



PAVING THE ROAD TO SUCCESS

When Peter Handal read Dale Carnegie's 1936 bestseller *How to Win Friends and Influence People* during high school in the 1950s, he had no way of knowing that, five decades later, he would become the chairman, president and CEO of Dale Carnegie & Associates Inc. worldwide, now the oldest and most renowned training company in the world. The high-spirited New Yorker now heads a global franchise that spans 76 countries and serves over 400 Fortune 500 companies, and despite these trying economic times remains a staunch believer in spreading a culture of positive employee engagement.

By Shaimaa Fayed
Photos by Victoria Hazou

Peter Handal advocates a simple management rule: focus on the human resources of an organization. But to him, the maxim is not one to which he pays mere lip service; it is a solid belief system, and pivotal in his view to the success of any organization. While business leaders have traditionally focused on developing their tangible assets and the technical skills of their workforce, Handal is resolute that the development of people's soft skills is essential to the success of both the individual and the company.

"Warren Buffet is one of [Dale Carnegie & Associates'] most famous graduates," asserts Handal. "In a biography of him that just came out, *The Snowball*, 16 times in the book they talk about Dale Carnegie." He adds that during the annual meeting of Berkshire Hathaway, Buffet's conglomerate, in Omaha last May, Buffet, now the world's most successful investor, was asked about the reasons behind his success. He cited two, says Handal. The first was his value investing approach, which Handal likens to "hard skills," and the second was his Dale Carnegie training. "It's the soft skills that really seem to differentiate people," explains Handal. "Most people have a certain level of intelligence, most have a certain knowledge of their businesses, most people work pretty hard, but what makes them really successful is their ability to communicate, their self-confidence, their soft skills, their ability to relate to other people."

Born in 1940s New York, Handal embodies a brazen characteristic of the city that never sleeps – indefatigable energy. In addition to his position as chairman, president and CEO of Dale Carnegie & Associates Inc., he is also CEO of J4P Associates, a real estate company based in Baltimore, and president of COWI International Group, a management consulting firm. He is a member of

the Industry Leadership Council of the American Association of Exporters & Importers (AAEI) and also of the US government's Industry Trade Advisory Committee for Distribution Services. He is president of the board of the Metropolitan Opera Club, and an active contributor to many not-for-profit causes. These include SFDS Development Corporation, which provides affordable housing for underprivileged groups in Harlem, and De Sales Assisted Living Operating Corp., which provides assistance for older people. "I really believe it's important to work in ways in which you can help people," says Handal.

His manifold interests and clear ability to communicate well in a variety of fields are the outcome of his diverse academic and professional background. A graduate of political science and economics at Georgetown University, Handal went on to pursue his MBA at the University of Chicago in 1963 with an emphasis on finance, after which he embarked on a career across many business sectors. "I went to work initially with Exxon for a few years in the Treasurer's Department and the New Investments Department," explains Handal, after which he worked in his family's importing business, which he ended up buying and turning into a children's apparel brand, Just 4 Kids, which manufactured products in 22 countries in the 1980s. In 1991, he sold the company. "I believe in strategic planning. I decided that the risk-reward ratio was not good."

It was at this point that Handal resolved to take some time off from the corporate world and travel extensively with his wife, Patricia. After touring many countries, however, his fervent drive and energy for work caught up with him. He began undertaking consulting work for companies in Europe – primarily Poland – and the US, including such companies as Joseph A. Bank, an apparel company, and Cole National, which owns the

optical brand Pearle Vision. In the late 1990s, Handal was approached by a board member of Dale Carnegie & Associates Inc., who asked him to take on consulting services for the company. "I was very blunt and gave the board of directors my opinions about the problems and opportunities that Dale Carnegie had, and they asked me to go on the board of directors in 1999," he says.

Only six years later, in a vote of confidence, Donna Dale Carnegie, Carnegie's daughter and the previous chairman of the company, asked Handal to become chairman of the board. To what does he attribute his fast-earned success? "I think I have a good ability to get a good group of people around me... it's the people that really have been successful. And I think the fact that I read *How to Win Friends and Influence People* in high school really had a big effect on me. While I don't do it perfectly, I think I practice most of the Dale Carnegie principles pretty well."

Dale Carnegie & Associates' self-development courses are based on the principles outlined in the original Dale Carnegie bestseller. "The flagship Dale Carnegie course can be completed in 12 weeks or condensed into three days," says Handal. "It covers confidence, interpersonal relations, sales training, leadership training, presentations – it's the standard course." The interactive exercises may be slightly tweaked to accommodate different cultures, Handal explains. "In Japan, we don't shake hands, people bow, that's the culture... Those are the local cultural changes that we make." But he maintains that the actual content of the course is universal: "The basic programs and classes are the same. In Spain, I went into session five of the Dale Carnegie class in Barcelona last week. I don't understand a word of Spanish except 'gracias,' but I knew exactly what was going on. It's the same session five that goes on in Tokyo, in Munich, in New York."

