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The Hard Path to Improvement

*“Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself.”* ~Leo Tolstoy

The inherent problem with human nature is our inability to accept that change is good. Nevertheless, Dale Carnegie’s guidance on self-improvement has changed many lives for the better. The most useful advice he imparted in his book *How to Win Friends and Influence People* is “If you want to be enthusiastic, act enthusiastic.” Conventionally, most people believe that emotions control the mind, however, it is important to realize that the mind has control over the emotions.

The first step to becoming a more socially adept member of society is to realize that change may be necessary, change in the form of controlling harmful emotions. The willingness to accept the fact that one may need improvement is a hard first step, one that many simply do not take. The only way to truly use Carnegie’s words of wisdom to the full effect is to develop a deep, driving desire to *want* to master human emotions. The eagerness and aspiration needed to follow this advice is lacking in many of those who could benefit from it, such as people suffering from anger problems.

Whenever I have a bad day at school, I often rant to my mother. As a doctor, she has highly developed people skills that she has honed through many years of experience with dealing with difficultpatients. When I have a problem with people, such as challenging teachers or annoying classmates, she often gives me advice that is a similar to what Carnegie gives to his readers: change your perspective in order to use your mind to avoid harmful emotions.

For example, a few weeks ago, she told me that she had a patient who had come late and consequently made her two hours late coming home. However, she looked through the patient’s point of view, someone who had been suffering for a long time, and understood that the patient had his own issues and problems and that, as his doctor, she needed to understand where he was coming from. By changing her perspective, she was able to employ Carnegie’s advice and use her mind to control her annoyance at the patient’s tardiness.

This advice would be most useful in my life when dealing with unfair teachers. When I get into a situation where I feel the teacher is being unreasonable, I should control my annoyance by understanding that the teacher has a life of their own, and that life may come with worries and troubles. By changing my perspective to that of the teacher’s, I can dominate my emotions instead of having my emotions dominate me. This way, I can maintain a calm and collected head when I talk to the teacher to have him or her understand my point of view.

I must admit, at first I was reluctant to accept my mother’s and Carnegie’s advice. I felt indignant and did not want to work harder than the other person at reaching an agreement. I almost felt that changing my perspective was equivalent to acquiescing to the other person’s argument and will. I am sure that many people refuse to accept this advice because they feel the same thing. Regardless, it has come in handy many times throughout junior year. The skills taught throughout the book not only benefit doctors such as my mother or students such as myself, but people from all walks of life.

Approaching a problem with a hot head can be harmful to the situation by inflaming emotions on either side. By knowing that we have the ability to control our emotions, we can attain a calm and rational head before approaching any problem. Sadly, many people do not accept advice on improvement willingly. It is my hope that people will learn to be open to this advice and accept help on the hard path to improvement.

*I have neither given nor received help on this essay, except from my teacher.*