

~~Staff~~ ~~Interviewees~~ “How to Win Friends and Influence People”

How Dale Carnegie’s masterpiece of interpersonal communication applies to student journalists

Fundamental Techniques in Handling People

1. *Don’t criticize, condemn or complain.*

This is **HUGE**. Nothing shuts a person down like being criticized or made to feel stupid by someone—especially a younger person who’s job it is to interview them (or sell them an ad, etc.). As a journalist you’re there to report, not to spin. Even when writing an op-ed piece, leave your opinions to the writing phase rather than the interviewing phase.

2. *Give honest and sincere appreciation.*

As a student journalist, there are many occasions when you can show appreciation. When you do, be sincere in your response. Look the interviewee in the eye when you say “I know your time is valuable; thank you for sharing some of it with me.” Same goes for the editor who reads your story draft, or the page editor who works with you on an infographic to accompany your story.

Why bother? Don’t you think the next time you ask for an interview or some help from that person they’ll be more likely to say “yes” because of how you respected and appreciated them the first time?

3. *Arouse in the other person an eager want.*

Make people like you

1. *Become genuinely interested in other people.*

Your newspaper serves a diverse group of students, educators, and in some cases, community members. You, as a journalist, have many opportunities each day to learn from these people while you’re interacting with them. Why not try and learn a bit about what the person you’re interviewing or writing about does? Are they a...

TEACHER? What got them interested in the subject they teach? Did they always want to be a teacher?

STUDENT? What do they do outside of class that might be interesting to work into the story?

STAFF? How long have they worked in their position? Have they worked at other schools?

In professional news organizations, reporters have “beats” where they make contacts and know a lot about the goings-on in community, sports team, or topic. Certainly, this takes time and it’s not always practical at a high school. But think about how much more receptive someone would be to your questions and how much more likely they’d be to tell you about a scoop if they know you are *sincerely* interested in their work.

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“You can make more friends in two months by becoming more interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get people interested in you.”

2. **Smile.**

It’s so simple it almost doesn’t need discussing. Smiling puts everyone at ease, which is helpful when the person you’re helping is nervous about being interviewed, or the situation you’re discussing—an accident, a high-profile sports loss, etc.—is tense.

3. **Remember that a person’s name is to that person the sweetest and most important sound in any language.**

Knowing someone’s name goes a long way in endearing that person to you. It doesn’t take much effort to learn the full name of the person you’re helping (use the student/staff directory, if you have one available). Occasionally referring to that person by name during the interview or sales presentation also serves to set the person at ease. But watch it; it’s easy to overdo it to the point where you come across as smarmy.

4. **Be a good listener. Encourage others to talk about themselves.**

This goes along with the first point in this section. Be sure to listen. Take a few moments to really hear what the person is telling you, rather than thinking about the lede you’ll write for the story while the person talks. You’ll often find there’s other angles to the story than you originally thought. Maybe you’ll hear something that would make a good sidebar or infographic to accompany your piece?

5. **Talk in terms of the other person’s interests.**

If you usually write for the sports section, avoid using baseball or basketball analogies when you’re asked to interview the art teacher for a feature. If possible, try to relate your questions to things the interviewee has already said. That way they’ll know you’re listening and be more engaged in your question.

6. **Make the other person feel important—and do it sincerely.**

Remember and respect that the people you’re interviewing are **EXPERTS** in whatever it is you’re interviewing them for: witness to an accident, knowledgeable community member, etc. Often (and especially among those not used to being interviewed), people regard you as the expert or authority. That may feel nice, but you should focus the attention on the interviewee: they’re the important person in the interview, not you.

Win people to your way of thinking

1. **The only way to get the best of an argument is to avoid it.**

In a tense—but newsworthy—situation, people can be on edge. They may not want to be asked questions about a particular topic, such as why they lost the Homecoming game by 20 points. Or a local business owner might not think your advertising rates fair and wants to take you to task for it. You can probably think a few other examples of tense people, too.

Don’t get into an argument with someone when you’re representing your paper. Period. It’s not worth it.

2. **Show respect for the other person’s opinions. Never say, “You’re wrong.”**

Common sense, right? Nope. It’s hard not to correct someone when you hear them say something you know is wrong. But remember: you’re a journalist, there to gather information to report on a topic, not argue with (see above) or correct someone.

