

How to Win Friends and Influence People – A Programmers Perspective in Effective Human Relationships

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ABSTRACT

Dealing with people has become a task and an art that every person has to master in the work and home environment. This paper explores 10 different ways that a programmer can use to win friends and influence people. It displays the steps leading to a positive, warm, and enthusiastic balanced work and life environment. The ability to think and to do things in their order of importance is a key ingredient for a successful career growth. Programmers who want to grow beyond just programming should enhance their people skills in order to move up to the management level. However, for this to be a reality a programmer must have good technical skills, possess the ability to arouse enthusiasm among peers, and is able to assume leadership. It is the programmer that embraces non-judgment, non-resistance, and non-attachment as the core mantras that will succeed in the complex and high paced work environment that we are in. Avoiding arguments, being a good listener, respecting the other person's point of view, and recalling people's names will increase your earning power and ability to influence people to your way of thinking. The ability to enjoy your work, be friendly, and be enthusiastic tends to bring you goodwill. This eventually leads to creating good relationships in the office and the power to influence those around you in a positive way.

INTRODUCTION

Many books and papers have been written about how to master the skills in dealing with people. In fact, most knowledge contained in these books draw the same conclusions that are repeated over and over again. This paper is not about knowledge but about ACTION. This action is about putting in practice the skills on how to deal with people, to influence them, to be better human beings, better managers, better leaders, and to WIN friends. We work in a fast paced environment that rarely gives us the ability to see each other as people. So, it is important that you walk away with two or three key actions that you will apply and follow through in your daily life. You must set your mind to apply the skills by forming a personal habit of selfless action. Unless you do this, you had better not start at all, because modern Psychology tells us that when we start something and do not complete it, or make a resolution and do not keep it, we are forming a habit of failure - absolute ignominious failure! If you do not intend to do a thing, do not start. If you do, see it through even if the heavens fall; if you make up your mind to do something, do it; let nothing, no one interfere; the thing is settled; the die cast, there is no longer any argument.

A successful and knowledgeable person is one who possesses the ability to talk well and win people to her/his way of thinking. If you aspire to navigate the ship of leadership, personality and the ability to talk are more important than knowledge of the most the advanced and complex SAS macros or a degree from MIT. In today's market place, the ability to deal with people is becoming a highly regarded commodity which many companies are searching for. I know this, because besides managing and leading a global workforce of statistical programmers, I have been responsible for the hiring of these associates. The programmer that has technical knowledge plus the ability to express ideas, to assume leadership, and to arouse enthusiasm among peers – that programmer is headed for high earning power.

Within each individual are infinite powers seeking expression - it is my will that this paper brings those powers into action and that each person may have the ability to meet life's situation's with poise, harmony, confidence, and enthusiasm.

The habits and skills described in this paper draw its conclusions from the author's personal experience as a people manager and various books on personal development by authors listed in the reference section.

HABIT 1: WHO ARE WE?

Understanding people and human nature is the first step in increasing your skill in building successful human relations. It is this proper understanding and knowing why people do the things that they do and why and how people will react under certain conditions. Subsequently, you will only then become skillful at managing people. Understanding who we are simply involves recognizing people *for what they are*, *NOT what you think they are*, *NOR what you want them to be*. Why?

Because people are creatures of habit governed by self-thought and self-interest, and therefore primarily interested in themselves, and not in you!

The other person is a million times more interested in himself or herself than they are in you. Think about it, this law is true in you because you are interested in yourself than you are in any other person in the world. Truth be told, we spend majority of our time thinking about ourselves. Research has even shown that the most commonly used word in the English alphabet is the word "I".

So, let us not apologize for who we are as human beings, for it has been that way since the beginning of time and will be that way till the end of time. It is this vital knowledge that people are primarily interested in them-selves, that gives us the basis with which to work, when dealing with people. According to the late Dale Carnegie, you can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people than you can, in two years by trying to get other people interested in you. Don't blunder through life trying to wigwag other people to become interested in you. It will lead to disappointed because people are interested in themselves – morning, noon, and after midnight!

