

How to Win Friends and Influence People... in Social Media

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Introduction

Back in 1936, when Dale Carnegie published his book *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, he could never have anticipated it would become one of the first bestselling self-help books, selling a *huge* 15 million (and counting...) copies worldwide.

Three reasons why Dale's book is just as relevant to online communication

Dale's classic book on interpersonal communication provides concrete advice on how to handle people—how to encourage them to like you, to win them over to your way of thinking, and how to become an inspiring leader. Although the world has drastically changed since Dale Carnegie originally published *How to Win Friends and influence people*, 75 years ago, there are at least *three* reasons why his classic book is *just as relevant to online communication and persuasive social media engagement*.

Reason ONE: “Wisdom can last thousands of years, helping each new generation”

The world is constantly changing, with new technology, social transformations, and a rapidly shifting political landscape. Nonetheless, good ideas tend to survive the test of time. The writings of the ancient Greeks have survived over 2,000 years, inspiring countless generations with their timeless wisdom, which seems just as relevant to each new generation.

In the same spirit, Dale Carnegie's bestselling book is just as relevant today as it was 75 years ago. Although the media we use for communicating have changed drastically since 1936, the principles of effective communication and the content of effective communication have not—at least not much. If you can easily win friends and influence people *in person*, then chances are that you can also do the same through *social media*.

Reason TWO: “Persuasive online psychology is largely human psychology”

The psychology of persuasive Internet communications is widely misunderstood, and in fact rarely discussed. What it boils down to, is one simple principle: *the qualities that make a website or social media profile persuasive are similar to the qualities that make a person persuasive*. Scientific studies show that the principles of social and interpersonal psychology are often just as relevant to online communication as face-to-face. So whether you are interacting with someone in the same room or through a mobile phone, you can leverage human psychology to become more persuasive.

For instance, the factors that help a talented salesperson sell widgets, will also help an e-commerce website sell more of their products. Similarly, the qualities that help a political candidate win an election need to be leveraged in the digital realm, in order to help them run persuasive online political campaigns. Now if you want to become persuasive in online environments, you'll need to start applying principles of social and interpersonal psychology to your online interactions.

Reason THREE: “Human charm trump advertising tactics in social media platforms”

Since its inception, the Internet has given organizations a new way to communicate with their target audiences. Progressively, organizations have moved away from traditional one-way communications, moving towards interactive two-way engagement. Monitoring of online discussions has become the backbone of online engagement where organizations monitor public discussions relevant to their organization, and then when appropriate, respond. This is forcing organizations to join those online discussions that are relevant to their organization and target audiences.

Let's assume that you've just attended a networking event and met a person who only talks about their company, brags about their services, and doesn't show any interest in you. What would you think about this person? How would you rate this experience? Well, if you're like most people, you'll probably consider it boring...perhaps unbearable! What many organizations don't realize is that these same principles of face-to-face interaction are *just as relevant to social media*, which is more like interacting with people at a networking event, and less like lecturing an audience.

In interactive and social channels, commercial marketing and selling tactics don't always work well, and may even backfire on occasion. Organizations that try to run mass-media style campaigns in social media are more likely to end up being flagged as spammers if they don't notice that they are operating in a social environment, not a broadcast media such as television or newspapers. In today's

socially networked world, marketing, advertising, and selling skills are essential—but they need to be based on the principles of persuasive interpersonal communication and online psychology if they're going to stand any chance of success. Personal charm and interpersonal psychology trump one-way advertising tactics in social environments, *whether face-to-face or mediated through technology.*

If Dale Carnegie were a community manager...

The title 'Community Manager' is a new name for an old role. It describes the member of staff who builds, manages, and grows communities around an organization, its products, services, or causes. They often play an ambassador-type role, representing the organization at public events and spending a majority of their time networking, schmoozing, and building strategic relationships.

Community managers are now becoming the front-line staff who represent their organization, sometimes even gaining more eminence than their CEOs. Typically, they network at events that are of interest to target audiences, and also use social media to supplement their strategic networking and community building efforts. With social media platforms becoming the dominant online tools, demand for community managers is rapidly growing. Consequently, it's essential that organizations adopt communication practices that can help them 'win friends and influence people', rather than deploy tactics that 'lose friends and infuriate people'.