Asked about the lessons he personally derived from Carnegie's book,

Handal cites two: "be a good listener" and "think and talk in terms of the other person's interests." He argues that while these lessons may appear to be common sense, they are not necessarily common practice. "I think the reason that [Dale Carnegie & Associates] has survived and thrived over such a long period of time, and I think will for another 100 years, is because human nature hasn't changed and therefore the fundamental principles that Dale Carnegie is based on don't change at all. Unfortunately, because human nature doesn't change, people don't do some of the things that make so much sense and so we are constantly in the business of training people and reminding people that they will be more successful if they follow these principles." Handal notes that Dale Carnegie will be celebrating its 100th anniversary in 2012, testimony to the success of the company. "Dale Carnegie had an insight into human nature that was unique."

For skeptics who would dismiss the company's core principles as self-help philosophies with intangible business outcomes, Handal is quick to point out that in some markets, Dale Carnegie & Associates guarantees three times the return on investment on the courses. Among many statistics, he cites the findings of a pilot study conducted on 148 North American respondents by Dale Carnegie & Associates in 2003. The study measured the impact of the Dale Carnegie Sales Advantage Program. Eighty-one percent of respondents reported an increase in their sales during the eight-week period that the Sales Advantage Program ran, says Handal.

A passionate believer in the capacity of employee engagement to make or break an organization, Handal argues that the current climate of economic doubt and uncertainty calls for greater investment in human resources. The US market, the worst hit by the recession, has seen some sectors, notably the financial and automotive markets, suf-



fering greatly, says Handal. All the more reason why employers should invest in training, he adds. "Employee engagement is necessary in these times especially. The odds are that the talk around any company in the US is: 'Am I going to get fired tomorrow? Is the company going to be in business tomorrow? Is anyone going to want our product tomorrow?' Employees come

to the office, punch the clock, gossip around the water-cooler and surf the Net looking for jobs. This is a very serious problem." He adds that as companies downsize their human resources, they must find ways to boost the productivity of the leaner teams in their organizations.

Despite the ripples of the financial crisis, the US remains Dale Carnegie's

largest single market, generating 44 percent of the company's revenues, the remaining 56 percent coming from international operations. "Our largest category is manufacturing, followed by retail, IT, telecom, health services and

"[We select] people who really want to do the job, are dedicated to it and are consistent with our culture." Handal explains that the trainers undergo a rigorous training process before they become practitioners and

managing the world's largest training company, Handal brings to the company a vivacious spirit and keen belief in human potential, which define both his career and the time he spends outside of the workplace helping less privileged people in his home city. Handal is a solid communicator, a business leader who's learned how to win friends and influence people, and, with 200 Dale Carnegie offices around the world, is adamant to show others how they can pave their own roads to success. The philosophy he applies to his work is driven by the vision he has for his own life: "My first strategic plan is to be happy." ■

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government," explains Handal. "Within manufacturing, we do very large business with aerospace and defence contractors and, until this year, very large business with the automobile [industry]."

Today, the Middle East is Dale Carnegie's fastest growing market. The first Middle Eastern office opened in Egypt in 2002, and the company's presence in the region solidified quickly, explains Handal. Since the set-up of the Egypt office, Dale Carnegie has opened in Morocco, Dubai, Qatar, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. "There is a receptivity, a need for Dale Carnegie," he says. "What we do is something that, in a growing environment like [the Middle East], there is a real market for... The second reason is that the economies here have really been very strong; these are very rapidly growing areas."

"While the headlines would suggest that everything is awful everywhere, that is not the case," says Handal, listing the many markets in which Dale Carnegie's business continues to grow. "In Saudi Arabia it doesn't make a difference if oil is down to \$40 a barrel. Our business there is still booming. The same in the US in healthcare, and in the telecom business in India."

Even as the global recession advances, Handal asserts confidently that Dale Carnegie will continue to do what it does best: training its trainers — 2,700 in total around the world.

are made to address a live audience before they take on the job.

As he takes on the huge task of

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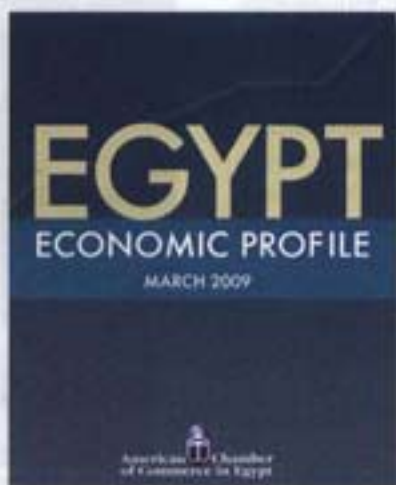


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