

WINNING WITH HEART

*Winning the Hearts and Minds
of Young Athletes*

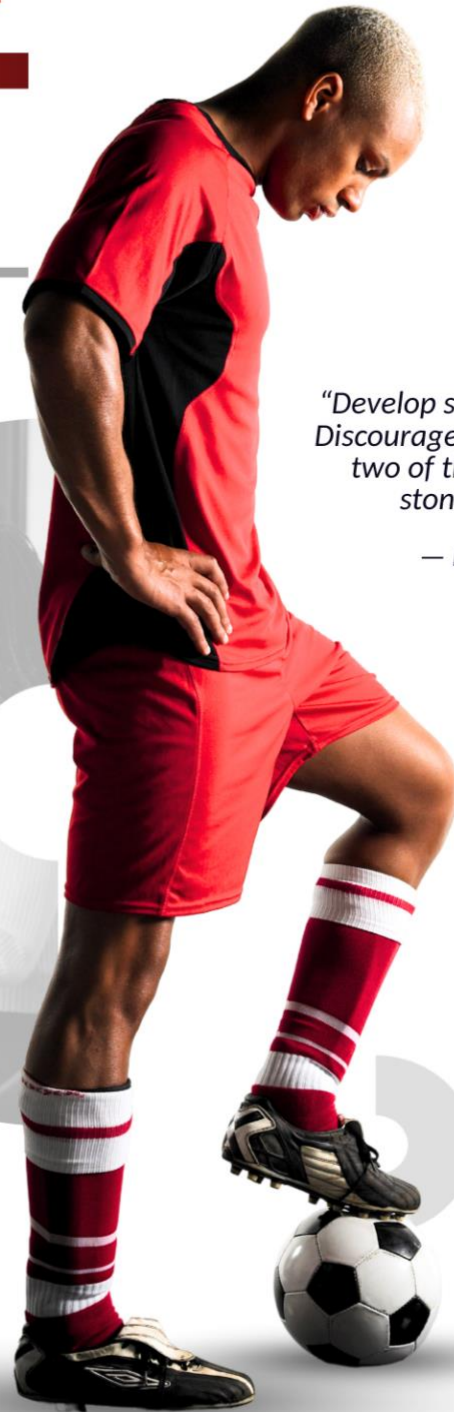
*"Develop success from failures.
Discouragement and failure are
two of the surest stepping
stones to success."*

— Dale Carnegie



**Timeless Principles for
the Volunteer Coach**

KEVIN R. CRONE
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FOREWORD

WHY I WROTE THIS

“A good coach will make his players see what they can be rather than what they are.”

— Ara Parseghian

If you are holding this playbook, there is a good chance you are one of the millions of volunteer coaches who quietly hold youth sport together. You did not train for this. No one handed you a manual. You stepped up because someone asked, or because your kid needed a team, or because no one else would. And now you are responsible for eight or twelve or twenty young athletes who look to you for more than drills and lineup cards.

You are their coach. And whether you realize it yet or not, for this season of their life, you are one of the most important adults they will know.

I have been coaching since I was fourteen years old. Tennis, soccer, football, racquet sports — you name it, I have stood on a sideline somewhere in the cold or the heat trying to figure out how to bring out the best in a group of young people who did not always want to be there. By the time I was nineteen, I was coaching very competitive junior tennis players, and I started to apply the book that changed everything for me: Dale Carnegie’s *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. The principles in that book — simple, human, and stubbornly timeless — became the framework for how I coached. They transformed my results and, more importantly, they transformed my relationships with the athletes I coached, and my life.

Those principles pulled me into the Dale Carnegie work full time at twenty-four. I have now spent twenty-eight years as a Dale Carnegie Instructor, Coach, facilitator, and speaker. Today, I am the President and Owner of the Dale Carnegie Business Group, serving Ontario and the Maritimes. Today, my coaching is with managers and leaders of amazing organizations in Canada. I am especially proud of our long-standing partnership with Athletes Canada, an organization that represents the best athletes and coaches in the nation. But long before any of that, I was a kid on a court, trying to figure out how to get better, win and get the best out of teammates.