If Dale Carnegie were to take a community manager job today, we're pretty sure he would have had no problem mastering his 'new' role. Sure, he would have to learn new technical skills and spend some time getting familiar with various online channels, but as a master in the art of handling people, Dale would know what to communicate and how to communicate it. Whether he was working for a company, a non-profit organization, or a government agency, we're confident that his approach to community management would bring his employer a return to be proud of.

Ten ways to conduct persuasive community management

If a community manager wants to become more persuasive—personally and digitally—he or she needs to master the art of handling people and communicating effectively. Sometimes people misrepresent persuasive communication as the art of manipulation and deception, and sometimes people overestimate the power of persuasive communication, treating it as mind control tactics that can make anybody believe anything. *Nothing could be further from the truth.* Dale's book on effective communication is not about deception or trickery, it's about winning people's trust because you are *trustworthy*, or winning their respect you because *you respect them*.

To simplify Dale Carnegie's advice on handling people, we have taken 31 of his principles and merged them into just 10 groups. In social media, the boundary between corporate communications and interpersonal communications is sometimes unclear and often the same thing. So, these 10 principles can be seen

as a list of personal development skills as well as a list of principles to guide organizational communications.

1. Be a good listener

Whether you're aiming to influence one person, a market segment, or an entire group, *feedback is your key to success*. When it comes to community management, you are more likely to deal with individuals and groups, where your listening skills can help you better understand their needs, motivations, attitudes, values, and beliefs. In social media, it can be more effective to let the other people do a great deal of the talking, rather than dominating discussions yourself. This way, you'll be able to gain a deeper understanding of their interests, motivations, and needs. This insight will allow you to formulate a stronger position and articulate a better response.

You should encourage others to talk about themselves and their views. Many people prefer to talk about themselves and their interests, rather than focusing on others. Thus, *by listening to your audience or constituents, you'll be able to glean valuable feedback* that will benefit your work—think of it as like a 'free focus group'. At the same time, if you show angry or critical people that you are listening to them and understand their position, this can help defuse a potentially explosive situation, by making them feel their views are valued and validated.

It can be challenging to become a good listener in social media because there are so many discussions happening in so many networks. For this reason, community managers often rely on social media monitoring tools to help them listen to thousands, or tens of thousands, of online discussions and zero-in on those few

that are relevant and important. For most organizations, there's no need to pay for expensive monitoring tools when there are enough free services available. But someone should be given responsibility to monitor relevant discussions, assess their significance, and then when appropriate, articulate a response.

2. Genuinely talk in terms of the other person's interests

One of the easiest ways for community managers to engage prospective audiences is to focus on issues that their target audiences already find interesting. By the same logic, it's difficult to interest a person in something they consider dull. It's surprising how many organizations use social media to disseminate irrelevant content. In order to be more engaging, you'll have to find ways to link your products, services, or social causes to the *issues that already motivate your target audiences*. For instance, this could mean targeting different groups with different messages that are relevant to each group, but which share one common feature—your core value proposition.

At the same time, you need to be genuinely interested in other people. This means that you are honestly interested in their interests, and that you do not fake your interest for the purpose of persuading people. This implies that your community managers should share the same values and outlooks as the groups you are targeting. We humans are pre-programmed and socially educated to detect fraud. Consequently, if you make insincere appeals to a person's or a group's interests, it will be seen for what it is—manipulative, deceptive, and... well, *'uncool'*. If you want to talk in terms of another person's interest, you'll have

to be genuinely interested in them. One way to achieve this is to *hire community managers who represent your target audiences, or at least have a strong understanding of them.*

3. Arouse in the other person an eager want

When you are introducing a new idea or proposal, you'll have to find a way to make people feel happy to do what you suggest. If you approach them in the wrong way, it's easy to arouse resentment and resistance. So if you want to make a lasting impression, you can't just tell someone to do something, rather, you must *get them to want to do what you are suggesting.*

For instance, if you are running a political campaign and you want to encourage constituents to spread your message in social media, the last thing you would do is tell people what to do. That's too prescriptive, and potentially demotivating. Rather, you'll be more effective if you can build on your constituent's internal motivation by asking them to come up with their own solutions. You can dramatize ideas in a way that transforms requests into a motivating goals, or turns your suggestion into a challenge that people are asked to solve however they see fit. Ideally, you want people to feel that *the ideas are theirs, not yours.* And, of course, don't be tempted to take credit for their work: you may risk demotivating the people who are supporting your product, campaign or cause. People are more likely to find "their" ideas motivating, and may feel insulted by the suggestion that they were merely carrying out "your" instructions. To play it

safe, praise all their improvements and remain humble about your contributions. If you must take your credit, share it.

