



DALE CARNEGIE: *A Man with a Message*

Dogged by a personality problem in his youth he stumbled on a valuable secret—good speakers are good at almost anything else. He built fame and fortune teaching this simple lesson. His Institute of Effective Speaking has since saved many a tongue-tied Caspar Milquetoast from the tortures of fear

by Collie Small

DALE CARNEGIE, a Missouri farm boy who grew up to be the most surprised man in the world, is the product of an unpredictable section of the United States, which has, in its time, spawned such improbable characters as Carrie Nation and the Dalton Boys. As a counselor on human relations and the author of an unfinished book on How to Win Friends and Influence People, Carnegie lies somewhere in between the two extremes represented by his neighbors. He is difficult to chart exactly; yet his personality has been stretched to such a point over the years that he has acquired, by osmosis, all the zeal of a crusader and most of the bravado of a bandit.

These two characteristics, plus a magnificent grasp of the obvious, have enabled Carnegie to establish himself as a man with a message. The message, a Carnegie conception of strength-through-joy, has been heeded so universally, moreover, that over 3,000,000 copies of How to Win Friends and Influence People have been sold since 1937, or more than any other nonfiction book in history with the exception of the Bible, the Koran, and possibly one or two other perennial classics whose total sales have never been computed.

Although Carnegie has always intended to put in a chapter advising readers what to do if the message doesn't work, he has never got around to it. Nonetheless, it is now in its 56th printing, and it has been reproduced in 20 languages and dialects, including Afrikaans, Gujarati, Punjabi and Burmese. This figure does not include certain Chinese and Japanese versions which have been bootlegged by enterprising Oriental booksellers.

Carnegie has written eight other books, the most recent being How to Stop Worrying and Start Living. How to Stop Worrying is a book composed largely of the case histories of accomplished worriers, and it has started off at the same lively clip that distinguished the early sales of How to Win Friends and Influence People. Now in its sixth printing, it was recently introduced into the Dale Carnegie course on Effective Speaking and Personality Development, where it is now required reading.

Carnegie's other books, which include a number of short biographies, books on public speaking, and an ambitious study of Lincoln, have been only modestly successful from a sales standpoint. One, an early novel called The Blizzard, was unquestionably one of literature's most resounding failures. It was never published, and it is the one cross he still bears.

(Continued)

OldMagazineArticles.com

The book on How to Win Friends and Influence People is simply a distillation of all that Carnegie has been teaching and preaching for 37 years in his courses in public speaking and personality development. It had its genesis in a post card listing certain fundamentals, graduated into a larger post card, expanded into a pamphlet, and finally blossomed into a book. Carnegie compiled it as a text on human relations and hoped that it might sell 30,000 copies. "I am," he says now, in speaking of its success, "the most surprised man in the world."

To Carnegie, who overcame his own shyness by debating in college, public speaking is the highroad to self-confidence, which in turn is the key to winning friends and influencing people. Stated as simply as possible, Carnegie looks on himself as a pioneer in a new field of adult education and feels that his main job is to help men and women conquer fear and develop courage.

As practiced in a Carnegie class, where every student must take his turn on the rostrum, public speaking is group therapy not unlike that practiced by Alcoholics Anonymous. By teaching his students to speak easily before a group, Carnegie has saved as many people from their own dread uncertainties as Alcoholics Anonymous has saved from the whisky barrel. In one notable instance, the Carnegie Institute and Alcoholics Anonymous joined forces, and together effected the rescue of a now-prominent New York businessman who had graduated from Harvard and had then taken an intensive postgraduate course in the Bowery.

Another extreme Carnegie case involved a man from Brooklyn, who, when called upon to make his first speech in class, responded by fainting dead away. Carnegie, with admirable aplomb, bounded to the fallen disciple's side, pointed dramatically to his prostrate figure, and, in a voice ringing with optimism, announced: "In four weeks, this man will be speaking to you from this floor." Carnegie was right.

The Dale Carnegie Institute of Effective Speaking and Human Relations is currently operating some 300 classes in a total of 168 cities in the United States, Canada, Hawaii and Norway.

In addition, Carnegie expects to open a class in Turkey under the direction of a man from Istanbul who came to the United States to buy locomotives and stayed to enroll in the course. This was not unusual. Many foreigners, temporarily situated in this country, look up a Carnegie class while they are here and take the course.

Those Who Come to Scoff—

Carnegie sees as his greatest obstacle the indifference of people to improving themselves; nevertheless, he consistently enrolls around 15,000 students a year, 60 per cent of whom have been recommended by former students. Most of them, as Carnegie himself puts it, "come to scoff and stay to pray."

