H ow often have we been walking somewhere and have been angry or depressed, then suddenly someone passes us by and says hello with a bright smile on their face? I am willing to bet that it turned your mind around, because I know it has done so for me. Smiles are contagious and tend to make people feel better, sometimes without even knowing why. Many times, during the course of my career, I have encountered people whose language I did not speak, but I started my interaction with them with a smile, and it changed the tenor of the translated discussion from what it might have been to something more productive. It can be that impactful, but as with other topics discussed in this book, it must be a conscious decision to offer the smile—even when we do not want to do so. That is when it is even more difficult because we also need to smile with our eyes for it to be genuine. Think about it though—a smile accompanied by gentle words and kind looks can overcome a great deal of animosity.
The nice thing about smiles is that they are free of charge, and it is a small part of the universal human language that everyone, no matter where you are, can readily understand. It opens doors and starts friendships. It eases tensions—all of which happens without ever saying a word. As Mother Teresa wrote in *The Joy in Loving*, “Every time you smile at someone, it is an action of love, a gift to that person, a beautiful thing.”¹ Though it depends on the person and type of response, smiling requires less effort too; it only takes 17 muscles in your face to smile but it takes 42 muscles to frown. Think of the expression as an energy-saving device if nothing else. Lastly, it can offer a significant boost to a negative situation because of its ability to lift moods and lend strength to those around us.

Thomas Paine was considered by many to be the voice of the American Revolution in that the pamphlets (the social media of the day) he produced not only motivated colonials to go through with the incredibly daunting task of fighting for independence from the foremost military power of the time—Great Britain—though lacking forces to back their efforts. Paine’s publications helped to sustain the fight during the times when optimism was low and options were few. He seemed to have a knack for hitting the right chord with these early Americans, and they responded to him overwhelmingly by making him one of the most widely read authors of the day. Some have called him the Father of the American Revolution; in early 1776, he wrote a pamphlet titled *Common Sense* that made the case for rebelling against the king of England in clear and concise terms that most people could

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readily understand. It provided the motivation for the colonies to come together to engage in the fight.2

Unfortunately, the revolution was not an immediate success for the American cause. By the end of the same year he wrote *Common Sense* and rallied people to the cause, the fight for independence was lagging. The Continental Army under General George Washington had spent the summer after the Declaration of Independence was officially signed on 2 August 1776 facing savage defeat through the coming months.3 They had tried to defend New York City, but were driven out of the area in a series of embarrassing losses, and then they had to give up the city after terrible losses during the Battle of Long Island on 27 August. They were then driven west across northern New Jersey. By December, what was left of the Continental Army crossed the Delaware River into Pennsylvania and collected every boat they could find on the river to prevent the British Army from crossing also to finish them off. Enlistments were expiring and morale was low going into the Christmas season.4 Thomas Paine reacted by writing a series of pamphlets called *The American Crisis* that started with the well-known words, “These are the times that try men’s souls. The summer soldier and sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country; but he that stands by it now, deserves the love and thanks of

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3 The Continental Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence on 4 July, but it was not officially signed until a month later. See “Declaration of Independence (1776),” National Archives, accessed 16 August 2022.

Figure 26. Thomas Paine, engraving by George Romney
Source: images of American Political History, National Archives and Records Administration.
man and woman.” It is not a long pamphlet, but the sentiment, in addition to the above discussion about smiling, is particularly apt here: “I love the man that can smile in trouble, that can gather strength in distress, and grow brave by reflection.”

I know from experience that this type of person becomes the rock to which everyone else clings to get through a tough situation. Gallows humor can seem quite dark at times to those outside the situation, but making people smile in tough circumstances is one of the most powerful tools in the arsenal of a leader.

George Washington exhibited these characteristics and, perhaps as a result of Paine’s pamphlet, he decided to cross the Delaware River again and make a surprise attack on the Hessian garrison in Trenton, New Jersey, on 26 December. These troops originated from one of the German states (Germany was not unified as a country until 1871) that the British had hired to help them suppress the colonial rebellion. They were particularly unpopular with Americans due to their brutality and the mercenary nature of how they came to fight in the colonies. The attack was launched late in the day on Christmas and went well into the next morning as the Revolutionary Army took hours to cross the Delaware River and then march many kilometers south along the New Jersey side of the river to enter Trenton during a driving rain and sleet storm. As they were crossing the Delaware River, General Washington, knowing how tense everyone was, decided to lighten the mood by joking with his chief artillery officer Colonel Henry Knox. Knox weighed almost 300 pounds and, when he got into the boat with Washington, the general quipped that Knox might sink their boat. Troops in the boat heard the lighthearted jest and shared the humor along the lines, likely lifting spirits in the face of the coming battle. This desperate and dar-

5 Thomas Paine, The American Crisis, published 13 volumes between 23 December 1776 and 19 April 1783.
The Battle of Trenton accomplished a complete surprise on the Hessians and may have been the victory that saved the patriot cause.  