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

We all need to feel respected, and often the mere perception that we are being disrespected, even if we are not, can cause a long-lasting resentment. To make an impact in social media, you'll be more successful if you can *make the people you are dealing with feel important*. One way to achieve this is by demonstrating honest and sincere appreciation. It must be sincere: Fake complements can cause more harm than good, as many people will instantly spot manipulative flattery. Also, you should always be as personal as possible, and remember that a person's name is, to that person, the sweetest and most important sound in any language.

If you're dealing with a person you don't agree with, or where you suspect their motives are unethical, it can sometimes be a mistake to publicly express your opinions. Part of this has to do with the fact that you probably can't read another person's mind very well, so if you make assumptions about their motives, there is a good chance you'll be mistaken. But this is the more important issue: in general, people like to feel that they are acting ethically, even when their behaviour is nowhere close to ethical. If you publicly accuse a person of acting on an unethical or greedy motive, you'll probably end your professional relationship right then and there. However, if you appeal to their nobler motives, then you'll have an area of common interest to build upon. For instance, suppose you come across a blog post with a scathing, but insightful critique of your organization. Instead of accusing the blogger of being spiteful, why not appeal to their noble motives by thanking them for caring enough to raise these points, and then following up as

appropriate. No matter what motives you ascribe to a person, if you publicly appeal to their nobler motives, you'll be making them look good, they will feel more respected, and your interaction will probably be more persuasive.

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

In social media you may, and probably will, often disagree with what other people have said. For this reason, many organizations use social media response protocols: flowcharts that help staff classify online discussions and decide when and how to respond. Most social media response protocols classify third party discussions into two tones: positive and negative. They then offer suggestions for how to deal with positive or negative comments. For positive comments, it may be enough to acknowledge the comment or add to it. For negative comments, they routinely suggest avoiding aggressive discussions, and only engaging with people who express factual errors, or unsatisfied customers. When your organization responds to negative comments in social media, you will need to exercise sensitivity and caution. Although you can never fully predict the outcome of your interaction, you can respond in a way that increases your odds of improving the situation and potentially transforming the discussion into a platform that helps, rather than harms, your organization.

When responding, you must *be sympathetic to the other person's ideas and desires*. Although you may not share their frame of reference, your response will be more palatable if you can frame it within their way of thinking. One way to achieve this is to try and honestly see things from their point of view. You can

never fully predict the outcome, but by placing yourself in their shoes and showing sensitivity to their views, people will be more likely to reciprocate, by seeing things from your point of view too.

6. Begin in a friendly way

Whenever you need to ask someone to do something, or to deliver bad news, or you need to respond to negative comments, always start out in a friendly and respectful way. You should look for a way to make the situation as positive as possible. Again, the trick here is to include *sincere praise and honest appreciation*. This could include a message to a Facebook group asking members to donate to your charity fundraising campaign, where you start off by praising the community for all the support they have shown over the last year. Also, this could include showing your appreciation for that blogger who wrote that critical article about your organization, and then thanking them for providing valuable feedback but also showing where you do disagree. After having started in a friendly and respectful way, the blogger will probably be more receptive to your points of disagreement.

One way to turn communications into a friendlier experience is to use questions. People are far more receptive when you *ask* them to do something rather than *tell* them to do it. For example, if you wanted to get your Facebook fans to help promote a campaign, you could use a question like “Can you help promote our latest campaign in Facebook?” as opposed to the command “Promote our latest campaign”. People are often more likely to help—if asked. Another way to use

questions is to begin your engagement by first asking a question that people would generally say “yes” to, and then on the basis of their agreement, deliver your more difficult messages.

7. Call attention to people’s mistakes indirectly

If you are dealing with an individual who has posted a comment that clearly contains a mistake, they will be more likely to accept your response if you *address their mistake in a diplomatic and indirect way*. Even when people are flat-out wrong, they’ll be embarrassed and potentially defensive if you are too direct in your correction. If you must be direct, move the discussion offline—the last thing you want to do is embarrass someone in public and risk driving them to defend their honour by attacking yours. Sometimes if you show someone they are wrong in an overwhelmingly and insulting way, they may accept *losing this battle, but winning the war with you*. It's best to defuse any potential conflicts before they emerge or as soon as they are discovered.