For years I have wanted to put together a short, honest guide for volunteer coaches. Something grounded in the Dale Carnegie principles that shaped my coaching life. Something that does not pretend coaching is simple and does not pretend I have all the answers. Because I don’t. Nobody does. But the principles — the ones Dale Carnegie gave the world nearly a century ago — still work. They work on the ice, on the field, on the court, in the gym, and in the car afterwards when a kid is quiet and you cannot quite figure out why.

This is that guide. It is short on purpose. Read it before your season starts. Read it again mid-season when things get hard. Use what lands. Leave what doesn’t. And please — please — add your own wisdom to it as you go.

This one’s for you, Dad — the best coach I’ve ever known.

Kevin R. Crone

A coach, like you.



A LETTER TO YOU

TO THE VOLUNTEER COACH

Before we get into the playbook, I want to say something to you directly.

You rearranged your schedule. You gave up your Tuesday nights, your Saturday mornings, maybe your whole Sunday. You stood in the rain. You got yelled at by a parent who did not see what you saw. You drove the kid home whose ride did not show up. You bought an extra water bottle and never mentioned it. You stayed up reading about drills. You worried on the Wednesday before game day. And Likely you took all the certification courses just so you could be on the bench and open the defense door – like I did.

Nobody thanks you enough for any of that. Most people have no idea. They see the scoreboard. They don't see the text message you sent a struggling player on the bus ride home. They don't see the quiet conversation you had with a kid whose parents are going through something. They don't see the teammate who now believes they are a leader because of something you said to them in September.

I see it. Every coach reading this sees it. And what I want you to know, at the very start of this playbook, is that the work you are doing matters in ways the statistics will never capture. You are building human beings. The trophy case is the least of it.

So read this as a letter from one coach to another. Not from an expert to a student. From one person who has stood where you are standing to someone who is doing the most important volunteer work in any community.

Thank you. For real.

A special thank you to all the coaches who have worked with my kids, Quinn and Ruby. You have shaped their love of sport, encouraged them to bring out their best, and helped them be disciplined. You have helped them build confidence, teamwork, communication skills, and the resilience to overcome adversity and setbacks. You have helped build their belief that they can do anything when they put their mind to it. Not to mention, they are pretty darn good too. What else could a parent ask for? I'm eternally grateful.

ORIENTATION

HOW TO USE THIS PLAYBOOK

This playbook is built on the principles of Dale Carnegie's two great books: *How to Win Friends and Influence People* and *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living*. I have taken the principles that have served me most in thirty-four years of coaching and organized them around the real moments of a coaching season.

What You'll Find Inside

Part One. Building the Team. How to set culture, earn trust, and make every athlete feel they belong on day one.

Part Two. Building the Athlete. How to coach, correct, and develop young athletes in ways that build their confidence instead of breaking it.

Part Three. Handling the Hard Stuff. The tough conversations — parents, losses, benching, mistakes, and the worries that keep you up at night.

Part Four. Your Coaching Legacy. A short reflection on why this work matters more than anyone tells you.

One Rule Before You Start

No one is a perfect coach. I am not. The best coaches I have ever known are the ones who stayed curious, stayed humble, and kept trying to be a little better this practice or season than they were last season. That is all any of us can do. This playbook is a tool to help you do it.



PART ONE

BUILDING THE TEAM

Earning Trust. Setting Culture.
Making Every Athlete Feel They Belong.

PART ONE

BUILDING THE TEAM

“Become genuinely interested in other people.”

