

Meanwhile, Back at DALE CARNEGIE...

by RALPH KEYES

The 65-year-old course on how to win friends and influence people is still going strong, and if it sounds familiar, that's because all the other self-improvement groups are beginning to catch up with it.

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On a table to our leader's left sat a stack of newspapers flattened out like small bedsheets. As each of us rose to face the group, our leader's assistant rolled the top sheet into a tube and handed it to us. We knew what to do next. Slam the tube against the table! Hit it hard! Then say, "You know what gets me mad?" Slap the table again!

"Unions!"

Whap!

"K mart!"

Wham!

"My in-laws!"

Whop!

"Banks!"

Whack!

"Nails!"

Nails?

"Nails!"

Thwap!

"All over the ground!" Thwop! "You know how much they cost?" Thump! "A lot!" Thwap! Thwop! Wham! "But every time I come to work there's nails all—over—the—ground!"

Most of us looked a bit sheepish pounding our paper up there, like grownups learning to bump and grind at Arthur Murray's. But after a while, more and more of us seemed to pick up the rhythm, spitting words out with conviction, letting anger roll forth in unstoppable waves.

"You know what makes me mad?" asked a young blonde. "Making coffee! It's not fair! The men at work don't have to make coffee! And they drink it!" Whap!

"It's a woman's job!" yelled a masculine voice in the audience.

The blonde's eyes flashed. "It is not!" Wham!

"If you drink it," Whop! "—make it!" And with that, she threw what was left of her tube at the male voice,

then stormed to her seat.

Once each of us had shredded a roll of paper, our leader said that Dale Carnegie considered this session—Session 5b—the most important one of all 14 sessions in his introductory course. Carnegie considered it so important, we were told, that he'd been known to thwack class members over the head with a tube of paper when they had trouble getting into the exercise. Among Carnegie graduates, 5b is renowned. During class discussion later, our 18-year-old second-generation member said his father recently asked if "they still do that thing with the newspapers."

By the end of this class, the floor of our Holiday Inn meeting room looked like Fifth Avenue after a parade. It was wall-to-wall shredded paper. And as the 30 members filed out into the hallway, kicking paper like fall leaves, there was excitement in the air—as if we were leaving a bull ring as the carcass was being dragged off.

In the men's room, a young salesman told me I'd either lost my calling as an actor or sure was an angry person. Never had he seen such rage in public. As my target of fury I'd chosen a grievance sincere if not too controversial: people who talk behind me in movie theaters. ("Shut up!" Wham! "Button your lip!" Whop! "You wanna talk, don't come to the movies!") How could I explain to him that for an encounter group veteran like me, public rage expression is a piece of cake. Newspaper tubes may not quite be Encounter-Bats, but their impact is the same. Maybe even more basic. Which is why I was taking this class in the first place. After years of being encountered, gestalted, rolfed, bioenergeticized and healed in every way, I felt a desperate need to get back to basics: back to Dale Carnegie.

The introductory course I took in Effective Speaking and Human Relations has been offered in the same basic format for the last 65 years. The course combines oration with revival, confession and sales-meeting enthusiasm.

"Good evening, class!" was out instructor's standard greeting. "And how are you tonight?"

"Fine and dandy, Dick!" we were trained to respond. "And why shouldn't I be?"

This exchange was to be repeated thrice in rising crescendo. After the first couple of classes, I found

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myself lingering in the john until I heard the loudest repetition before making a belated entry.

Speeches are at the heart of Dale Carnegie, two a night normally, lasting a minute or two each. Although the subjects we spoke on were often mundane, the content and impact weren't.

As "An Incident out of Your Childhood," an airplane mechanic told us of taking his 10-week-old puppy out on a tractor with him when he was 11. His parents didn't think it was a good idea. But he begged and they consented. Halfway out to the field, he noticed his puppy had disappeared from the seat beside him. Stopping the tractor, he looked back and saw the dead puppy's body; he had run it over.

"I took the body home and showed it to my parents," the mechanic concluded in a husky voice. "They could have whaled the living daylights out of me, but they didn't. I guess they figured I'd been punished enough."

At times our talks involved high good humor, which wasn't always intentional. A housewife in her 40s, assigned the subject "television" for an impromptu talk, gave the following speech: "We just bought a new TV with a remote attachment for our bedroom. Now

Take life one day at a time. Live in day-tight compartments. It works.

we spend a lot of time in bed." (Titters.) "But the worst thing is we don't watch much TV in bed." (Laughter.) "We just fall asleep." (Roar.)

As "A Lesson I've Learned," a shop foreman told us of being nearly strangled on his first job in a machine shop when his tie got caught in a drill press. "And the lesson I learned from that is this," he concluded, "never wear loose clothing around moving parts of machinery."