It is true that individuals who are not interested in their fellow men have the greatest difficulties in life and provides the greatest injury to others. Why? Because, it is from such individuals that all human failures spring. Next time, when you answer your phone, do your best to say "Hello" in a smiling tone that that shows you are pleased to receive the call and offer to exceed the expectations of your caller! For example say, "This is <Priscilla>, how can I exceed your expectations today?" You

As you continue to read the paper, you will come to realize that success in acquiring and using each habit is rooted deeply in the understanding that people are primarily interested in themselves and not in you.

HABIT 2: BECOME A GOOD CONVERSATIONALIST

According to the late Author Les Giblin, in *Human Relations Hand Book*, he says that it requires impeccable skill to talk to people and the following four words must be eliminated and expelled from your vocabulary –

"I, me, my, mine"

Substitute these four words with one word -

"You"

e.g. "this is for YOU", "YOU will benefit if you take this point of view", "this will please YOUR wife", etc. When talking to people, be sure to pick the most interesting subject in the world to them to talk about, which is THEMSELVES! People will be deeply interested and fascinated and definitely think well of you for doing this.

It is imperative therefore that YOU give up the satisfaction YOU get from talking about YOURSELF, and that YOU get from the use of the words "I, me, my, mine". This will result in YOUR personality efficiency and YOUR influence and power will be greatly increased. The rewards for doing this are well worth it. Asking people questions about themselves such as:

1. "Is that a picture of your family, Jane?"
2. "Did you enjoy your trip, Joe?"
3. "How long have you been with the company?"
4. "How did you write such great and complex SAS code?"
5. "Can I use your specifications document as a template?"

To become a good and effective conversationalist, remember two things: talk about them and let them talk about themselves. Remember, it is not how you like your remarks and subject; it is how your listeners like them.

HABIT 3: MAKE PEOPLE FEEL IMPORTANT

The small secret of making a person do what you want them to do is making the other person WANT to do it. This is the only way under heaven to get anybody to do anything. Dr. Sigmund Freud, one of the most distinguished psychologists of the twentieth century, said that everything you and I do springs from two motives; the sex urge and the desire to be great.

Professor John Dewey, an American philosopher, said that the deepest urge in human nature is "the desire to be important". Every normal person wants: good sleep, abundance, perfect health, harmony, the well-being of our children, food, and a feeling of importance. We can almost certainly gratify these wants, all except one and that is what Dewey calls "the desire to be important" and what Sigmund calls the "desire to be great". The late Professor William James of Harvard University said "the deepest principle in human nature is the craving to be appreciated". Notice the use of the word "craving". This craving to be appreciated is gnawing and unfaltering human hunger. It is the rare individual who honestly satisfies this heart-hunger that will in the end hold people in the palm of his hand and "even the undertaker will be sorry when he dies". It is this desire that makes you want to wear the latest styles, drive the latest car, and talk about your brilliant children.

Let us pause here. Our work environment is so high paced with constant emails, unfulfilling meetings, people who are driven by self-interest, and deliverables that outweigh the time needed to accomplish them. Why not arouse

enthusiasm among the people that work with you by appreciation and encouragement? Remember that there is nothing else that kills ambition of a person as criticisms from his or her superiors. Give the person incentive to work. *Be anxious to praise and slow to find fault. Be hearty in your approbation and lavish in your praise.* This will lower your turnover rate and have a happier workforce.

To give kind words of appreciation, will sing memories in people for years like the music of the morning stars. Nourish the self-esteem of your spouse, your children, and your co-workers. Avoid flattery at all costs and remember that "you can never say anything but what you are". You should engage yourself in thinking about the good points of the person instead of thinking about yourself. Give honest, sincere appreciation, and people will cherish your words and treasure them and repeat them over a lifetime, even after you are gone.

Remember that the more important you make people feel, the more they will respond to you. Here are some tips on how to do that:

- Listen to people.
- Applaud and compliment them. They deserve it!
- Use their names and pictures as often as possible.
- Pause before you answer.
- Use their words – "you" and "your".
- Acknowledge people who are waiting to see you.
- Pay attention to everybody in a group. A group is more than one person!

