Leadership Reflection Paper

How to Win Friends and Influence People. From the beginning it feels like Dale Carnegie is talking directly to you. He even stops to give you advice on how to get the most out of his book. Written in the 1930s, the lessons, values, and stories still resonate. They still hold true. I first read this book when I was in high school. It sat on the shelf for almost 30 years before I was asked to read it again. We were delivering youth leadership training for the Boy Scouts in the National Youth Leadership Training program. The Scoutmaster, the adult leading the program, asked all of his adult volunteers to read the book before our teambuilding began. This was to "get us all on the same page". Later in life, I found the book to be more meaningful. The lessons were more relatable. When I saw this book as a requirement for this course, I was pleased. I bought it as an audio book and made my sweet elderly mother listen to it as I drove her from Denver to Albuquerque to visit my sister. I had to listen to it for class. She was understanding and indicated that she got something out of it as well. I recommend this book to folks all the time.

Be genuine. This message is threaded throughout several other principles as follows: Part 1 Principle 2, "Give honest and sincere appreciation". Part 2 Principle 1, "Become Genuinely Interested in Other People". Part 2 Principle 6, "Make the other person feel important – and do it sincerely." Part 3 Principle 8, "Try honestly to see things from the other person's point of view." Part 4 Principle 1, "Begin with praise and honest appreciation." Carnegie points out the importance of being honest and ensuring only genuine intentions are conveyed. Although it's been said that flattery will get you everywhere, flattery is called out as transparently disingenuous and ineffective.

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Honesty is the best policy. I have done my best to operate in this manner and it has served me well. I'm not sure if it's my nature or my upbringing, perhaps a combination of the two. If I had to guess, I'd say it was good values imparted to me by my parents and positive role models. It's a tricky balance, as truth overdone can be as harmful as truth underdone. I've seen folks get into trouble because they were too honest. If your significant other asks you if they look fat, the answer is no. Always no. It may just be the cut of the pattern or the design of the clothes at the root of the problem. That's where I'd shift a compliment to an outfit that I liked more than the one currently being presented. It's sincere, I do like that other outfit better and I avoid saying something negative about the unflattering outfit. You can't fake it. I can't count the number of times I've encountered folks that are not genuine. The example that springs to mind is the "typical" used car salesperson. You can see these folks coming from a mile away. Sometimes they attempt to make an emotional sale, telling that you look great in the car or that you deserve something nice. Other times they try a financial angle, vectoring in on the monthly payment you've already committed to yourself. Too many times they are running plays out of their playbook with little regard to the individual customer or their needs. When I listen to someone, I listen with genuine interest. This may be part of my natural curiosity. Whatever it is, it's genuine. I recently met one of our product managers from California who took his wife with him on a business trip to London. They ran into all kinds of travel snags but managed to have an enjoyable time together in spite of it all. I applauded his results, sharing a small version of a trip where my wife and I had run into (and around) a major travel snafu. Following Carnegie's advice, I intentionally scaled my story back so that it didn't exceed his. I made sure that he knew that I listened to, appreciated, and was not attempting to overshadow his story. I shared just enough to relate while intentionally falling short of the adventure he'd just described.

Be careful with your words. Don't criticize or correct. This message threads throughout several other principles as follows: Part 1 Principle 1, "Don't criticize, condemn, or complain." Part 3 Principle 1, "The only way to get the best of an argument is to avoid it." Part 4 Principle 2, "Call attention to people's mistakes indirectly." Part 4 Principle 5, "Let the other person save face." Part 4 Principle 8, "Use encouragement. Make the fault seem easy to correct." We wield a lot of power in our words. How we say something can make all the difference in how we make others feel. Therefore, it is important for us to be judicious in our selection of words and our presentations in speech.

Once it's out there, it's out there. You can't take words back. My wife asked me to review a contract she'd been working on for information technology (IT) services for her family's small business. With complete disregard for her previous effort (this was the 3rd version of the contract), I stepped in with a red pen and did a lot of markup. I should disclose that part of my job is IT outsourcing, including the contracting aspects of the business. Needless to say, I hit it a little too hard for small business needs. I made my wife feel like she'd missed a lot of critical contract components. Her family, while greatly appreciative of my effort, deepened the criticism she felt with their praise of my edits. I had criticized her work. Realizing this a little too late, I tried to back up by agreeing with the way out she had so kindly provided. I echoed her sentiment that my perspective as a commercial contractor caused me to address issues that were not applicable to a small business. When she asked me to review version 4, instead of pulling out the red pen, I used a yellow highlighter. I marked 3 things for her to go after with her contractor and flagged the pages with sticky notes. I let her take charge, enabling her to go forth to drive the

contract negotiations. My fading back and letting her save face made her feel better as her family could see and appreciate her value without the shadow I had inadvertently cast over her work.

Dale Carnegie's book is chock full of good lessons and great advice. I believe it needs to be read and re-read over time. Simple things, like replacing the word "but" with "and" can have a major impact in our daily discussions. More complex concepts, like how to give criticism without invoking ill will or animosity takes time and practice. Reviewing the book and your notes can help with retention of the key principles. As we have new experiences our perspectives change. This natural process can change our interpretation of the lessons. While this book is a solid foundation to be built upon, it requires the maintenance of review. Understanding and applying the basic concepts will make us all better communicators. Living by good values and being considerate of others will make us all better people.