For his angry talk, a visitor from another class had this to say: "You know what gets me mad? It's these Dale Carnegie classes. I graduated from Class 135. But they keep on bugging you to make up classes you've missed. They call you. They mail you cards. It bugs me! But that's why I'm here."

Although Dale Carnegie is a profit-making institution (our class cost \$345), I found this the least illuminating handle to have on the course. Because his apostles not only make a living from Carnegie, they live him. "You don't take Dale Carnegie," we were told, "you live it."

As do Carnegieites the world over, we turned regularly to our little red manual on Effective Speaking and Human Relations, at times to read aloud in unison from the homilies within, at other times just to hold it aloft in symbolic unity. Although I'd feared getting stuck with a bunch of razor-cut doubleknits in such exercises, my classmates ranged from a suit-and-tied dentist through an Earth-Shoed bank teller to a cowboy-booted warehouse foreman and a cashmered executive's wife.

At our opening session, when we went around the room giving our reasons for being there, the dominant themes were workaday: "to communicate better with people at work"; "to get better organized"; "to improve my self-confidence"; "to get my point across better."

It was hard for me to imagine any of my classmates joining me in an encounter group. Yet at a deeper level,

I wondered if the motives for being there were really so different from those of other self-improvers. Our behavior was similar. Particularly as the class wore on and as we came to know one another, some of our talks grew quite intimate.

Among the most moving speeches was that given by a Burger King assistant manager about his young son. Because of a congenital birth defect, this boy had severe digestive problems. Life for him was a daily struggle to keep food down. "And sometimes," his father told us, "when I'm sitting out in that parking lot trying to work up the courage to come in here I pull his picture out of my wallet and remember his courage, and that gives me the nerve to get out of my car and walk to class."

(A few sessions later this man suffered a tragic accident when an irate customer ran him down in the parking lot of his restaurant, severely damaging both knees. Joe was popular and we missed him. The session before last, on crutches and against doctor's orders, he joined us one last time. For our final session, Joe was with us only by telegram.)

In the middle of the course, the two-decade marriage of a saleswoman broke up. I knew this was imminent because she'd told me about it during breaks. She wasn't sure who to talk with. So she talked with us, her classmates, for a 10b speech on "Learning to Control Worry."

Two months ago, the woman told us, she'd decided to leave her husband. For days after that decision she couldn't function. Her physician said she must get hold of herself. So she decided to put Dale Carnegie's principles to work. "Take one day at a time. Live in day-tight compartments. Don't worry about the past. And it works. My problems aren't solved, but at least they're under control."

After her speech ended, our instructor walked up and put his hands gently on the woman's shoulders saying, "Atta girl," softly and asking after her children.

To my surprise, there was no stated or implied taboo against this kind of personal sharing. If anything, there was encouragement to be personal. Not for its therapeutic value, but because our goal was to become better "communicators," and, according to Dale Carnegie, communication comes from the heart. "Good talks," he wrote in one of many booklets we were given, "are the ones that well up within you as a fountain in a garden."

Only once did I detect any implicit inhibition from the top. This was when our original instructor, a warm, perpetually smiling preacher-salesman for Mack Trucks, had the flu and was replaced by an instructor whose smile was more forced and enthusiasm studied. During this class, we spoke for 90 seconds on "An Incident from My Life." Our booted warehouse foreman, who wore '50s ducks and was affectionately called Fonz, used less than that amount of time for these words: "A memorable incident from my life was when my best friend Oded in my arms. I was in a bar shooting pool with some buddies. We were drinking beer. Then some of the guys went outside to sniff glue. I said I wasn't having any of it. Then one of them came back in to say this friend of mine had taken something stronger and had passed out. I went outside. He was breathing funny. I took him in my arms. And he died. And his name was Peanuts Mallory. And that's it."

The hush that followed this speech was soon interrupted by the rustle of our substitute instructor walk-

ing to the blackboard. There he drew some boxes. Then he urged the speaker to "fill in" his story with more details, make it more vivid, more "colorful," etc., etc. The hush quickly turned sullen. Our speaker refused to fill in any boxes. And luckily this substitute never returned.

At first I'd found Dick, our original instructor, too much—too enthusiastic, too smiling, too positive in every way. He never criticized and invariably leaped on the tiniest sliver of achievement to heap with praise.

"You sure showed a lot of poise up there tonight."
"I can see your self-confidence growing every week."
"Isn't it great the way she waves her arms and gets her whole body into a speech?"