In any event, they have come from India, South America and other far-off places; whole families have trooped in en masse to take advantage of the family rate, which is less than the regular by one fourth; some of the nation's biggest industries, including a Hollywood motion-picture studio, repeatedly send their executives to Carnegie for overhauling.

A former mayor of Baltimore, the president of a large shoe company, and the manager of one of the world's greatest hotels have taken the Carnegie

home life happier, and any number of ways to master whatever other problems there are in the techniques of handling people. This is his gospel.

Six Keys to Popularity

The gospel is disarmingly simple. Carnegie's six ways to make people like him—become genuinely interested in other people, smile, remember that a man's name is to him the sweetest sound in the English language, be a good listener, talk in terms of the other man's interest, and make the other person feel important—these are all obvious platitudes that have been dispensed over a mother's knee for ages. Yet, Carnegie has been astonishingly successful in selling them professionally to people who have forgotten them or who, for one reason or another, find it difficult to apply them.

The gospel, even to Carnegie, did not come all at once. He cannot remember any particularly blinding moment when the secret of harmonious living revealed itself to him. But he does recall that his first important triumph over himself came when he won the debating championship of Warrensburg State Teachers College, in Missouri.

The son of a farmer, Carnegie was painfully shy as a youth. A state of extreme penury, coupled with the fact that he had to ride a horse to school instead of boarding with his richer schoolmates, combined to make his existence at college a humiliating experience. His clothes fitted him so badly that the girls refused to go out with him, and Carnegie started looking for his revenge.

Unfortunately, there were few ways to make a lasting impression on the campus. Carnegie's athletic prowess was largely confined to a certain talent for pitching hay into a loft, no great accomplishment for a Missouri farm boy, and debating was about all that was left. However, having already played the role of Snooks, the Newsboy, in a high-school play entitled *Imogene, or The Witch's Secret*, circa 1901, Carnegie was aware that what he lacked in talent he was beginning to make up in determination.

Needless to say, Dale Carnegie was the toast of Warrensburg after he had tutored the winners of both the public speaking and the declamatory contests and had himself captured the college debating championship. Although the wheels on the family buggy still squeaked discouragingly and the springs still popped up through the seat, the girls began buzzing with compliments for that nice Carnegie boy with all the talent.

After college, however, the buzzing stopped temporarily. For a time, he tried valiantly to sell correspondence-school courses in the sand hills of Nebraska, but the farmers he approached were seldom interested in becoming research chemists or certified public accountants, and his only important sale came when he trapped a lineman up a telephone pole and sold him a course on electrical engineering.

In 1908, at the age of twenty, Carnegie got a new job selling ham, bacon, soap and lard for a packing company, and he performed at this more practical task so enthusiastically that he was offered a branch managership after only two years. This was the historic moment at which the secret of enthusiasm manifested itself to Carnegie.

Carnegie, in fact, became so charged with enthusiasm that he gave up his selling job and went to New York, where,

Man with a Message

still flushed with his schoolboy triumph in *Imogene*, or *The Witch's Secret*, he enrolled in the American Academy of Dramatic Arts. His first role was that of Dr. Hartley in a road-company version of *Polly of the Circus*, and he bolstered his precarious income by selling suitcases during his off hours. After nine months, he left the temple of Thespis in disgust and tried vainly to persuade his roommate to do likewise.

"You'll never get anywhere in this business," Carnegie warned him.

Carnegie is still embarrassed over this early effort to influence someone. His roommate was Howard Lindsay, co-author of *Life With Father* and the current Broadway hit, *Life With Mother*.

Following a rugged period of truck selling, Carnegie returned to his first love and began teaching public speaking at a New York Y.M.C.A. in 1912. Eventually he extended his operations to include classes in several near-by cities, and gradually it dawned on him that proficiency in public speaking was doing strange and wondrous things to the personalities of his students. He has been at it ever since, attacking from the viewpoint that public speaking is a powerful antidote for fear.

When a welcoming committee greets Carnegie at the railroad station in a city where he is scheduled to speak, he is frequently overlooked by committee members who expect a red-blooded giant to bound from the train, breathe deeply of the good air, and grab in a viselike grip the hand of the first man who gets close to him. Carnegie is instead a gentle, neat, gray-haired man of sixty with a well-turned sense of humor, a quiet demeanor and a horror of exhibitionists.