HABIT 4: BE WELCOME ANYWHERE

To be welcome anywhere means to skillfully make a good impression. You control other people's opinion of you. Their opinion of you is largely controlled by how you conduct yourself. So, to be welcome anywhere, it is of absolute necessity that we carry and conduct ourselves in such a manner that the effect on other people will be good. What value do you put on yourself? Be proud of yourself, of who you are, of what you do, of where you work, of your heritage, and of your accent since we all carry one! Never apologize for yourself or for your situation in life. You are what you are, so handle yourself with pride and respect. In James Allen's book, *As a Man Thinketh*, he states, "that you are what you think all day long". Since that is such a profound truth, why not think yourself as a positive, powerful, and influential individual? Then, so that when you meet other people, the crown of your head is high, and you have no reason to apologize for your astute demeanor!

Let us explore a classic example of when someone asks you what you do for a living. Remember, it is very important how you answer them. Let us assume your answer is one of the following –

"Oh, I'm just a SAS programmer"
"Oh, I'm only a Programmer"
"Oh, I'm just a Recruiter"
"Oh, you don't want to know"
"It's complicated"

Imagine the perception from the person receiving this answer. Why would they be impressed by you? You have made it clear to them that you are not worth their being impressed. Handle yourself with pride and respect and answer something like –

"Thank you for asking, I am fortunate enough to be associated with one of the largest bio-pharmaceutical companies in the world, the Blank Company"

This answer has a big difference and value over any of the previous answers and it leaves your listener with an urge to know you more and appreciate you.

Some further tips are listed below on how to make good first impressions:

- **Show enthusiasm.** Let the winds of enthusiasm sweep through you when talking about who you are and what you do. This creates a positive energy that will radiate happiness and a feeling for a full and rich life.
- **Be sincere.** Say only things that you mean and avoid cheap flattery like you would avoid rattle snakes!
- **Don't be overanxious.** This is especially important when you are going for an interview. Conceal your anxiety. Be an actor.

- **Don't try to build yourself up by running other people.** A book I read many years ago, said that when you are tempted to do this, always imagine stepping on the dead bodies of those you are about to trash. If you are a person of good morals, you will stop right there! And if you don't stop, you are damned anyway since the emphasis or credit will go to those you are trying to put down, not on you.
- **If you have nothing good to say, don't talk.** Talking only reveals one's inner self. Be cool. Be calm and smooth. Don't rub people in the wrong way!

HABIT 5: LEARN HOW TO CONVINCE PEOPLE

This is a habit that any programmer can master with ease. Remember, it is human nature for people you meet to be skeptical of you and of what you are say, if what you say is to your own advantage. Eliminate this skepticism by being tactful and the better way to do is by speaking through third persons! Quote people, relate success stories, and cite facts and statistics.

Example 1 – if you are applying for a job and the hiring manager is wondering if you would be a team player in a global environment. You would mention your manager's feedback in the past performance appraisals. Avoid the use of the word "I" when describing this feedback.

Example 2 – if you were trying to get your peers to use code that you have written and they wondered if the code is efficient. You would show the statistics of the code's efficiency.

Example 3 – if you were trying to get your peers to embrace a new platform and the peers wondered if the new platform is better than the old one. You would mention that "other departments within our company have been using the new platform for 6 months and they are happy with the results".

In all three examples, you do not answer the question or inquiry. Your manager, the statistics and other departments do the answering for you.

HABIT 6: BE AGREEABLE

There are 3 reasons behind the art of being agreeable:

- People dislike those who disagree with them.
- People like those who agree with them.
- People don't like to be disagreed with.

In the Tao Te Ching, the Chinese prophet Lao-Tzu, says, "those who know do not talk and those who talk do not know". Lao-Tzu encourages us to blunt our sharpness, soften our glare, and settle the dust of our disagreements. Yielding is the way of the Tao.

In the bible, Jesus teaches his disciples to "agree with thine adversary quickly". It is this philosophy that is behind the wisdom of being agreeable. Most of us like to argue and contradict people. Most of the time, an argument ends with each of the contestants being more firmly convinced than ever that he is or she is absolutely right. Let's face it, you can't win an argument. You can't, because if you lose it, you lose it, and if you win it, you lose it. Dale Carnegie, says that you will feel fine after shooting holes in other person's argument, however, you will have hurt his pride and made him feel inferior. So, avoid the acute angle and realize that "A man convinced against his own will is of the same opinion still".