Dale Carnegie also understood the value of a smile. He was born in the late 1880s and lived until 1955. As a writer and lecturer, Carnegie was strongly devoted to self-improvement. He is best known for his book *How to Win Friends and Influence People* and the belief that it was possible to change people’s behavior by altering how one behaves toward them. The poem below highlights this concept and why he believes a smile is one of the most important ingredients for positive interpersonal relationships:

**The Value of a Smile**

It costs nothing, but creates much;

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7 For more on the battle and the events that would follow, see Benson Bobrick, *Angel in the Whirlwind: The Triumph of the American Revolution* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997).
It enriches those who receive, without impoverishing those who give;
It happens in a flash, and the memory of it sometimes lasts forever;
None are so rich they can get along without it, and none so poor but are richer for its benefits;
It creates happiness in the home, fosters good will in a business, and is the countersign of friends;
It is rest to the weary, daylight to the discouraged, sunshine to the sad, and nature’s best antidote for trouble;
Yet it cannot be bought, begged, borrowed or stolen, for it is of no earthly good to anybody until it is given away;
Nobody needs to smile so much as those who have none left to give.
Smile, smile, smile.\(^8\)

Smiling also has positive physical effects on the person smiling. *Forbes* columnist Ron Gutman once wrote in “The Untapped Power of Smiling” that

Smiling stimulates our brain’s reward mechanisms in a way that even chocolate, a well-regarded pleasure-inducer, cannot match. In a study conducted in the UK (using an electromagnetic brain scan machine and heart-rate monitor to create “mood-boosting values” for various stimuli), British researchers found that one smile can provide the same level of brain stimulation as up to 2,000 chocolate bars; they also found that smiling can be as stimulating as receiving up to 16,000 Pounds Sterling in cash. That’s a 25 grand smile . . . it’s not bad . . . at

Figure 28. Dale Carnegie, ca. 1936
Source: National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution.
400 daily smiles quite a few children out there feel like Mark Zuckerberg every day!

And unlike lots of chocolate, lots of smiling can actually make you healthier. Smiling has documented therapeutic effects, and has been associated with: reduced stress hormone levels (like cortisol, adrenaline, and dopamine), increased health and mood enhancing hormone levels (like endorphins), and lowered blood pressure.

If that’s not enough, smiling also makes us look good in the eyes of others. A recent Penn State University study confirmed that when we smile we not only appear more likeable and courteous, but we’re actually perceived to be more competent. . . .

So now, whenever you want to look great and competent, improve your marriage, or reduce your stress . . . or whenever you want to feel as good as when you’ve enjoyed a stack of high quality chocolate without incurring the caloric cost, or as if you randomly found 25 grand in the pocket of a jacket you hadn’t worn for ages . . . or when you want to tap into a superpower and help yourself and others live longer, healthier happier lives . . . SMILE :-)⁹

Last, in a sermon the other day, the priest said something that really struck home. He was thinking about when he was young and saw pictures of Mother Teresa. No matter what the circumstances were in any of the pictures he saw of her, dealing with desperately sick and needy people amid unimaginable squalor, she was always smiling. She had virtually nothing that most of us would consider something to smile about, but she smiled. All he could say about it was that what-

ever it was that made her smile all the time, he wanted some of it. It had to be powerful.

Questions to Consider

1. When was the last time you saw someone sad or angry and smiled at them, changing their mood and enabling them to smile as well?
2. Have you ever been lifted out of a bad mood by someone smiling at you?
3. Do you try to start every greeting and/or meeting with a smile? Watch the effect that it has.

Suggested Further Study


This is not a widely known book, but I found it to be very good in its depiction of how desperate a move crossing the Delaware and taking Trenton was for Washington and the ragtag remnants of his army. It can be argued that had he not made this move, the war would have been over.


This is a classic, but it never seems to go out of date. *How to Win Friends and Influence People* focuses on the art of human relations.


As stated in the chapter, these pamphlets passed for blogging at the time. Paine had such a way with words that he rallied many people to the revolutionary cause. It is short, but well worth the read even today.
Same with this work; written at the worst time in the revolutionary cause, it stirred enough people to continue to fight, and maybe for Washington to take the chances he did at Trenton, that it can be said it is partly responsible for our eventual victory against the British . . . seven years later.