

What's in it for me? Master the art of human relationships.

Do you wish you found it easier to make friends? Or to convince others of your way of thinking? Would you like to improve your relationships with colleagues, clients, and even family members?

If so, look no further. These blinks are the ultimate guide to getting along with people and enjoying happier and more fruitful relationships.

Discover simple, concrete techniques that'll help you get what you want in any situation. Combining anecdotes with actionable advice, these blinks are full of tips that have already enriched the lives of millions.

In these blinks, you'll learn

- why you should never criticize others;
- what Al Capone can teach us about leadership; and

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Praise is more effective than criticism.

When you hear the name Al Capone, a few associations probably spring to mind – like mob violence, corruption, and criminal protection rackets.

Whatever you know about the famous gangster, you probably don't think of him as a do-gooder or public benefactor. But one man did – Capone himself. As he put it, “I have spent the best years of my life giving people the lighter pleasures, helping them have a good time, and all I get is abuse, the existence of a hunted man.” The notorious mobster who terrified Chicago believed that, deep down, he was a good man.

What can we learn from this? Well, like Al Capone, we tend to believe we're in the right, no matter what we've done. But if we struggle to criticize ourselves, just imagine how we feel when we're criticized by others.

The key message here is: Praise is more effective than criticism.

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The problem with criticizing people is that it puts them on the defensive. People take it personally when they're told they're in the wrong. Their natural instinct is to justify their behavior. What's worse, people tend to bear lasting grudges against those who criticize them, even if the criticism was well-intentioned.

So what's the solution? It's true that people need to be urged to change their ways from time to time. But if we can't help them by criticizing them, what can we do?

The answer's simple: we can praise them. Everyone wants to feel valued and important, and a few words of appreciation can get you closer to your desired result than any amount of criticisms and complaints.

That was the philosophy of Charles Schwab, a phenomenally successful steel magnate. According to Schwab, his ability to manage people was the key to his success in business. Unlike most senior businesspeople, Schwab tried to criticize others as little as possible. Instead, he focused on praising them.

In his decades of business experience, Schwab found that you can achieve far more by encouraging and praising people than you can by criticizing them. Praise inspires us to work harder and better, and makes our relationships much warmer.

Make everyone you meet feel interesting and important.

Picture this. You've come home from a long day at work and as soon as you open the door, you see your puppy bounding toward you. Her tail is wagging, and she's jumping up in excitement. You can't help but smile at your cute, furry friend.

If you have a dog, then you understand why people keep them as pets: it's because of how they make us feel. Dogs make such great companions because they simply can't hide their affection for us.

There's a lesson to be learned from dogs – and it can help you attract friends with puppy-like ease.

The key message here is: Make everyone you meet feel interesting and important.

So what's the human equivalent of canine affection? How do you show your goodwill to a new acquaintance, and earn hers in return?

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Well, for a start, you can stop trying to be interesting. It doesn't work. People rarely care much about the details of other people's lives or hobbies. Instead, they usually care about themselves and their own lives. So the quick way to a stranger's heart is showing that you're interested in him, too.

How can you do that? Well, start by showing genuine pleasure when you meet someone. Smile at him, and greet him enthusiastically. Make an effort to remember his name, and be sure to use it in conversation. In short, show people that you're happy to be in their company.

And don't stop there. If you really want to make a favorable impression on people, it's not enough to be warm and interested in them. You also need to make them feel important.

A landscaping inspector who attended one of the author's seminars learned this lesson firsthand. The man once complimented a client on his fine pedigree dogs, which led to a long conversation about the client's passion for dog breeding. The respect and genuine interest that the inspector displayed not only established a warm professional relationship – it also led to the client giving him an expensive, purebred puppy as a parting gift.

When you demonstrate that you're truly interested in others and value their opinions, you'll often receive great and unexpected rewards.

Encourage others to talk, and listen carefully when they do.

In the midst of the American Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln summoned an old neighbor to the White House, seeking advice. When he arrived, Lincoln spent hours discussing the emancipation of the enslaved people in the South. Was it a good idea? Would the country as a whole react positively?

Lincoln went back and forth all evening, examining the pros and cons of every possible move. Then, without receiving a word of advice from his old friend, he finished up, thanked his neighbor, and sent him home.

In the end, Lincoln hadn't needed an advisor; he had plenty of those. What he needed was a listener.

The key message here is: Encourage others to talk, and listen carefully when they do.

Like Lincoln, we all value good listeners – but it often seems that they're in short supply. We all like to talk about ourselves – about our achievements, our worries, our pasts, and our

futures. But that's not the way to win friends. In fact, that's how to lose them.

