Sweta Karlekar

Quarter Grades:

* 1st Quarter: A
* 2nd Quarter: B+
* 3rd Quarter: A
* 4th Quarter: A

Final Grades:

* Artificial Intelligence I: A
* Artificial Intelligence II: A

Essays Written:

Sweta Karlekar

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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.” It goes against popular belief, as most people believe that emotions control the mind, but 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 way. 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.*

Additional Notes, Experience in class:

During my time in AI, I greatly improved my computer science skills. Past just learning new algorithms and Python programming, I gained a useful skill: how to think like a programmer. I grew to enjoy the constant challenge and by the end of the year, there was always a small part of my brain constantly thinking of solutions to the program I was working on at the time. Sometimes the solution would just pop up while I was folding my clothes or reading a book. Thinking of a way to make the code work stopped becoming a chore, it became a new way for me to test my abilities and gave me something new to think about when I was bored. On the bus rides home, instead of staring out the window aimlessly, bored out of my mind, I would get my laptop out and stare at the my program, debugging both on the screen and in my mind. I actually felt my brain moving faster as I learnt to think like a true computer scientist. One of my favorite programs in class was Tic Tac Toe because you had mentioned it in class a week before it was actually assigned. Instead of putting it out of my mind, I spent that whole week thinking about how it might work and actually came up with almost the exact same solution that you did in the packet. It was that moment that I realized how much I had grown in the class. I was able to come up with my own creative solutions and solve problems on my own, rather than depending on a teacher to tell me how to figure out the problem. It was truly exciting the first time it worked and I fiddled with it for days after it was done until the display was perfect and it was running faster and faster. It was that lab that showed me how powerful AI really was and what my computer was really capable of. We can use soft AI skills to model and solve many of the world’s problems.

During this past summer, I went to two coding camps were I was able to use what I had learnt in my past three years at TJ, especially in your class. First, I spent four weeks in a Girls Who Code camp in California, where I was able to learn to use Android Studio and code an android app for customized alarms. Unlike most of the students there who hadn’t had the opportunity to be exposed to post-AP classes, I was constantly thinking one step ahead at problems that may arise or at what we could do next with our app. I was also, surprisingly, the only one who checked each block of code as I went and was able to debug very fast. Overall it was an amazing experience and I was glad that I was able to teach my friends about the computer science skills I had learnt at TJ. My next four weeks of the summer were spent at the Geospatial Research Lab with the Army Corp of Engineers as a computer science intern. I worked on storytelling using the Twitter API and built my first website in AngularJS. Without having experience in Javascript, I was able to build a foundation and learn Angular within a week because of my ability to pick up new languages quickly: something I learnt in AI. One of the best things about AI was the first week when we were thrown into a new language and course and asked to solve problems we had never tackled before. I learnt to quickly adapt and learn new languages in a short period of time. My mentor and his team at the lab were incredibly impressed with my skills. I couldn’t have done it without the growth that I experience during the course of the year in AI.