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How to Win...

The Eighth in a series of An Executive Summary for Busy Managers.

It is not often that a book written almost 70 years ago is still of tremendous value in everyday business activities. However, Dale Carnegie created such a timeless tome.

Guten Tag, I hope you enjoy this informative invasion while you ingest your morning caffeinated beverage.

I am often asked what it takes to be a good project manager. My response is always in two parts. The first part of the answer is that a person must be creative. It is the project manager's responsibility to think of every little detail that no one else is worried about. People used to call this paranoia and lock you up in the looney bin until they invented the term Risk Management. Risk Management meetings make it okay to reveal your deepest, darkest project fears to your colleagues without worry of them putting you in a straight-jacket. As a matter of fact, the more far-out your concerns may seem the more some people will respect your ability to perform the job.

The second part of the answer is the ability to communicate. Some people call it management, some call it leadership and others refer to it as an amazing ability to bulls—t. No matter what you call it, the ability to interface with other human beings is of utmost importance to a project manager.

In the 1930's the University of Chicago and the YMCA commissioned a study to understand what adults wanted most to learn. The second most important topic to the adults surveyed was how to communicate with other people (the first was personal health). Following that study a search began for a textbook that would cover the topic for the new class. No textbook could be found. Not Plato, Aristotle nor Benjamin Franklin had even written on the topic. At the time Dale Carnegie was a well-known, featured speaker on the topic of communication. He agreed that he had never seen such a book and decided that he would put his lecture papers into a booklet format. In 1937 he published How to Win Friends and Influence People. "How to Communicate" did not quite have the appeal required for the best seller list. The book has since made it to the International Best Seller List and has been translated into every known language.

The funniest part of the whole thing is that the message that Carnegie puts forward is not really that difficult. Basically the objective is for the reader to try to look at the world through the eyes of the people with whom they are communicating. Try to get to know your listener so that you can understand what makes them tick. Today this is taught in almost every salesperson how-to book in existence. However, Carnegie is able to make it so much clearer than even the authors that have had the benefit of reading his words. There is no point in reinventing this wheel.

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The other big part of what Carnegie tries to get across to the reader is that no one likes to be told what to do. Instead, people like to be asked for their thoughts on how to improve some particular situation. This is the ultimate weapon against the NIH Monster (Not Invented Here) that threatens productivity every time a boss tells a subordinate what to do and how to do it. Some people also refer to this as the Socratic Method. A rose by any other name still works when applied correctly. Perhaps the biggest mistake that people make is their lack of sincerity. There is a noticeable difference between asking someone for their thoughts because you have to and because you really are interested in what they have to say. No matter how good you are you cannot fake sincerity.

Carnegie used one quote that stood out to me the most as person who has spent a lot of time trying to develop new business opportunities. Most people in the business world are extremely busy. Trying to get even fifteen minutes of their time is sometimes the equivalent of moving a mountain. For example, in dealing with U.S. Government program managers and decision makers, regardless of the Department or Agency, they are usually tasked with multiple responsibilities that require a tremendous amount of time. You certainly cannot develop a relationship with a person in a matter of minutes (or can you?). So how do you get these types of people to stop and pay attention to what you have to say? Carnegie quotes Benjamin Disraeli (two time British Prime Minister), "Talk to people about themselves and they will listen for hours".

Dale Carnegie has authored other books on the topic of communication however none have been as successful as How to Win Friends and Influence People. This book should be given out to any person in an organization that has to interact with humans. Other than maybe the guy in the IT room that watches over the email server (although he would probably benefit the most), I cannot think of a single individual that would not take away tremendous benefits from reading this book. Every person with responsibility for sales or business development should keep this book handy. Carnegie gives real-world accounts of how his advice has been implemented successfully. These accounts help to add a bit of humor and keep the book light and lively.

Hopefully I am just preaching to the proverbial choir and all of you have previously read this book. If not, grab a copy and spend a few minutes learning to be a more effective communicator!

Just my opinion and we all know what "they" say about opinions...

Thanks

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