Nobody likes people who monopolize conversations. If you want to make a favorable first impression and win people's hearts, take the opposite tack. Invite them to tell you about their lives and interests, and listen attentively to what they say.

Do you want to become friends with the new guy at work? Try asking him open-ended questions that he may enjoy answering, like how he's finding his new position, or if he has any hobbies. And remember, pay attention. If you're going to appear distracted and uninterested while others speak, you're better off not encouraging them to talk at all.

Take it from Theodore Roosevelt, who knew that engaging people on a topic they find fascinating is a sure-fire way to make friends. Every time he had an important meeting, Roosevelt would study a book dealing with one of his guest's favorite topics. That way, he could have an informed and pleasant chat with anyone about their own preferred hobbies and interests.

It worked for Roosevelt, but you don't necessarily have to do that much homework. Just share the limelight, ask questions, and listen attentively. Before long, drawing people out will become second nature – and making friends will be a cinch.

If you can't avoid an argument, then disagree as gently as possible.

How do you win an argument? By tangling your opponent in argumentative knots? By showing that your facts and figures are indeed correct? Or by cleverly exposing some logical fallacy in your opponent's way of thinking?

None of these is a good idea. If you “win” an argument like that, your opponent will come to resent you – and if your opponent resents you, you can be sure he'll never agree with you.

When disagreements become full-blown arguments, no one wins. If you can, it's best to avoid them completely. But sometimes an argument is inevitable, so if you find yourself in a situation where you have to state your case, there are a few tips worth keeping in mind.

The key message here is: If you can't avoid an argument, then disagree as gently as possible.

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If you want to convince someone that what you're saying is true, never say the words, “You're wrong.” Making your case

so bluntly won't bring your opponent around to your way of thinking. Instead, she'll take offense, double down on her own convictions, and try her best to prove you wrong.

A subtle and gentle approach is far more likely to be effective. Rather than trying to prove your case by force, try to lead your opponent to your conclusions in a spirit of friendly inquiry.

But how do you get someone who disagrees with you to cooperate? The trick is to just acknowledge the possibility that you might be wrong. Try saying something like: Well, you know, I could be wrong. Let's look at the facts. This is often enough to disarm a stubborn opponent.

And if you do in fact turn out to be wrong, be gracious in defeat, and try to be the first to admit your mistake. Owning up to your errors preemptively often makes others take a softer tack.

On the flip side, if you turn out to be right, don't rejoice. Your opponent is unlikely to adopt a new opinion if you make it feel like a humiliation.

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Get others to agree with you from the start, and then gently lead them to your conclusions.

Socrates, the ancient Greek philosopher, understood the fine art of persuasion. By asking the right questions in the right way, he convinced people to affirm things they'd never believed before.

How did he do it? Well, he made sure to get them in an affirmative state of mind. That means he got them into the habit of saying yes.

And how did he do that? First, he began his conversations by making assertions everyone could agree with. Then, bit by bit, he shifted the conversations into more dubious territory. By foregrounding the points everyone could agree on, he made his audience more likely to accept the contentious arguments that followed.

So what can we learn from Socrates?

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conclusions.

Socrates's style of persuasion is worth imitating. If you can get people nodding from the beginning, you're halfway to convincing them you're right.

A no, on the other hand, is best avoided. When someone rejects a point of yours, it becomes very hard to change his mind. People typically become emotionally invested in defending opinions they've declared publicly. After all, their reputation for intelligence and good judgment is on the line.

For the same reason, people prefer ideas that they come up with themselves to those of other people. Advancing our own ideas gives us a sense of independence. Accepting those of others can sometimes feel like taking orders.

So what can you do with this information? Well, instead of trying to convince others that your ideas are the right ones, you can help them arrive at those ideas themselves. By getting people in an affirmative state of mind and asking questions that nudge them in the right direction, you can often help others arrive at your conclusions on their own.

That was the strategy that Colonel Edward M. House used when Woodrow Wilson was president. Rather than giving Wilson explicit advice, the colonel would very casually mention a proposal of his in conversation. Over time, the seed that Colonel House had planted would take root in Wilson's mind – so much so that he often thought the plan was entirely his own!

Did House correct him? Of course not. He understood that people prefer their own ideas to those of others.

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Try to understand other people's viewpoints.

Jay Mangum was in a difficult situation. He represented an elevator maintenance company, and he needed to schedule some repairs at a hotel.