*“We are evaluated and classified by these **four contacts**: “You never achieve success unless what we do, how we look, **what we say**, and how we say it.” you like what you are doing.”*

3. If you are wrong, admit it quickly and emphatically.

This is **HUGE**. Why do you think papers run corrections boxes each issue? Because we're all human and we make mistakes. But you know what? Sometimes that's not enough. Journalists, editors, and business staff can be wrong, too. You know it, I know it, everyone knows it, so there's no reason to try and cover it up. Acknowledging your mistakes immediately and emphatically will bring the person around to your side, rather than resenting the mistake you made. Plus, you show your professionalism by admitting—and correcting—your mistake. In this way you may actually build trust rather than lose it.

4. Begin in a friendly way.

5. Get the other person saying “yes, yes” immediately.

6. Let the other person do a great deal of the talking.

Sounds obvious, but sometimes its not. I knew a journalist whose questions were so detailed, so full of carefully-researched facts and references that it took longer for him to ask the questions than the interviewee took to answer them. What's worse was this was a broadcast journalist so everyone heard him talk through most of the interview! Ask simple—but relevant—open-ended questions and then listen well to the answers. Often, the responses will lead you to ask something you hadn't considered before.

7. Let the other person feel that the idea is his or hers.

This is important. Suppose you're a page editor helping a junior staffer learning page layout. You're guiding them to craft a sidebar with student quotes relevant to the story when they suddenly exclaim, “Hey, let's put quotes in that sidebar we're creating!” Sure, you were already planning that... but praise them for the idea and let them carry it out rather than tell them that's what you were telling them to do. It goes a long way to build self-confidence in that person, who is then more likely to dive into creative designs next time.

8. Try honestly to see things from the other person's point of view.

9. Be sympathetic with the other person's ideas and desires.

10. Appeal to the nobler motives.

11. Dramatize your ideas.

12. Throw down a challenge.

Careful with this one. It's powerful but can be overdone and lose all its usefulness. Editors, motivate your writers by challenging them to write a longer, more in-depth story. Read Carnegie's book for the details, but essential it comes down to this: if you don't expect much from people, that's what you'll get: not much. Challenge them to do more and often times they will.

“Do the thing you fear to do and keep on doing it... that is the quickest and surest way ever yet discovered to conquer fear.”

“Fear not those who argue but those who dodge.”

Be a Leader: How to Change People Without Giving Offense or Arousing Resentment

An editor's job often includes changing your staff's attitudes and behavior. Some suggestions to accomplish this:

1. **Begin with praise and honest appreciation.**

Except on rare occasions, even terrible layouts, stories, photos, and interviews have more good than bad. Acknowledge that—*sincerely*—before picking the bad stuff apart. Don't just say “it's good, but...” Find and talk about one or two things that are honestly good first.

2. **Call attention to people's mistakes indirectly.**

3. **Talk about your own mistakes before criticizing the other person.**

No one's perfect, so remember that when discussing someone's mistakes. A misspelling slip through? Tell the writer and/or copy editor about the doosey that got by you once before. It'll set the tone that you're all helping each other because we've all been there before.

4. **Ask questions instead of giving direct orders.**

Ever come across an editor working on a layout that isn't going anywhere? Rather than say “hey, move that photo so the person faces the inside of the page,” try asking: “Interesting approach—what are you going for with that design?” You may get an answer that makes sense but the implementation just isn't there yet. Then you can help them develop it.

5. **Let the other person save face.**

Screw-ups happen sometimes. When they do, don't call undue attention to the mistake. It won't change it but it will cause the person at fault to be embarrassed, ashamed, etc. Instead, help them to prevent the mistake from happening again (while admitting your own mistakes).

6. **Praise the slightest improvement and praise every improvement. Be “hearty in your approbation and lavish in your praise.”**

If a junior writer finally learns to put the period inside the quotation marks, tell them “good job.” Do it again when they correctly use an ellipsis in a quote correctly. Tell them again each time they correctly do something they did wrong before. Praising positive change is much more effective than criticizing screw-ups. It *builds* confidence rather than tearing it down.

7. **Give the other person a fine reputation to live up to.**

When your head photographer's quality or punctuality starts to slip mid-way through the year, take her aside and remind her that her work has been excellent and she's talented, but not so much lately. Encourage her to return to her previous standard. Chances are she'll want to do better again because you've reminded her of her reputation.

8. **Use encouragement. Make the fault seem easy to correct.**

9. **Make the other person happy about doing the thing you suggest.**