A little obvious perhaps. But after he missed that single session, I was desperate for Dick to return and was thrilled the next week to see him back. Then in the middle of our class, Dick was transferred across the state and was replaced by a Carnegie instructor who works at Bethlehem Steel. Heavysset, crewcut, with the air of a benign career army sergeant, Paul lacked Dick's flair. But he had his own kind of presence. This came out best during our two-minute talks meant to "Evoke Feelings." As their topic, both a loan officer and a salesman spoke of being present at their children's birth and the importance this had for them. "Seeing my daughter born, that's one thing," the loan officer concluded. "But my wife. That's one hell of a woman. I'll tell you, if the positions were reversed, if men had to give birth—there would be Zero Population Growth tomorrow."

The class chuckled in agreement, the women especially. Then Paul asked how many other men present had witnessed their children's birth. Four hands were raised.

"You know," he continued, "when my wife gave birth to our four children, that sort of thing wasn't being done. And I feel cheated." His fist shook the air. "I feel cheated at not being able to take part in that experience. I was driving an ambulance at the time, and I saw a lot of other people's children being born. Just not my own. And I feel cheated. Hearing your speech tonight reminds me of how cheated I feel."

Our class was warned in its first session that as a group we would be telling one another things we didn't normally tell anyone, and that in the process we would grow closer than a family. To a degree, both premises proved true. Speakers continually introduced their remarks by saying, "You know, I've never talked about this before but . . ." Our level of trust in one another grew higher with each class. We became a community in which it was safe to take risks. And to this degree, there's not a dime's worth of difference between Dale Carnegie and his more exotic cousins in the self-improvement industry.

Some parallels are obvious. The key to growth in Dale Carnegie, for example, is nothing more nor less than unconditional positive regard. "In here," we were told repeatedly, "there is no more negative. There's only the positive."

And: "Growth can only occur when you let go, when you learn to accept yourself."

And: "We'll try to bring out your strengths and help you feel better about yourself by working on the positive."

I can testify that it's tonic to take part in a group that you know will only approve of you—even when you know this approval is automatic. How often in the

course of a lifetime are you applauded as you rise, listened to while you speak and then complimented on your delivery?

But one result of accentuating the positive is a suffocating taboo against anything else. "Who feels as if they gained confidence tonight?" we were asked after one session. A few hands went up.

"Let's all get those hands up!" More hands rose. "Come on!"

Most hands finally hit the air.

Our classroom testimony was generally limited to how helpful, how growthful, how great all-around our Dale Carnegie experience had been. Only in the john or over beer after class did any cynicism and negativism seep out—often from mouths that had just reported how overall terrific the course was. "Sometimes," one woman whispered to me after class in the hallway, "sometimes you wish they wouldn't try to help you so much. Sometimes you just want to shout, 'Why can't you just let me be the way I am!'"

This is a problem Dale Carnegie shares with most self-improvers: the implicit assumption that because we're there something's the matter with us in need of

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their fixing. My broader objection to Dale Carnegie also relates to groups in general. This has to do with the moral vacuum in which they operate. As an antidote to the stultifying judgments of everyday life, self-improvement settings are normally ones in which ends aren't scrutinized; only means. This is true of Dale Carnegie. Repeatedly we were warned against the three Cs: "Don't Criticize, Condemn or Complain." As a principle for human interaction, such suspension of judgment is morally and practically impeccable. And as a tool for teaching, unconditional acceptance is powerful in the extreme because it makes us feel so safe to say what's on our minds.

The only problem is that the human skills so learned can be applied to inhuman ends. Some branches of the military have found sensitivity training quite helpful in furthering their goals. Other than counselors, probably no professional group spends more time studying human-relations techniques than salesmen. And Dale Carnegie simply has no mechanism for evaluating the fact that Dimmie Johnson of Houston, after he was elected a grand dragon of the Ku Klux Klan at 19, attributed his success to the human skills he'd learned in a Dale Carnegie course.

During one of our own sessions, a nursery manager described how he'd applied Carnegie principles to an angry customer. The woman had brought back a terrarium that broke in her car on the way home. Rather than argue, the manager listened sympathetically. He said they had had the same experience moving terrariums between stores. He suggested a better way to protect such an item in her car. Disarmed by this attentive response, the woman conceded that perhaps it was her fault. Maybe she did transport the product clumsily. And she ended up buying a new terrarium at cost.

"So just by listening sympathetically," our classmate concluded, "I saved our cost when by rights I

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should have given her another one because it probably broke due to faulty glass. It's called 'keeping a customer happy.'

"Beautiful," whispered the instructor's assistant behind me. "Atta boy."

Partly because of this capacity for manipulation, Dale Carnegie has a bad odor among those who think they know better. One of the more interesting experiences of taking Dale Carnegie is the reaction one gets from friends. "Great!" said one. "Next how about Arthur Murray?" "But Dale Carnegie's for losers," blurted out another, "and you're not a loser." (I also noticed how quick I was at times to add, "But it's for an article," which wasn't entirely true.)