Jay knew the work would take a full day, but the hotel manager didn't want to shut the elevator down for longer than two hours. So what did Jay do? Did he say that the repairs were impossible to rush?

No. He took a minute to see things from the manager's point of view. Jay let him know that he understood his desire to keep the guests satisfied. But, he pointed out, if the repairs didn't go ahead soon, the elevator would need far lengthier repair work down the line.

Unsurprisingly, the manager agreed to the eight-hour shutdown.

The key message here is: Try to understand other people's viewpoints.

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Jay was able to convince the manager to let the repairs go ahead because he understood his true concerns. Jay knew that more than anything, the manager wanted to please his guests. By recognizing that, he was able to explain to the manager that delaying the repairs would be far more inconvenient for them in the long run.

Trying to see things from someone else's perspective is always beneficial. Not only can it help resolve a tricky situation like Jay's, but it can also win people's favor and generate a great deal of goodwill.

You see, most people appreciate sympathy. When tensions rise and tempers begin to fray, a sympathetic phrase is often all that's needed to make things right again. Sometimes an aggrieved customer or upset friend only needs to hear the words: I completely understand where you're coming from. In your situation, I'd feel exactly the same.

In fact, sympathizing with others doesn't just make them feel good – it can also help you to manage frustration and impatience. By understanding the factors that make people act as they do, you can become more tolerant of behaviors that once irritated and upset you.

The next time someone's behavior upsets you, pause for a minute and try to see things from the other person's point of view. Why might your colleague be slacking off? Is there anything kind or understanding you could do to help him get

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Extending sympathy isn't always easy – but for you and the other person, it's normally better than getting angry.

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Set the bar high and people will strive to meet it.

Ruth Hopkins, a fourth-grade teacher from Brooklyn, New York, got a surprise on the first day of school. She'd been assigned a new class for the year and realized that Tommy, the biggest troublemaker in the school, was now among her pupils.

Though he was smart, Tommy was very disobedient – his previous teacher had complained about him day in, day out. How would Ruth cope?

Luckily, she had a plan. On the first day, Ruth went around the class and complimented each student. When she reached Tommy, Ruth looked at him and told him she'd heard he was a natural-born leader. She said she was depending on him to make her class the best of all the fourth graders that year.

With such a stellar reputation to live up to, Tommy's behavior rapidly improved.

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The key message here is: Set the bar high and people will strive to meet it.

We humans love praise, and we hate to disappoint people who believe in us. When we commend someone's reputation, we can make use of both these facts: our admiring words reward them for what they've already done and also set a high benchmark for future performance.

In other words, if you want someone to develop a certain characteristic, speak of them as though they already possess it. If you'd like your child to be more generous, praise her for sharing with others. Set up an aspirational reputation for her as a generous and giving child.

A dentist named Dr. Martin Fitzhugh used just this technique when he noticed that the standards of his office cleaner seemed to be slipping. A patient had complained that the dentist's metal cup holder was dirty. Sure, it was just the cup holder – but it was an oversight that made Dr. Fitzhugh seem unprofessional.

Rather than chastising his cleaner, however, he wrote her a very gracious and appreciative note thanking her for her hard work and commending her diligence. Then, as a little side note, he mentioned that he could pay her extra from time to time if she needed to work longer occasionally – just in order to take care of once-in-a-while things like the cupholder.

The result? From then on, the cleaner's work improved drastically – and she never once had to work overtime.

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Praising others, and letting them know that you appreciate their work, is generous – but it's also an astute way of making

sure they'll try at least as hard in the future. If you can make a habit of it, and combine it with the other tips contained in these blinks, you'll soon have an easier time making new friends and improving old relationships.

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Final summary

The key message in these blinks:

To be truly influential, try to understand the perspectives of those around you. Everybody likes to be listened to, understood, and made to feel important. If you can do these things for other people, you'll always find favor.

Actionable advice:

Set up a challenge.

If you find yourself repeatedly trying and failing to motivate workers, try awakening their natural sense of competition. All you need to do is find a way to appraise your employees' performances and then acknowledge the top workers publicly. Very often you won't even need to award a prize – healthy competitiveness is sometimes all it takes to rouse a sleeping workforce.

Got feedback?

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What to read next: How to Stop Worrying and Start Living, by Dale Carnegie

Our blinks to How to Stop Worrying and Start Living, another self-help classic by Dale Carnegie, outline exactly why worrying is bad for you and what you can do to relax more. With tools and techniques to put into practice, as well as a wealth of examples and anecdotes, these blinks can help you start worrying less today.

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