together toward meaningful achievement be it commercial success, corporate victory, or relational longevity. The crowning essence of success lies along a spectrum between authentic human connection (winning friends) and meaningful, progressive impact (influencing people).

When you put the medium before the meaning, your message is in danger of becoming, in the words of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, "a tale, told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

But it is not only the messages going out at 140 characters or less that are at risk of signifying nothing. Any medium carrying a message that lacks meaning will fall short of its intention: a television ad, a department memo, a client email, a birthday card.

Straightforward Advice for Succeeding with People Today

The reason *How to Win Friends and Influence People* remains a top seller to this day, moving more than 250,000 units in the United States alone in 2010, is that the principles within it are simple yet timeless.

It is important to remember that in Carnegie's time the many media of venerated identities (websites, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter) and gimmick-laden persuasion (pop-up ads, celebrity endorsements, televangelism) were not around. The idea of winning friends had not been reduced to an "accept" button. The idea of influencing people did not include the baggage of a half century's worth of inflated ad campaigns, corporate deception, and double-living luminaries. Carnegie had an intuitive reason for identifying his title the way he did.

Back then, if you didn't foster a friendship, influencing a person was nearly impossible. Social media didn't exist. Digital connections were not available. In fact, you rarely did business with a person you did not know in a tangible way. The average person had only three ways to connect with another: face-to-face, by letter, or by telephone. Face-to-face was the expectation. Today it is the exception.

The inherent, relational value of influence has not changed. It is still the currency of interpersonal progress. Yet the plethora of communication media has made it possible to acquire dime-store versions. And you get what you pay for.

While we live in an era when "noise plus naked equals celebrity," this is not a book about soliciting friendships and exploiting influence. This is a human relations handbook that originates "from the heart out." It is about winning friends the way your good grandfather won your wise grandmother's heart—through sincere interest, heartfelt empathy, and honest appreciation. And it is about guiding the lasting influence that arises toward mutual progress and benefit.

While the journey to applying Carnegie principles today is not as complicated as unplugging and returning to a reliance on telegrams, telephones, and tangible interface, it is also not as trite as injecting a little humanity into every aspect of your digital space. In general, the best practice is a judicious blend of personal touch and digital presence.

Employing this blend begins with an honest assessment of your current situation. From here your path to progress with others is clear.

What is your ratio of face-to-face versus digital interactions? For most people, email, texts, blogs, tweets, and Facebook posts are the primary ways they correspond with others. This presents new hurdles and new opportunities.

Emotion is difficult to convey without nonverbal cues. The advent of video communication has knocked down some barriers, but video is only a small fraction of digital communication. And still it does not shepherd the highest standard of human dignity the way a face-to-face meeting can.

We live in a driven, digital world where the full value of human connection is often traded for transactional proficiency. Many have

mastered the ironic art of increasing touch points while simultaneously losing touch.

We expect courtesy on first dates and follow-up meetings; we are impacted when the same courtesy shows up in a weekly progress report or a shared ride in the elevator. We expect humble eloquence in an ad campaign or a wedding speech; we are inspired when the same humble eloquence shows up in an email update or a text reply on a trivial matter. The difference, as they say, is in the details—the often subtle details of your daily interactions.

Why do such details still matter in this digital age? Because "the person who has technical knowledge plus the ability to express ideas, to assume leadership and to arouse enthusiasm among people—that person is headed for higher earning power." It is remarkable how much more relevant Carnegie's words are today.