

Do Not Argue

We're nearly half-way through the book. We've done Parts 1 and 2 on Fundamental Techniques in Dealing with People, and How to Make People Like You. I love the simplicity of what Dale shares, don't you? This book changed my life 10 years ago. Between this and *How to Stop Worrying*, I gained all kinds of people skills - like all good life lessons, making use of what I learned has been a process. I didn't learn and apply them quickly enough. I hope you don't make the same mistake.

Today we begin *How to Win People to Your Way of Thinking*. This chapter is *huge* in its importance. It impacts how we treat each other, our family, and strangers. It is jam-packed with information and advice to help us. So I want to spend some time on it and expand on what Dale has to say.

There are certain occasions when it doesn't matter if you are right about something. If you press the issue, you will lose the argument because you will alienate the other person or make them out to be the fool. It is almost always more gracious to defer. I think it depends on the topic and the forum. You've heard it said that you never discuss religion or politics because you're bound to alienate somebody. That's true most of the time. Sometimes it is not only proper, it is unavoidable and even essential to confront one another.

What about the current discussion over stem-cell research? If you remain silent, whichever side you take, there will be no national consensus, no resolution by anyone other than politicians, religionists, and scientists even though your life will be directly affected. Abortion and euthanasia are too important to remain silent on either side. We *need* a national debate. Silence instead of confrontation allowed the Nazi's to exterminate the Jews. That being said, there is a time and a place for such arguments. Dale was in the wrong place at the wrong time to prove himself right over such a minor issue as where a quotation came from.

He was a *guest*. He was there at his friend's invitation. What he did and said would reflect back on his friend. This may seem old-fashioned, but when you are a guest you *never* create an embarrassing situation for your host or the other guests. You *never* demand your rights. You *never* burden your host. The same is true in how the host treats the guests. It is completely improper either way. That is how hospitality works. This is a lost art, so let me expand on it.

If the host says grace at the dinner table, it is improper for a guest to rebuke him. If the host doesn't say grace, it is still improper for a guest to rebuke him. It is the host's home. He can do what he wants within his four walls. Who are you to correct him in his own house? If you resent it, even if you say nothing, you are the one who's wrong. You need to get over it. Understand your place.

That's Dale's point here. You can't win an argument without someone paying for it. Therefore you can't win an argument in a social setting, ever. It is *always* too costly. So don't get into an argument when you are socializing. Period.

Here are some rules of engagement:

1. You *never* offer an opinion where none has been asked.
2. When someone does ask your opinion, offer it very reluctantly. Politely refuse to offer it when it may cause controversy or embarrass *anyone*.
3. You will cause the other person to lose face if you prove him wrong. That forces him to justify himself and escalates the argument. Always allow people their dignity and their self-respect.
4. You will embarrass any other people who are present because they don't like observing rude behavior or conflict. It's like hanging dirty laundry in public. Some things you'd rather not see or know about.

5. You will lose any possibility of friendship with the person you argue with. There are times when that's OK. But in the family, the workplace, or the church, it causes *irreparable* harm to relationships, unity, and teamwork.

"Misunderstanding is never ended by an argument, but by tact, diplomacy, conciliation, and a sympathetic desire to see the other person's viewpoint."

Dale quotes 9 excellent things to do when disagreement arises to avoid turning it into an argument. These are great to apply with your kids and spouse:

1. Welcome the disagreement as an opportunity for growth. You may learn something.
2. Distrust your instinct to get defensive. Stay calm.
3. Control your temper. "You can measure the size of the person by what makes him or her angry."
4. *Listen* first. You may have misunderstood. Ask questions.
5. Look for areas of agreement. Build bridges.
6. Be honest. Admit if you're wrong.
7. Promise to consider your opponent's ideas and study them carefully. That's basic courtesy.
8. Thank your opponent for his interest in the topic. He was willing to risk disagreement to help you see another point of view on something that matters to you.
9. Take a breather to give both sides a chance to think it through rationally instead of emotionally.

That's great stuff! His ending paragraph is even better. He throws out some self-examination questions. Try asking yourself these questions next time you think arguing is worth it. I'm going to paraphrase a bit.

1. Could the other person be right, even in part?
2. Will arguing solve the problem or make it worse?
3. Will I draw the other person closer or push them away?
4. Will I come off a winner or a loser after it's over?
5. What price am I willing to pay to be right?
6. If I'm silent, will the disagreement continue or end? If it will continue, then I'd better seek resolution rather than victory.
7. Is this an opportunity for me? Can I use the disagreement to my advantage in building a better relationship with this person? To do that, I need to respect their opinion even though I disagree with it.
8. If the other person is yelling, I need to be silent and listen for the message through the noise. I need to let them know I heard it and understood it, even if I don't accept it as true. It is true for *them*, and that's what I have to deal with.

Lynn and I have been blessed during the course of our marriage with almost never being angry at the same time. But arguing isn't necessarily limited to angry expressions. It can be as simple as an objection, a rejection, a look. Those are signs of disrespect. We need to do everything we can in our marriage, in our workplace, and in social settings, to foster understanding and mutual respect. We need to *resolve* our differences. We may never achieve consensus, but we can always achieve kindness.