The classic nose-up comment was a cartoon that ran in the *New Yorker* some years back in which a scowling man followed by a group of creeps is saying to an acquaintance of the street, "They're friends—leftovers from Dale Carnegie days."

The ironic part is that although it may be ridiculed, ignored and nearly forgotten in more sophisticated circles, Dale Carnegie continues to attract more par-

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ticipants than any course of its kind. They claim two million graduates overall. My own course was the 136th offered in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, over a half-century's time. While it was going, two more classes started up.

In a way, Dale Carnegie's problem image is a product of its very success. There's nothing "new" about Dale Carnegie, no novelty in taking his course. Magazines are not sending their reporters to brave this "latest" chapter in self-discovery. No status is to be gained from dropping Dale Carnegie's name at a cocktail party. And despite the fact that saviors up to and including Werner Erhard draw freely on Dale Carnegie, to the best of my knowledge only Abraham Maslow was generous enough to cite Carnegie as a colleague—in a bibliography of sources for human growth.

But after eating at more exotic banquets, I want to speak on behalf of Carnegie's simpler fare. He may be the Model T of self-help, but this durability is exactly what makes Dale Carnegie appealing. There is comfort in knowing that the course being offered has endured in its basic form since 1912. Giving speeches before a class is scary, and it's reassuring to know that hundreds of thousands have gone before me. When it comes to whacking a table with newspaper, not knowing if I'll go crazy with rage, it's a relief to hear how "Mr. Carnegie" handled that session in the '20s.

Something I liked especially about the mustiness of this course was its emphasis on family. Repeatedly we were reminded that trying out the skills we were learning with colleagues was the easy part. Doing so with those to whom we were tied—listening better, not judging, showing honest appreciation—was the hard part. Regularly we were asked how things were going at home, whether we were able to use lessons from the course to improve our family life. For one accustomed to hearing the emphasis put on self-

discovery, self-realization and self-actualization, this perspective was, to say the least, refreshing. And having seen how threatened one mate can be by the other going off for self-improvement with strangers, Dale Carnegie's practice of inviting family as guests to the first and last sessions (recruiting tactic though it may be) strikes me as inspired.

The best thing I have to say about my Dale Carnegie experience is this: in it my classmates and I were given the opportunity to try out new behavior in a safe setting; then we were encouraged to take that risk elsewhere.

To "Express a Feeling," a young accountant spoke for two minutes against Jimmy Carter's pardon of draft resisters. He had served in Vietnam, risked his life, seen buddies shot up and was outraged that those who hadn't were now going to "get off scot-free."

This pissed me off. Hasn't the time passed for such vindictiveness? Not wanting my classmate's sentiments to go unanswered, I ditched my own prepared talk and spent two minutes talking about my brother, whom I admire for going to jail as a witness against the draft and the war, and suggesting the time for reconciliation was upon us.

At the next session, the last, when we spoke about gains from the course, the accountant told us what he'd gained was the confidence to take a stand and state his opinion. Until recently, he said, his tendency had been to "blend in, just be kind of gray—like this suit I'm wearing." Our instructor asked the guy's wife, who was there as a guest, if she'd seen such a change. She said she had, that her husband seemed more sure of himself, more willing to speak up since taking Dale Carnegie. She liked the change.

As we went around the room, different people reported different gains from the course: self-confidence primarily, poise before a group, willingness to take leadership and better communication at home. One of the main strides reported was a variation on this theme: I no longer feel so alone with what I'm feeling. From Dale Carnegie to the primal scream, there's probably no more important reward. The feeling of company—I felt it.

After the last session, 10 of us—about a third of those who received diplomas—went to a restaurant for beer. There we lingered long into the early morning. Over beer, the talk was more boisterous, funnier and more irreverent than in class. A couple of people confessed they didn't think they'd gotten much from the course. But the salesman who'd seen his baby born called Dale Carnegie one of the most important experiences of his life. He'd taken the course to try being fully open with his feelings and felt he'd done this. Expressing anger was hard for him. Session 5b in particular felt like a turning point in his life—proving it was possible to lose his temper and survive. As a result, he'd broken down a long-term barrier with his sister when they were able to talk the better part of one night and air years of grievances. "Just being able to do that," he said, "made this whole course worth it."

The talk, the feeling over these last beers, was much like that after an encounter week-end. Although we hadn't probed one another to the core, we had pulled aside masks. I don't think I'd feel uneasy running into any of my classmates on the street. In fact, I think I'd enjoy it, because in retrospect my reaction to the Dale Carnegie class overall is this: I miss them.

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