— Dale Carnegie

Every season starts with strangers. Even on a team where half the kids have played together before, the opening whistle of a new season is always a reset. Personalities have shifted over the off-season. Bodies have grown. Confidences have wobbled. A quiet kid is now suddenly tall. A star from last year is suddenly nervous. You are standing in front of a group of young people who are all, in their own way, wondering: *does the coach see me?*

Your first job is not tactics. It is not conditioning. It is not the playbook. Your first job is to make every athlete on that team believe you genuinely care about them as a person before you care about them as a player.

Do this, and everything else in coaching gets easier. Skip it, and nothing else you try will fully work.

What You’ll Find Inside

1. Become genuinely interested in every athlete on your roster.
2. Remember and use their names. Use their nicknames, if they have them. Get the pronunciation right.
3. Be a good listener. Encourage them to talk about themselves, their lives, what they love.
4. Make every athlete feel important — and mean it.

Focus on stealing moments.

You don’t have a lot of time. So, focus on what I call “stealing a moment”. To me it’s always been the small, focused moments with people/players that add up to something special. *“I see you...”* Before the first drill of the first practice, take the time to have an actual conversation with every athlete on your team. Not a drive-by *“hey, great to have you.”* A real moment. Thirty seconds of eye contact. Their name used correctly. A question that has nothing to do with the sport.

“How was the summer?” “I heard you started high school — how’s it going?” “Tell me one thing you’re excited about for this season.”

You will be amazed at what thirty seconds can do. These kids walk into tryouts and practices anxious — worried about whether they will make the team, whether the coach will like them, whether their teammates will accept them. You, the coach, have the power to dissolve that anxiety with one genuine conversation. Spend it generously.

TRY THIS WEEK

1. Before your next practice, write down the first names of every athlete on your roster from memory. Whoever you cannot name yet, find a way to learn their name before you see them next.
2. In the opening ten minutes of practice, have a thirty-second conversation with at least three athletes — not about the sport. About them.
3. Ask one question and listen for the answer. Do not offer advice. Do not redirect. Just listen.
4. Before practice ends, use each of those three athletes' names again in something that has nothing to do with a drill — a thank-you, a compliment, a joke.

A COACH'S NOTE

If it weren't for Harry, my first tennis coach, I probably wouldn't have fallen in love with tennis and stuck with it. Tennis remains my happy place and my go-to stress reliever. The joy it has given me for all these years has been so important to me. Harry made playing tennis fun. He made me feel like I could be great at it. And when I look back at it, he made me feel important. Thank you, Harry. I can't imagine all the players and people you have inspired.

Setting the Culture in Week One

The culture of your team will be set in the first three practices, whether you mean to set it or not. Athletes are watching you. They are watching how you treat the quietest kid on the team. They are watching whether you laugh at your own mistakes. They are watching whether you mean it when you say, *"we win together and we lose together."*

If you do not deliberately set a culture, one will be set for you — and it will probably be set by whoever on the team is loudest. Better to decide, early and clearly, what you stand for.

THE CULTURE CONVERSATION

In your first or second practice, gather the team and tell them, in your own words:

- What this team is about. (*"We work hard. We show up for each other. We have fun."*)
- What you expect from them. (Effort. Respect. Honesty. Lift each other up)
- What they can expect from you. (Fairness. Preparation. Caring about them as people.)

Keep it short. Kids tune out. Say it once, clearly. Then live it for the rest of the season.

- Most importantly – reinforce the culture you are setting by acknowledging when the team is living the team culture. *“Quinn, way to lift up Jackson when he was feeling bummed out, that’s what this team is all about”.*

When you see something good – jump on it!

As Dale noticed, *“Praise the slightest improvement, and praise every improvement. Be hearty in your approbation and lavish in your praise.”* — Dale Carnegie



PART TWO

BUILDING THE ATHLETE

Coaching, Correcting, and
Developing Confidence.

PART TWO

BUILDING THE ATHLETE

“Give them a fine reputation to live up to.”