On the platform, he falls something short of a fire-eating monster, but he does speak with almost hypnotizing assurance, and he is one of the most enthusiastic speakers extant. Enthusiasm, in fact, is his most enduring quality. It is not inconceivable that Carnegie, the piper, could lead an army off a high cliff with his enthusiasm. His audiences, although they are invariably prepared to ridicule both the man and the idea, consistently come away wondering what happened.

Not long ago, at a luncheon of sales executives in New York, Carnegie asked several hundred businessmen to take out pieces of paper and copy down his rules for generating enthusiasm with pep talks, morning exercises and so forth. There was an embarrassed silence while the men of commerce looked painfully at one another in search of a clue.

Gradually, as Carnegie rushed on, well-manicured hands started slipping into well-tailored pockets for pencils and paper, and within a couple of minutes some of New York's top executives were furiously scribbling Carnegie's homely recipes on how to increase profits simply by getting out of bed on the enthusiastic side.

One of Carnegie's close friends has described him as a man who likes to preach and make money. Carnegie's success obviously has brought him considerable wealth, but he still lives modestly in a small house on a quiet street in Forest Hills, New York, where he harbors a secret desire to learn how to play the accordion. When he is not working on a new lecture tour, he putters around his garden, takes long, meditative walks in a near-by park, constantly exclaiming over the wonders of nature, and regularly inspects a set of dinosaur footprints he purchased last year from Yale University.

Carnegie's wife, Dorothy, is a graduate of one of his classes in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and her mother, by coincidence, was a lady who boarded with the elder Carnegies at their farm in Missouri when Dale was a boy and Dorothy was not yet born.

Dale and Dorothy periodically set off without warning for extended vacations, and Carnegie confesses that this habit of going on vacations, willy-nilly, is the reason he never finished *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. Instead of adding that chapter for the people the book doesn't help, he succumbed instead to an impulse to visit Alaska.

An avid reader, Carnegie has filled his already brimming head with an endless supply of oddities, and they have now taken over an important part of his normal conversation as well as his lectures. There is virtually nothing that does not remind him of some little-known fact, and he is fond of startling people with such observations as: "Know how big the national debt is? No? Well, it's over 250 billion dollars, and remember this: Only a little more than *one* billion minutes have passed since the birth of Christ."

Antiquity of Man Estimated

He is likely to observe that it is against the law to shake dustrags out of windows in New York, and may follow this up with: "Know how long man has been on earth? Well, if the Washington Monument represented the age of the earth, you could represent the time that man has been on earth by laying a dime on top of the monument."

Although Carnegie believes passionately in the precepts of his teaching, he is not under the illusion that everyone needs it. "The most important thing in the world is getting along with people," he says, "and almost everyone can do that. One in a hundred can't, however, and he is the one who needs the course. The others will get along just as well without it."

Carnegie also concedes that neither he nor the course is infallible. "There are some people I can't possibly help," he said recently. "Occasionally, you find people who under no circumstances seem able to get along with other people."

Carnegie is quick to say that a sub-moron can read *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, and he happily admits that in all his teachings he only glorifies the obvious. Most of his ideas, he confesses, are simply lifted from such philosophers as Jesus, Confucius or Socrates, and are converted into functioning maxims in the Carnegie workshop.

"If people would only think a little, they wouldn't need my course at all," he says. "For example, I teach them how to stop worrying. Holy smoke! All you have to do to stop worrying is remember two little proverbs: 'Don't cross your bridges before you come to them' and 'Don't cry over spilled milk.' What's so hard about that?"

The one thing that occasionally rankles Carnegie is his own inability to follow consistently the course that he himself has charted. He realizes that it is difficult, if not impossible, to maintain a steady course in negotiating the straight and narrow, and he is able to console himself only by recalling that other philosophers have also had trouble practicing what they preached. In this connection, Carnegie identifies himself with Confucius, who suffered from a similar disability.

When Carnegie gets off the path, Mrs. Carnegie, remembering that she once

Man with a Message

spent \$76 to take the course, laughingly demands her money back, and this usually straightens him out. Occasionally, however, he finds himself in a mood that is calculated only to alienate friends and minimize influence.

Not long ago, on an otherwise placid Sunday afternoon, Carnegie was put in a bad temper by a caller, and he provoked himself further, after the caller had left, by brooding over the inconvenience it had caused him. On one of his circuits around the house, he stalked out onto the sun porch, glanced around balefully, and stalked off into the house again.

"There," said Mrs. Carnegie, arching an eyebrow, "goes the man who wrote *The Book*."

Collier's

January 15, 1949

p. 26



OldMagazineArticles.com