

Carnegie, Dale – How to Win Friends and Influence People

Vermilion, 2006 (first published in 1937), [Surrounding Knowledge] Grade ★★★★★

This must be one of the best guides to Warren Buffett's psyche and persona that there is. On the cover Buffett is quoted saying "[Carnegie] changed my life." Dale Carnegie is *the* pioneer in the self-improvement genre and in adult education overall and this book remains a best seller nearly eight decades after its first publication. Today psychological self-help in any form is big business, writers like Tony Robbins and Stephen Covey are close to household names and as many successful movements it has attracted its fair amount of criticism and parodies. This public position was not the case in 1930s. Carnegie who was born on a Missouri farm had been a lecturer on public speaking since 1912 when he commissioned a statistical survey on what adults want to study and what they want to get out of life. Second only to good health the survey showed that their prime interest was "*people; how to understand and get along with people; how to make people like you; and how to win others to your way of thinking.*" Realizing that despite the obvious demand the educational system ignored the topic altogether and as there were no books written on the subject, Carnegie set out to write one. The insights formed the basis for the hugely successful Dale Carnegie Course that is still offered around the globe. It was this course that changed a young and shy Buffett's life.

Any book on how to influence people walks a fine line between moral behavior and manipulation; between trying to become a better version of yourself and learning puppet-master techniques. The core idea of the book is that you can change people's behavior towards you by changing your behavior towards them and nine times of ten Carnegie ends up on the right side of the line. There is often a type of jujutsu-character to the advice given and in my opinion the advice at times becomes a bit too self-effacing. I'm not debating the efficiency of the counseling but my inner self rebels against the "please walk all over me"-feeling of some of the content. Everybody doesn't have to be friends with everybody and all persons' point of

view are not necessarily of the same value. Otherwise – and perhaps not surprising – it is nothing in this book that is not as relevant today as in the 1930s. The human psyche hasn't changed so why should the advice?

The book as such has four parts; *Fundamental Techniques in Handling People, Six Ways to Make People Like You, How to Win People Over to Your Way of Thinking* and *Be a Leader: How to Change People Without Giving Offence or Arousing Resentment*. They all include a large number of short chapters containing one specific advice backed up by a large number of contemporary examples showing how effective they are. In reality much of the advice given in separate chapters – powerful as it may be – is relatively similar and could have benefited from some consolidation. The book is also more of a mixed stew than a modern day editor would have approved of. It gives advice on sales techniques, on leadership, on self-improvement, on increasing your social abilities and much more.

For me the most striking thing about the book was how I could read "Buffett" on almost every page. A huge part of Buffett's success comes from the fact that everybody apart from some envious hedge fund managers likes him. And people like him because of how he behaves: his keen interest in others that should be of no importance to him, his admittance of his mistakes and flaws, his down to earth humor, his public praise of those working for him and unwillingness to criticize people even when they are at fault. All this is what makes Buffett who he is; and all this is in Carnegie's book. Buffett was only 20 years old when he completed his course and it should have been very formative for him. Buffett saw best practice and internalized it. Now, I'm not saying that Buffett's personality isn't authentic as Carnegie's advice only should have accentuated traits that were already there but it would have been hugely interesting to know the young Buffett from before internalizing the advice.

If you want to understand Buffett, read Carnegie.

Mats Larsson, April 15, 2015