— Dale Carnegie

The Quickest Way to Develop Any Athlete

Every young athlete who steps on your team is carrying an invisible weight. A kid who looks confident at tryouts is secretly terrified of failing. A kid who looks disengaged is often the one who cares the most and is protecting themselves. Every single one of them is watching how you react when they succeed and — more importantly — how you react when they fail.

How you coach them in those moments will shape them long after the season ends. The great coaches know this. The great coaches build athletes who are braver, more confident, and more capable than the kids who walked into tryouts. The mediocre coaches build athletes who are technically better but smaller as people.

You want to be a great coach. That is why you are reading this. So, let's talk about how to coach and correct in ways that build the human being at the same time you are building the athlete.

The Nine Principles That Inspires My Coaching

From *How to Win Friends and Influence Others*, Principle 22 – 30. I reframed them a bit. Dale, I hope you don't mind.

1. Always begin with praise and honest appreciation.
2. Call attention to people's mistakes indirectly.
3. Talk about your own mistakes before criticizing theirs.
4. Ask questions instead of giving direct orders.
5. Let them save face. Don't call out personal mistakes.
6. Praise every improvement, no matter how small.
7. Give them a fine reputation to live up to.
8. Use encouragement. Make the fault seem easy to correct.
9. Get them excited about doing the thing you suggest.

The Art of the Correction

Correction is the heart of coaching. Every practice, every game, you are seeing things that need to change — a shot that is off, a position that is wrong, a head that has dropped. The question is not whether to correct. The question is how — it's always the how that matters most.

Here is a truth I wish someone had told me at nineteen: the way you correct a young athlete will land long after the correction itself is forgotten. A kid will not remember the exact thing you said about their forehand in 1994. They will remember whether you made them feel stupid when you said it. (*I still remember what you said Sean. Hahaha!*)

The best coaches I have known — and the best coaches I have tried to be — correct in ways that leave the athlete's confidence intact, their dignity respected, and their motivation to try again stronger than it was before the correction.

THE CORRECTION METHOD

1. Lead with something genuine they did well. Not flattery — something real. *"You got into position fast — I love that."*
2. Describe what you observed, not what you concluded. *"I noticed your elbow dropped on the follow-through,"* not *"You have a sloppy follow-through."*
3. Ask a question before you offer an answer. *"What do you think happened there?"* Let them see it first.
4. Offer the correction in one clear sentence. Not a lecture. One sentence they can actually use.
5. End with belief. *"Try it once more — you've got this."*
6. When you see any improvement — jump on it. Yes, that's it. You feel that.

This process will build belief and make it all seem possible.

TWO-WORLDS APART

Words matter. *"You're sloppy"* and *"That was sloppy"* are two worlds apart. They feel entirely different to the kid receiving them. The first attacks the person. The second describes the moment. Use the second. Always.

Praising the Small Stuff

Most coaches praise the obvious — the goal, the ace, the great catch. And they should. But the coaches who build real athletes are the ones who praise the stuff nobody else notices. The weak-

side defender who rotated correctly. The second-line kid who cheered loudest for the starter. The player who lost the point but got their feet in the right place for the first time ever.

This is what Carnegie meant by "praise every improvement." Everyone. Not just the wins. The effort. The try. The incremental thing that proves the kid is growing. If you praise only outcomes, you build kids who collapse when outcomes are bad. If you praise process and effort and growth, you build kids who keep going.

THE EFFORT AUDIT

1. At your next practice, consciously look for three things to praise that have nothing to do with a goal, a point, or an outcome.
2. Praise them specifically. Not *"good job!"* but *"I saw you go back and help Jamie set up — that is exactly what this team is about."*
3. Make at least one of them public — in front of the team. Make at least one of them private — pulled aside.
4. Watch what happens to the athletes you praise over the next two weeks. You will notice a change.