Tell people when you agree with them, nod your head and say to them – "I agree with you" or "you are right". Do not tell people when you disagree with them unless it is absolutely necessary. Admit it quickly and emphatically when you are wrong. You cannot win friends by arguing - therefore, refrain from arguing.

Try to understand the other person. Why? Because, the other person may be totally wrong but he doesn't think so. Don't condemn him; any fool can do that. Remember, there is a reason why the other man thinks and acts as he does. Ferret out that hidden reason and you will have the key to his actions. Try honestly to put yourself in his place. We live in a world of cause and effect, and it is the man who is interested in the cause and not the effects who exemplifies skill in human relationships. Say to yourself: "How would I feel, how would I react if were in her shoes?" This will definitely save you a lot of time and irritation.

Build a habit of pausing and thinking the whole thing through from the other person's point of view. Simply ask yourself: "Why would she want to do it?" Many books I have read stress the importance that you know what you are going to say before you enter a conversation by equipping yourself with knowledge of the interests and motives of the

other person. Build a tendency to think always in terms of the other person's point of view, and see things from his angle as well as your own.

As long as you live, never forget that any fool can disagree with people. It takes a wise man to agree and especially when the other person is wrong.

HABIT 7: LEARN TO SKILLFULLY LISTEN TO PEOPLE

A good listener always winds up far ahead of a good talker in the affections of people. This is because a good listener always allows people to hear their favorite speakers, themselves. This skill is about courtesy and being respectful to the other person's point of view.

Consider mastering the five rules below, which will make you a good listener:

- Ask questions. This lets the other person know that you are indeed listening.
- Look at the person who is talking. If you are going to spend your time listening to me then acknowledge I exist by looking at me!
- Listen intently. Appear genuine enough like you don't want to miss a word I am saying!
- Don't interrupt. Stick to the speaker's subject. Never change the subject until someone is finished no matter how anxious you are to get started on a new one!
- Use the speaker's words – "you" and "your". Remember to eliminate the use of the words "*I, me, my, mine*". *These are talking words, not listening words.*

HABIT 8: LEARN TO SKILLFULLY INFLUENCE PEOPLE

This skill requires that you exercise effort on your part to find out what people want by asking, watching, and listening to them. With this knowledge, you can show people how they can get what they want by doing what you want them to do. This means hitting the target with what you say but naturally you must know where the target is first.

Example - as stated previously, one of my responsibilities in my past roles was to facilitate the hiring of Statistical Programmers. If I wanted a programmer to come work for the company, and the person had several offers, I would change gears on my interaction with the candidate to focus on what they want. I would first determine what the programmer wanted in a position and the company and what appealed to him/her most.

- If I found out that he wanted work-life balance, then that would be my opportunity to mention the telecommuting options, recreational facilities, fitness center, day care center, and any other options that showed the company was "life-friendly" not just work focused.
- If the programmer wanted further education and experience, I would show them the education possibilities available.
- If they wanted career advancement, I showed them the possibilities. In other words, I am giving the candidate what they want so that I get what I want, the candidate working for the company.

If you want to influence people and get them to cooperate with you, you might want to use the following wise words from one of the favorite books I have laid my eyes on, the *Tao Te Ching*, by Lao-Tzu, verse 66:

"The reason why rivers and seas receive the homage of a hundred mountain streams is that they keep below them. Thus they are able to reign over the mountain streams. So the sage, wishing to be above men putteth himself below them; wishing to be before them, he putteth himself behind them. Thus, though his place be above men, they do not feel his weight; though his place be before them, they do not count it an injury."

It is clear from this verse that humility is a key ingredient for influencing people. Humble yourself at home, in the office, and at the grocery store while shopping. To influence, you need to go the extra mile of consulting the other person and showing respect for their advice.

HABIT 9: SHOW GRATITUDE

The art of dealing with people cannot be complete without learning how to skillfully thank people. It is not enough to feel grateful and appreciative; you must endeavor to show the gratitude. If you are grateful to people and you let those people know that you are grateful, almost always they will give you more the next time.

