

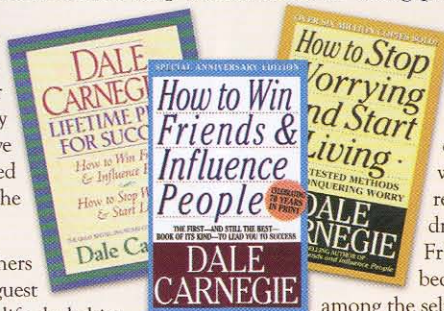


How To Win NEIGHBORS

AND INFLUENCE THE WORLD

Of all the celebrities from Forest Hills past I've had the honor to write about, the one that still remains famous is Dale Carnegie. Before there was "The Secret" there was Carnegie's "How to Win Friends and Influence People", the standard of all self-help books. It's still being published.

MEMORY LANE



Even as I write these words on the R train, there is a fellow passenger reading this very same famed classic. Born as Dale Carnegie, he grew up dirt poor. His mother was a stern Methodist with hopes her son would someday become a missionary. In a way his life of preaching positive values honored her hopes. As a young boy Carnegie loved reciting in church and local functions. He joined the debating team in high school yet never won a debate.

It was while he attended Warrensburg State Teachers College, Carnegie experienced his epiphany. He heard a guest speaker share how he triumphed over the tough hand life dealt him.

Then and there Carnegie knew what he wanted to do with his life; to become an inspirational public speaker. He established himself as one on campus then left college before graduating to further pursue his dream. At first he took all sorts of odd jobs which included selling ham, ladies shoes, and engineering courses. Once he scraped up enough money he boarded a train to New York City. En route, his goals took a slight detour when a fellow passenger convinced Carnegie he should take up acting. So off he went to attend the American Academy of Dramatic Arts. His acting career was short lived after traveling with the lame Polly of the Circus road show. However, years later, Carnegie starred as himself in the movie, "Jiggs and Maggie in Society", produced by Monogram Pictures. Arthur Murray and Sheila Graham also had cameo appearances.

In 1912, down on his luck without two pennies to rub, rather than languish in self-pity, Carnegie created a new opportunity for himself. He approached the director of the YMCA where he was living with an idea to teach a class on public speaking. He saw a need for training business professionals in the art of communication. At the time such a course was unheard of. Intrigued with the idea the director agreed.

Like most flourishing inventions created from mistakes, such as erasers and hole-donuts, Carnegie's success started when he ran out of things to say. At a lost for words he relied on what he learned in drama school. He coaxed his students to talk about their experiences, their fears, and dreams to help rid them of their anxieties about public speaking. And it worked! The news quickly spread about Carnegie's program. YMCAs in Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Wilmington, Delaware, began offering the popular public speaking course. Carnegie continued fine tuning the curriculum to include techniques for confidence building and effective communication. He even had his own radio program where he shared his principles to millions of listeners. Within two years Carnegie was averaging \$500 a week, an equivalent to today's 50K. His course was now being taught nationwide. Within another two years he changed the spelling of his name from Carnegey to Carnegie when he booked Carnegie Hall for one of his presentations.

But he hit a snag. World War I erupted and Carnegie served a brief stint in the Army in Europe. Once the war was over, he remained in Europe to write his first book and become the next "...Jack London or Thomas Hardy". He called it "The Blizzard". The reception it got from his publisher "was as cold as any blizzard that ever howled across the plains of the Dakotas". Carnegie writes about this period in another book, "How to Stop Worrying and Start Living", which is part self-help/part autobiographical. He adds that during this time he even contemplated suicide yet for whatever reason managed to pull himself up by his bootstraps, "put a stop-loss order" on his worries and returned to public speaking.

Leon Shimkin of the then fledgling Simon & Schuster, convinced Carnegie that a book needed to be written based on the principals covered in his course. A stenographer was hired to sit in his classes. The resulting transcript served as a rough draft for the bestseller, "How to Win Friends and Influence People". It became an instant hit and is still popular among the self-help genre.

Carnegie met his second wife through his course. At the time, Dorothy Price Vanderpool, was a single mom working as a stenographer in Tulsa. When she completed Carnegie's course, she landed a job with the Gulf Oil Corporation where she received numerous promotions. Her success so impressed the Carnegie people they hired her. Several months later she married Dale Carnegie and eventually became his business partner thus catapulting the Dale Carnegie Institute (DCI) into the mega corporation it is today. Branches sprung up globally and Carnegie's books began being published in different languages. Successful business personalities like Frank Perdue, Lee A. Iacocca and even Mary Kay Ash of Mary Kay Cosmetics attended the DCI. Following her husband's footsteps, Mrs. Carnegie even wrote her own book, "How to Help Your Husband Get Ahead in his Social and Business Life".

The Carnegie Family lived in Forest Hills Gardens from 1927 until 1955 when Dale Carnegie died of Hodgkin's disease. They were members of The Church-in-the-Gardens where Mrs. Carnegie volunteered her expertise as its Sunday school coordinator. They had one daughter, Donna Dale Carnegie, who took over as chairman for the DCI when her mother died in 1998.

Carnegie believed, "the sweetest sound to any person is the sound of his or her own name." My Dad, Bob Cuddeback, told me a story that attests to this credence. He and his all time buddy once met Dale Carnegie at a business function of sorts where the three briefly struck up a conversation. Years later, these same two cronies had another chance to schmooze with the Great Carnegie. They devised a wicked plan to see if Dale Carnegie really lived by his principle of remembering names. During their initial hellos, they were surprised that, yes, despite all the years that had passed, Carnegie did indeed remember each of their names. In keeping with their plan, these two mischievous yet grown men then told the great spokesmen that no, "those aren't our names." My dad recalled how "Dale Carnegie's face went absolutely pale". Realizing the error of their ways they made a quick comeback without missing a beat and 'fessed up to their devilish prank. It became the butt of a joke for the rest of the evening and the three men shared many laughs. How ironic that years later, my father would be living next store to the Carnegie House on Wendover Road. By then it was occupied by a different family.

Dale Carnegie was as sincere as they come. His success as a businessman and human being stemmed from his winning attitudes. How many of us have been side-tracked from our dreams, losing time and money and yes, even our hearts and minds, by following them? Sure anyone can write a book on survival skills and the art of communication. What gave meaning to Carnegie's words is he actually went through the process of sinking into low despair yet rising upwards with style. It's how he lived his life that serves as the greatest inspiration of all. ■