GIVE THEM A REPUTATION TO LIVE UP TO

Carnegie's most powerful principle for building people is this: give them a fine reputation to live up to. If you tell a kid *"You're one of the hardest workers on this team,"* and you mean it, they will work harder. If you tell a kid *"You're someone the younger players look up to,"* they will start acting like it. You are not flattering them. You are showing them who they could be. This is rare. Be the one who does.

The Quiet Conversation

Every team has one. The kid who seems off. Something is happening — at home, at school, in their head — and you can feel it even if you cannot name it. This is the moment most volunteer coaches are not sure what to do. You are not a therapist. You are not their parent. You are the coach. And yet here you are, the adult in the room, and they are struggling.

Here is what to do. Pull them aside, not to interrogate, but to let them know they are seen. *"Hey — you've seemed a bit quiet today. Just wanted to check in. Everything okay?"* That is it. Whether they open or not is their choice. What matters is that they know an adult in their life noticed and cared enough to ask.

You would be shocked how many young athletes have never had this conversation with anyone. You may be the first. You may be the only. Do not underestimate what a thirty-second check-in can do.



PART THREE

HANDLING THE HARD STUFF

Parents, Losses, Benchings, and the
Worries That Keep You Up at Night.

PART THREE

HANDLING THE HARD STUFF

“Our life is what our thoughts make it.”
— Marcus Aurelius, quoted by Dale Carnegie

Every volunteer coach will tell you the same thing: the games are the easy part. The hard part is the parent’s email at 11:00 PM. The kid in tears after a benching. The loss that the team can’t seem to shake. The parent who corners you in the parking lot. The moment you second-guess yourself driving home, wondering if you are any good at this at all.

This section is about those moments. I will not pretend they get easier. They don’t. But there are ways to handle them that preserve your team, your sanity, and your own belief in the work you are doing.

The Parent Conversation

Ninety percent of parents you will coach with are wonderful — grateful, supportive, willing to help. About ten percent will test every ounce of patience you have. The ten percent are not bad people. They are usually worried, or hurt, or seeing their child’s experience through the lens of their own old wounds.

When a parent approaches you angry or upset, almost every instinct you have will be wrong. Do not defend yourself first. Do not explain your thinking. Do not argue with their version of events.

THE PARENT PLAYBOOK

1. Listen first. Do not interrupt. Let them get it all out. Most of what parents need in that moment is to feel heard.
2. Thank them for coming to you directly. *“I appreciate you bringing this to me. That’s better than having it build up.”*
3. Show empathy before you show logic. *“I can hear how hard this is. I know you just want what’s best for your kid.”* Even if you disagree with them.
4. Never have the conversation in front of the athlete or other parents. Move to a side. Book a phone call. Preserve dignity on both sides.
5. If you made a mistake, admit it quickly and clearly. If you did not, explain your thinking calmly, once. Do not argue. Do not rehash.
6. End with what comes next. *“Here’s what I’m going to do.”* Give them a clear forward motion, not a debate.

BEGIN IN A FRIENDLY WAY

Carnegie's principle: *"The only way to get the best of an argument is to avoid it."* With parents, this is gospel. You will never win an argument with an upset parent. You can, however, almost always find a way to leave them feeling heard and move the relationship forward. The parents you handle with grace in the tough moments will become your biggest allies for the rest of the season.

The Bench Conversation

Sooner or later, you are going to have to sit a kid down. Maybe they missed practice. Maybe someone else earned the spot. Maybe their effort has dropped. Whatever the reason, the way you handle this one conversation will determine whether they come back fighting or quietly check out of the season.

The worst thing you can do is avoid the conversation. Kids can feel the benching coming long before it happens. Not talking about it makes it worse. The second worst thing you can do is deliver it publicly, or in passing, or on the way out the door. This conversation deserves your full presence.