Here are few things to master when showing gratitude:

- When you say “thank you”, mean it. People will easily read your insincerity or sincerity, so be true to your choice when you thank people.
- Look at the person when saying thank you. Most “thank you’s” that we give are over email and they lack a personal touch. Pick the phone and let the other person hear voice saying “thank you”.
- Thank people by name. This is always overlooked. In fact, we hardly know the names of people we work with, nor put the effort to pronounce people’s names correctly. Personalize your thanks by saying “Thank you Chris, for being an awesome boss!” instead of just saying “Thank you”.
- Say thank you like you mean it. Be glad you are saying thank you!
- Work at thanking people all the time. Find instances to thank. As an above average person, be lavish in your praise and hearty in your approbation, it will give you an edge over the average person.

HABIT 10: DON'T CRITICIZE, CONDEMN OR COMPLAIN

The futility of criticism is bristling on a thousand pages of history. As human beings, we hardly want to criticize ourselves for anything. In fact, hard core criminals like “Two Gun” Crowley or Al Capone regarded themselves as innocent men or public benefactors whose motive was misunderstood by all. Such men, who were quick to pull a trigger or crack a safe were quick to justify their anti-social acts even to themselves, and thereby maintaining their innocence. We have seen in the media numerous justifications of why certain acts have been done, and shaking our heads to some of the reasons which leaves a soar taste in our mouths. Why? People don't blame themselves for anything! And if this is the case, what about the people with whom you and I come into contact?

Personally, I have learned that it does not pay to scold and it is in fact beneficial to work on and overcome your own personal limitations before criticizing anyone or anything. I always remember clearly that ninety nine percent of the time; no one will criticize themselves, no matter how wrong they may be. Personally, I do not provide any unjust feedback about my peers, though they are quick to provide feedback about me and how I should behave, what I have not done, what I did in the past, what is the level of my capabilities, and what is wrong with my management style. Be careful not to let people “brand you” what you are not. Stand your ground, be firm and live by your values and personal mission statement. Look closely to the criticism and decide what makes sense and what does not. When dealing with people, let us remember we are not dealing with creatures of logic. We are dealing with creatures of emotion, creatures bristling with prejudices and motivated by pride and vanity. And yes, criticism is a disease that no matter how many clinical trials are performed to find a cure, the resulting adverse reactions always stay the same – you have wounded a person's precious pride, hurt their sense of importance, and aroused their resentment!

How many times do we blame the data managers for dirty data? How many times do we go after the statisticians for providing unclear specifications? How often do you bad mouth your manager for being lousy at her job? Endless complaining of the work and home environment never ceases. It's the programmer's fault, their programming code only pick up what they want and they are myopic in understanding the true nature of data and its scientific interpretation! Please, stop right there. Do you listen to yourself when criticizing others? This is human nature in action, the wrongdoer blaming everybody but themselves. We are all like that. So, let us remember one important fact. Like a homing pigeon, criticism will always return home to you. The person you are trying to criticize will justify themselves and condemn you in return!

If you want your children to respect you long after they are grown and gone, refrain and expel criticism from your lips. Speak no ill of your children or spouse, and speak only of the good you know about them. The poem, *Father Forgets* by W. Livingston Larned will open your mind to what I am trying to say here:

FATHER FORGETS

*Listen Son, I am saying this as you lie asleep, one little hand crumpled under your cheek
and blonde curls sticky over your wet forehead. I have broken into your room alone. Just a few
minutes ago, as I sat reading my paper in the library, a stifling wave of remorse swept over me.
Guilty, I came to your bedside.*

*There are things which I am thinking, son; I had been cross to you. I scolded you as you
were dressing for school because you gave your face a mere dab with the towel. I took you to
task for not cleaning your shoes. I called out angrily when you threw some of your things on the
floor.*

*At breakfast I found fault, too. You spilled things. You gulped down your food. You
put your elbows on the table. You spread butter too thick on your bread. As you started off to
play and I made for my train, you turned and waved a hand and called, "Goodbye, Daddy!" I*

frowned, and said in reply, "Hold your shoulders back!"

