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Book Review: How to Win Friends and Influence People

The book *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, originally written in 1936 by Dale Carnegie, deserves its exceptional longevity. Subtitled *The Only Book You Need to Lead You to Success*, this book presents the culmination of Carnegie's career in salesmanship, public speaking, and lecturing. To call this "the only book you'll ever need" may be hyperbole, but it is well-earned. The wisdom and advice that it contains are a snippet of psychology, that enable one who studies and practices its precepts to get the most out of their interactions with others. It is conveniently divided into four parts, each with a different focus: General techniques for handling people, how to make people like you, how to be persuasive, and how to be a leader. To sum up the overarching theme of each suggestion, Carnegie encourages us to be more considerate and more interested in others. Many of the points of the book fall in line with this generalization. The suggestions that fall outside of this category still embody an undeniable sense of positivity, which is another common thread throughout.

This sense of positivity is my first point. At the core of Carnegie's strategy to make friends is this: be a person that is easy to be around. The positivity, kindness, and patience required to implement the list of behaviors outlines by this book will transform anyone into a more positive, kinder, more patient person. This kind of person is easy to be around because they elevate those around them. They win friends and influence people because they take the people who surround them and bring them with themselves as they rise throughout life.

Carnegie writes in chapter 2, “You must have a good time meeting people if you expect them to have a good time meeting you. (65)” I really like this quote, especially the idea that having a good time meeting someone is almost contagious. It is certainly true! I have seen it many times. Kindness and joy are reflected and multiplied as they pass between people, and it uplifts everyone involved. People want to be around somebody who makes them feel important and appreciated. At the end of the day, that’s the goal of this book, and anyone who earnestly strives to follow it.

The second point that I would like to make is that this book will work a genuine change in those who earnestly strive to follow it. I find it striking that Dale Carnegie quotes Jesus Christ in chapter 6 of the book; the sermons and teaching of Christ in the New Testament have the same effect in people, albeit much stronger. The transformative power of this book, as well as the New Testament and any book of scripture, comes from the call to action. Carnegie himself writes in the 1936 introduction to the book, “This is an action book. (xxi)” Any action undergone by a person will change them, even if it is a slight change. Even in the small time since I read the book, I have noticed a change that, although minor, has had a positive influence in my life. The biggest change that I have tried to implement is simply smiling at people more, and I have felt a marked difference in my interactions with people around me. It was very surprising, but it has motivated me greatly to continue making efforts to incorporate these behaviors in my life.

The third thing that was really striking to me in the book was its emphasis on the importance of applying the principles in a genuine, organic way. It emphasizes several times how transparent it will be if someone attempts to use these techniques in an insincere way. For example, he writes of vapid flattery, “it ought to fail, and it usually does. (26)” Carnegie’s effort

to distance his book from empty gestures and manipulation really raised my opinion of the work as a whole. My initial impression of the book was mixed, as I was slightly put off by the phrasing of the title. “Winning” friends and influencing people has a strange feeling to me, and I was wary of what kind of psychological manipulation tricks that the book would teach. Carnegie’s clarification about the importance of being genuine rectified that concern and restored my faith in his strategies.

Overall, I would recommend this book to anybody with no reservations. I think it has great potential applications in every part of anyone’s life. Specifically, as professional development curriculum, I would recommend it even more enthusiastically. I particularly liked the emphasis on leadership towards the end. I felt that the book became even more practical at that point and warrants further study and practice. This book has extraordinary potential to transform the reader’s life, if they choose to study and learn its contents, and strives to apply those concepts in a consistent and lasting effort. Without really internalizing and applying these concepts, the book is useless to the reader. It can be entertaining, but it would ultimately be fruitless unless it led to a change in the reader and results in their life.

Reflecting further on that, I might rephrase my endorsement in the last paragraph. I would still recommend it without reservation, but I would recommend it with conditions. I would not recommend it to somebody that I didn’t think would try to use it in their life. To do so would be a waste of their time, and a waste of a book. I have many friends to whom I will recommend the book, but I would certainly be selective.

Overall, this book was excellent. I am glad to have read it, and I intend to revisit it on a regular basis to evaluate my progress. I’m grateful that it was assigned, as I finally got around to

reading a book that I had heard so many great things about. The discussion in class have also been enlightening and have helped me to understand even more clearly the ideas presented by Carnegie. Reading it was a very successful experience, and I am thankful for the opportunity.