HOW TO BENCH WITH RESPECT

1. Pull them aside privately. Not at the bench. Not during a drill. A quiet moment before or after practice.
2. Get to the point. Kids respect directness. *"I want to let you know — Saturday's game, you'll be starting on the bench."*
3. Explain the why in one clean sentence. Not a lecture. One sentence they can understand.
4. Tell them what you want to see. Be specific. *"I want to see you sprint back on defense every time. Do that for two games and you're back in the lineup."*
5. End with belief. *"I chose you for this team for a reason. This isn't a statement about who you are — it's a moment we're both going to get through."*

LET THEM SAVE FACE

Carnegie's fifth principle of leadership: *"let the other person save face"*. Never, ever embarrass a young athlete publicly. A kid humiliated in front of their peers loses something that takes years to rebuild. A kid corrected with dignity comes back hungry. The difference is not about being soft. It is about being wise.

When the Team Is Losing

Every season has a stretch where things go sideways. The team loses three in a row. Heads drop. Confidence drains. Parents get quiet. You start questioning yourself. This is the test of your coaching — not the winning streaks, but the losing ones.

Here is what I have learned in thirty-four years: the team follows the coach's emotional state. If you get tighter, they get tighter. If you get frustrated, they get frustrated. If you panic and start changing everything, they lose their footing. Your calm is the single most valuable thing you can offer the team in a losing stretch.

THE LOSING STREAK PROTOCOL

1. Before you do anything, check your own energy. Are you frustrated? Disappointed? Panicked? The athletes will feel it. Settle yourself first.
2. Go back to the fundamentals. What was working when you were winning? Return to those things. Do not throw out the system.
3. Praise effort publicly. When the team is losing, effort is what you reinforce. Outcomes will come back. Effort is always available.
4. Have one-on-one conversations with your two or three most emotional players. A quick *"I believe in you — just keep working"* goes a long way.
5. Keep practices fun. A team in a slump needs to remember why they play. Do not make every practice an intense correction session.

The Worries That Keep You Up

Every honest coach I know has laid in bed at some point during a season replaying something. A conversation with a parent. A kid's face when you benched them. A game you could have coached differently. The worry that comes with coaching is real, and it is part of caring. It is not a sign that you are a bad coach. It is a sign that you are a coach who cares.

But worry, left unchecked, is corrosive. It steals your energy. It makes you less present at the next practice. It leaks into your family life, your work, your sleep. This is where Dale Carnegie's second great book — *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living* — has helped me more than I can say.

The Four Questions for a Worried Coach

When a worry is circling your head at 11:00 PM on a Sunday, put it on paper. Answer these four questions. You will sleep better, and you will coach better on Monday.

PUT THE WORRY ON PAPER

1. What exactly am I worried about? State it in one sentence. If you cannot, you are not worried about a thing — you are worried about a fog.
2. What is the worst that could realistically happen? Not the catastrophe your mind is spinning — the actual worst. Usually, it is smaller than you think.
3. What can I do about it? List every option, even the ones you would never choose. Volume first, quality second.
4. What is the one thing I will do first? Pick it. Commit to it. Then go to sleep.

LIVE IN DAY-TIGHT COMPARTMENTS

Carnegie's first principle on worry: *"live in day-tight compartments"*. Do today's coaching today. Let tomorrow arrive before you try to manage it. A young athlete does not need a coach who is mentally two weeks ahead or three games back. They need a coach who is fully present at this practice, right now. The rest of it — the what-ifs, the maybes, the replays — can wait.



PART FOUR

YOUR COACHING LEGACY

Why This Work Matters More Than
Anyone Tells You.

PART FOUR

YOUR COACHING LEGACY

“A person’s name is to that person the sweetest and most important sound in any language.”

— Dale Carnegie

I want to close this playbook by telling you something that the last thirty-four years of coaching have taught me — something I wish someone had told me in my first season.

The athletes you coach will forget most of what you teach them. The drills, the plays, the conditioning — most of it will fade. But they will not forget how you made them feel. They will not forget whether you believed in them. They will not forget the moment you pulled them aside after a bad game and told them you saw something in them that nobody else saw. They will carry that moment forward into relationships, marriages, careers, and — eventually — into how they coach their own kids someday.

