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# The staying power of persuasion

We are as eager as ever to win friends and influence people

Dave McGinn, Financial Post

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Reuters

The influence genre of books are still widely popular. But not all men are born leaders.

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It is what you need to get the corner office, the raise, the promotion. It is what closes deals and drives sales. You either have it or want it. It's as old as business itself. But can influence really be learned in a book?

"[Influence] is trainable. Because it's based on science, it's not just an art. It's a set of procedures that can be replicated," says Robert Cialdini, professor of psychology and marketing at Arizona State University and one of the world's foremost experts on

persuasion.

The author of best-selling *Influence: Science and Practice*, now in its fourth edition, defines influence in contrast to power: "Power has to do with the judgment of one party that his or her control over the other allows for change. Whereas influence is not control, it's information that's presented in an especially effective way that allows for change," says Cialdini.

Understanding influence and exercising it can make careers. And the lack of it can break them.

"You find so often these individuals in an organization who are acknowledged as brilliant, acknowledged as expert in their fields, but they don't have the social skills or don't have the emotional intelligence to be able to make their case well within their organization. They may have an excellent case to make regarding their own abilities, but they're not able to communicate well and they don't rise in the organization," explains Cialdini.

No wonder books purporting to explain and teach influence are so popular.

Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, the gold standard of the genre, has sold more than 15 million copies since it was first published in 1937.

In the wake of Carnegie's success, countless other influence books have followed. Go to your local bookstore and you are bound to find not only Carnegie's and Cialdini's books, but titles such as *Becoming a Person of Influence*, *Instant Rapport*, *The Science of Influence* and *Social Intelligence*.

Shane Gibson, president of Knowledge Brokers International, a Vancouver-based sales training organization, says influence books are critical reading material for executives on the rise. " *How to Win Friends and Influence People* is a fantastic book. It's timeless. It's on my list of 'to-reads' for anybody who attends my sessions," says Mr. Gibson, who recently developed the national sales program for the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

Given that influence permeates practically every area of business, books on the subject have a wide audience.

"It is a core skill at every level of business," says Cialdini. "It is a core skill of course for

salespeople. But it is also a core skill for managers, for purchasers, for vendors, for distributors -- all kinds of individuals who are involved in the business exchange process need to be influential beyond the power they have from the hierarchical structures that they're in. It's just not enough any more to rely on power ... So, everything has to occur on the basis of persuasion and communication."

As books on the subject that have been released in recent years show, influence has changed. All of the core principles Carnegie set out in *How to Win Friends and Influence People* are still as useful today as they were in the Depression era: show people appreciation, be a good listener, talk in terms of other people's interests, etc. But Carnegie could never have anticipated the so-called flattening of organizations.

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