One way to soften the impact of your response is to talk about your own mistakes before criticizing another person. Similarly, you can use encouragement and make the fault seem easy to correct. To extend Dale’s wisdom for a moment, Winston Churchill summed up this principle by saying "Diplomacy is the art of telling plain truths without giving offence".

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

In social media, it's ok to publicly express disagreements and different views, but arguments should be avoided. By arguments, we mean intellectual wars where at least one of the parties is emotionally committed to winning some intellectual contest, and ensuring their opponent loses. No matter how correct you may be, no matter how justified you are, you can rarely win an argument, especially in public, and never with someone who feels their position is the truth. If you argue too hard, this person may feel cornered into a position they cannot accept, which may produce many unpleasant consequences. At the same time, if you're in the wrong, by defending the undefendable, you're only going to make your situation worse! No matter what you think of their position, *show respect for the other person's opinions* and never say "you're wrong." It's best not to criticize, condemn, or complain about a person, but rather to find another way to express your disagreement and seek a resolution.

No matter who is right or wrong, more harm will often result from open arguments, especially those in social media. This does not mean you should avoid defending yourself or your organization if it's slandered or falsely accused of a scandal or crime. It means that *if you want to get the better of an argument, don't argue!* Also, if you must publicly respond to a situation that could escalate into an open argument, bring together your brightest minds and find a way to defuse the situation in a non-argumentative way. Also, remember that people pay close attention to conflicts—from the schoolyard, to the octagon, to political rows and wars. Movies, newspapers, books are normally about some sort of conflict. As a

result, people will often pick open conflicts with a larger organization in order to escalate an issue. The minute the organization responds in a conflictual way, the fight is on, people will start paying attention, and the issue may gain prominence and close public inspection.

If you believe that a conflict with this individual or group is unavoidable, try to move the discussion to email or phone, where it is easier to diffuse the situation through personal interaction outside their public stage.

9. If you're wrong, admit it quickly and emphatically

Though few people or organizations easily admit their faults, criticisms of your person or organization may come from legitimate frustrations. Like a lie, *the longer you deny legitimate criticisms, the worse your situation will grow*. When an organization's management are out of step with their customers' needs and values, defending any questionable practice may cause more harm than good. *Before a problem grows, address it, fix it, and move on*. If you attempt to repress or hide issues your customers find frustrating, your problems may grow, and potentially blow out of proportion.

One classic case study includes the story of Nike's personalized shoes—remember that one? In an absurd email exchange, a level-headed customer repeatedly requested that Nike print the word "Sweatshop" on their personalized sneakers. However, Nike staff refused to comply by making an irrational appeal to their policy, which the customer continually showed had no bearing on the customer's wish to print "Sweatshop" on their sneakers. The email exchange was absurd, it

made Nike look dishonest, and went viral, further damaging Nike's reputation and raising a spotlight on their labour practices in developing countries. Nobody comes out of this sort of exchange without scars. Admit your mistakes, correct your errors, and move on.

10. Smile

Believe it or not, the way you look online will impact how people relate to your social media profiles and online properties. Your smile affects how people perceive you in person. Similarly, *a friendly and professional looking social media profile can inspire a greater sense of goodwill and trust towards your profile.* We can expand the concept of smiling to also include looking like the kind of person a prospective customer would buy from, the kind of person a prospective constituent would trust, or the kind of person a prospective target audience would find convincing. In social media, you need to present a credible photograph and a profile that demonstrates your expertise and trustworthiness but that also presents a friendly approachable person, as demonstrated by your smile. Remember that most people intuitively sense a fake smile, and that you can spot them in people's squinting eyes. So the next you are selecting your profile photo, try to select a headshot with a sincere smile that demonstrates you are open, friendly, and approachable.

Final thoughts

Just think about the last time you've witnessed someone breaking these key principles and found themselves missing obvious opportunities or worse, finding themselves embroiled in a useless conflict. As timeless wisdom, these 10 principles will help you win friends and influence people in social media or whatever technology you use to connect with others.



What did you think? This is a concept paper that we authored to see if there could be interest in going deeper into Dale's work. If you have any reactions, good or bad, get in touch with us. You'll find us at our links above.

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