That is your legacy as a coach. Not the trophies. Not the record. The human beings you helped build. You are quietly shaping the next generation in ways that will still be rippling fifty years from now. Most of what you do will be invisible. All of it will matter.

There is a reason I stayed in this work. There is a reason I took what I learned on a tennis court as a teenager and built a career out of teaching it to adults and leaders everywhere I go. The principles Dale Carnegie gave us nearly a century ago are not sport principles. They are not business principles. They are human principles. And coaching young athletes is one of the purest places in the world to practice them.

Thank you for the work you are doing. Thank you for showing up this season. Thank you for reading this far. The kids in your care are lucky to have you — more than they will ever know.

Coach well. Coach with heart.

The work is bigger than the scoreboard.

A PERSONAL NOTE

A FINAL WORD FROM ME



It is my sincerest hope that the ideas in this playbook find their way into your coaching — and into your life, your family, your business, and your community. These principles do not stay on a field. They travel with you.

At the Dale Carnegie Business Group, I am proud to be part of a team of instructors and coaches who work with tens of thousands of people every year, across hundreds of organizations here in Ontario and the Maritimes, helping build the kinds of teams, cultures, and leaders that organizations and communities desperately need. It is meaningful work, and I am grateful to get to do it.

If any of the ideas in this playbook speak to you, or if you are wondering how to bring something like this into your organization, your team, or the people you lead — I would love to hear from you. I mean that. One coach to another.

And please — if you have your own stories, lessons, and wisdom to share from your coaching journey, send them my way. I don't have all the answers, and no coach does. The best guide to coaching will always be the one we all build together.

Let's Stay in Touch!

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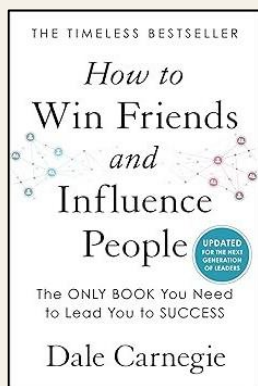


GO DEEPER

RESOURCES FOR THE COACH WHO WANTS MORE

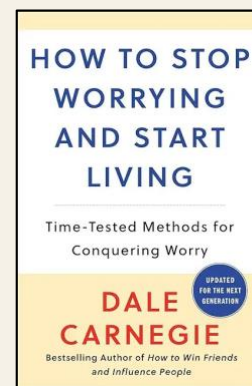
The principles in this playbook come from two books that I consider essential reading for any coach, leader, parent, or human being trying to do this life well. Both are still in print, have sold tens of millions of copies worldwide, and are now available in updated editions for a new generation.

If anything in this playbook sparked something in you, pick up one of these. Read a chapter a week. Talk about the ideas with your co-coach. Try one principle a month on your team. These books will meet you wherever you are and take you further.



How to Win Friends and Influence People *by Dale Carnegie*

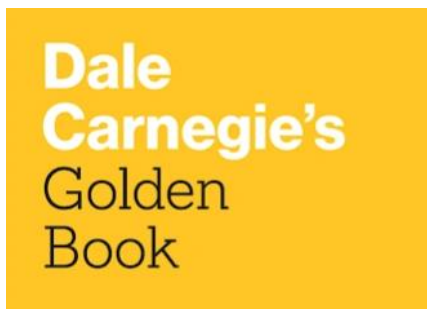
The foundational text on human relations. The principles of connection, persuasion, and leadership used throughout this playbook come from here.



How to Stop Worrying and Start Living *by Dale Carnegie*

The companion volume on managing the mind. Essential reading for any coach who has lost sleep over their team, their decisions, or their own doubts.

For more human relation principles, coaching tips, and how to manage stress and improve your attitude, scan the QR Code to download Dale Carnegie's Golden Book apps:





Dale Carnegie Business Group — Ontario & Maritimes

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