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Lead the Way—Let Me Influence You

Skills and Professional Development



Dale Carnegie published his groundbreaking book, *How to Win Friends & Influence People*, after discovering his public-speaking students needed to learn the “fine art of getting along with people in everyday business and social contacts” more than they needed to learn to speak publicly. Because there was no text available, he wrote the book himself.

People in business are dependent upon positive interactions with one another. Without healthy and functional relationships, business is hampered. But how do you get the job done when you have no power or formal authority over those people you rely upon to do so?

Have you ever had the opportunity to purchase a product, or more likely a service, and simply did not feel a connection or rapport with the person selling it to you? Even when you were not feeling the connection with the vendor, you likely purchased the product anyway. It is less likely you purchased the service when the person selling it was someone you didn’t connect with. When it comes to personal services, the importance of connecting with the service provider becomes even more paramount.

From a personal standpoint, you might not care whether people like you; however, in order to get work accomplished, it is imperative that they do. While you may achieve your business goals without them liking you, your ability to influence them in matters where their cooperation and assistance is needed would be easier if they did.

In his article “The Science of Persuasion,” Robert Cialdini says salespeople seek a connection in order to influence their customers, even sometimes to the point of fabricating that connection. Carnegie would advise against this practice in favor of developing genuine interest. If you do not have genuine interest, you can develop it over time by deliberately working to improve the relationship on a regular basis.

Carnegie believed being a good listener and encouraging others to talk about themselves were essential in getting them to like you. This is counterintuitive. You would think that if you could just let others see how marvelous you are, they would naturally like you, but the opposite is true.

A recent Harvard study confirms that people like talking about themselves: “They found the brain was strongly engaged when the test subjects talked about themselves, and less engaged when talking about someone else.”

Here is my cautionary tale: A year ago, I had an opportunity to talk with a chair about the problems she had with volunteers. While all the things that I told her were true, the manner in which I conveyed my thoughts prevented her from hearing me. It was not my intent to come across as condemning or critical. However, in matters of communication, what the receiver hears is more important than what the communicator thinks she said.

While this chair wasn’t a stranger, we didn’t have a strong relationship; it would have served me well to have developed better rapport prior to tackling such a weighty issue as her leadership.

Had the rapport been developed, I still would have needed to understand that the source of influence is grounded in mutually satisfactory exchanges. Only in my ability to recognize and meet her needs, could I have influenced her to hear me and to make the necessary changes to address the volunteer problem. Because she didn’t know she had a problem, she didn’t think she needed my input, thus putting us on different pages. I had no power in that situation: I had no ability to meet her needs, no formal authority over her, and nothing of value or currency to offer.

Furthermore, she felt attacked by me, which meant she did not feel I was affirming her values, self-esteem or identity. Although I thought there was something of value in the information I shared with her, only the receiver can give currency any value.

Relationships and currency are vital to having power and influencing people. You develop these relationships by building rapport and getting people to like you. People grow to like you when you express an interest in things that pertain to them. Once you have taken the time to get to know them, you become aware of their needs and can begin to influence them by meeting those needs through a mutual exchange.

[Whitnie Wiley](#)



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Whitnie Wiley was a long-time columnist for the *ACC Docket*, where she wrote the *Lead the Way* column for more than seven years. The column provided leadership tips for in-house counsel and others as they pursue their personal and professional goals.