Then it began all over again late this afternoon. As I came up the road I spied you, down on your knees, playing marbles. There were holes in your socks. I humiliated you before your friends by marching you ahead of me to the house. Socks were expensive, and if you had to buy them you would be more careful! Imagine that son, from a father.

Do you remember later, when I was reading in the library, how you came timidly, with sort of a hurt look in your eyes? I glanced up over my paper, impatient at the interruption; you hesitated at the door. "What is it that you want?" I snapped.

You said nothing, but ran across in one tempestuous plunge, threw your arms around my neck and kissed me, your small arms tightened with affection that God had set blooming in your heart, which even neglect could not wither. Then you were gone, pattering up the stairs.

Well, Son, it was shortly afterwards that my paper slipped from my hands and a terrible sickening fear came over me. What has habit been doing to me? The habit of finding fault, or reprimanding; this was my reward to you for being a boy. It was not that I did not love you: it was that I expected too much of you. I was measuring you by the yardstick of my own years.

There is so much that was good, fine and true in your character. The little heart of yours was as big as the dawn itself over the hills. This was shown by your spontaneous impulse to rush in and kiss me good night. Nothing else mattered tonight. Son, I have come to your beside in the darkness, I have knelt there, ashamed!

It is a feeble atonement; I know that you would not understand these things which I have told you in the waking hours. Tomorrow I will be a real daddy! I will chum with you, suffer when you suffer and laugh when you laugh. I will bite my tongue when impatient words come. I will keep saying as if it were a ritual: "He is nothing but a boy--a little boy."

I am afraid I have visualized you as a man. Yet as I see you now, Son, crumpled and weary in your bed. I see that you are still a baby. Yesterday you were in your mother's arms, your head on her shoulder. I have asked too much, too much!

What you speak is but your own thoughts of yourself. Remember that you can only talk about who you are. Self-mastery begins by realizing that your negative thoughts will pollute the home, office, and the entire universe, and it's up to you to change that. So, why not do it now, this moment?

Instead of condemning people, let us try to understand them and figure out why they do what they do. That is more profitable and intriguing than criticism and it breeds sympathy, tolerance, and kindness. Constructive feedback which is factual and given with the intention of improving performance, can be considered a gift.

Lincoln said: *"A drop of honey catches more flies than a gallon of gall."* Praise instead of condemnation inspires people to do well and produce results. Praise can change careers. Praise will make even the hardest criminals want to become better people. We can transform people by inspiring them to realize, understand, and recognize the hidden powers they possess. We make use of only a small part of our physical and mental abilities and to awaken these faculties, require that you and I will these infinite powers into action. Praise the slightest improvement and every improvement. Be slow to condemn and criticize.

My only prayer is that this paper, changes you and me as we evolve in this journey, we call life. One day at a time.

As my Grandma always said; *"God has seen it fit, not to judge man until the end of his days"*. So, why should you and I?

CONCLUSION

Dealing with people is a task that you will have to embark on daily. Use the habits without fail, even when no one thinks you are capable of changing. Slowly, the results will start to show and soon you will be a powerful individual who is advancing well in human relations. *Within you* are infinite powers seeking expression, and it is your conscious choice of action that will bring this Universal Fountain of Supply, this infinite energy, of which each individual is an outlet, to the *world without* to find expression. Remember you are the master of your fate and nothing can come between you and your innermost desire to be a better person, a person of service. And this service is *service to all*, and for the *collective good of all*.

According to Stephen Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective people*, “The essence of effectiveness is that you get results you want today in such a way that you can get even better results in the future”. So, if you apply even one of the 10 habits today, you can see immediate results; but it's a lifetime adventure – a life promise. As you cultivate the roots of your character, you will be guaranteed to see the fruits.

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I dedicate this paper to my Son, David Njoroge who has graduated from Drew University with Honors and is now a graduate student at London School of Economics. The best job I have carried with pride, is that of being a PARENT. Thank you David, for making this job worthwhile and a most loving experience. May the winds of Wisdom, Beauty, and Strength sail with you as you soar like an *EAGLE* through this wonderful life!

THANK YOU to my AWESOME readers, your constant letters and emails keep the fire burning in my writing pen!

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