

BOOK REVIEW

Carnegie, Dale (1936). *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. (Ed.) Lowell Thomas, First Published in 1937; e-book version by Cornerstone Publishing, 2005, Pp. 213.

Shreesh Chaudhary

I read this book first at Pilakhbar, a village near Madhubani in Bihar over 50 years ago. I was an undergraduate student then, studying for honours in English Literature at a college in Darbhanga. I enjoyed my time at Pilakhbar and spent several vacations there, reading my own and borrowed books. I read also from the collection of Mr. Jha, a cousin of my sister's husband, Pt Shivanandan Jha. This collection had a copy of *How to Win Friends and Influence People*.

I liked the way this 200-page book is organized, containing short, interesting and relevant anecdotes in simple, almost Biblical, English, from the lives of the big and the not-so-big. I could not have read all their biographies, but here I learnt how Lincoln (mentioned on Pp. 29, 94 & 180) packed his notes and letters with power, and how a woman served hay to her unappreciative sons and husband. These stories not just gave me words in context; they also taught me some English. More importantly, they taught me that difficult though the path might be, there always was a way out.

The editor of the present edition rightly calls it, "grandfather of all people's skill books". No wonder it has sold millions of copies and has been translated into most major languages of the world. A 15-page bio-section on the life of Dale Carnegie (DC) says he began his working life as a door-to-door salesperson. In India, we call them "hawkers". But

because of his ability to tell stories, and help even ordinary people see the power of good word, DC became the most sought after speaker of his time. His seminar halls used to be packed to capacity with already successful professionals eager to do still better. By helping people develop their latent possibilities, DC created, as Prof William James of Harvard (p.14) says, "a revolution in adult education".

The book is organized into four parts and each part has an overall theme whose sub-themes are illustrated in several sections with stories and anecdotes from lives, mostly, of contemporaries. One section, for example, is called why you should not "kick over the beehive if you want to gather honey"; another section presents "the big secret of dealing with people". Each section ends with a mantra, a principle, coming out of that section. We have principles such as follows:

- Don't criticize, condemn or complain.
- Give honest and sincere appreciation.
- God has created none without something worth appreciating.
- A man without a smiling face must not open a shop.
- The best way to win an argument is never to start it.

The book is neither didactic nor boring. It retains the tone of a fireside chat throughout,

and making the point in question, occasionally quoting verses, such as the following:

Here lies the body of William Jay

Who died maintaining his right of way

He was right, dead right, as he sped along

But he's just as dead as if he were wrong.
(p.114)

Here DC suggests that insisting on your right is not always the best way to move on.

Though I was a slow reader, I finished the book quickly. For a rural boy in teens, growing up in a regimenting culture, where reprimand was routine and rewards were rare, it was a great education. I learnt why Lincoln and Rockefeller were different from the lot I saw all around me.

By the time I came to college, I had become a vain and quarrelsome person, hating and hated by most around me. But after this book, I got into fewer quarrels. I began becoming popular among friends and relatives. At one point of time, I was the most sought after attendant on patients from our large extended family undergoing treatment at Darbhanga Medical College Hospital. I wrote both my

Honours and Master's degree examinations from bedside in the DMCH, under the appreciative eyes of those charming all white-clad Malayalam- and English- speaking pretty nurses.

I have read the book several times, and have enjoyed it each time. I am reading it once again, preparing to train some middle-level managers of an English and Mathematics teaching company in Chennai run by a graduate of IIT Madras. I have advised the trainees to read this book again and to share their opinions at our fortnightly get-togethers.

It is possible that you have already read this book. But you might consider looking it up once again. For all of us, who have families, colleagues, and ambition, this book should be compulsory reading. It improves your relationship with all. More importantly, it improves your happiness index.

That I am not in prison for unsuccessful attempts at murder or suicide is in part due also to this book! But I may be overrating it! And you sure know better!!

Dr. Shreesh Chaudhary, (Prof (Retd.), DHSS, IIT Madras); Faculty, GLA Health & Learning Centre, Pindaruch 847 306.

Email: shreeshchaudhary@gmail.com