

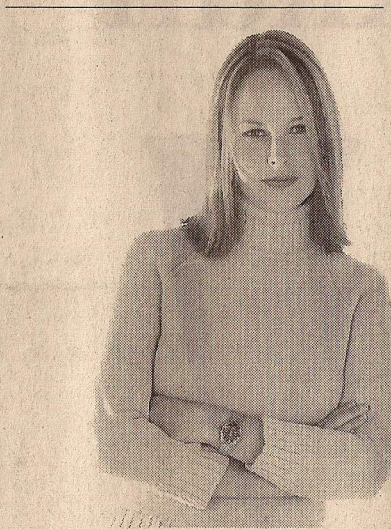
How to deceive friends and manipulate people

It all started a year ago, when an old friend from high school was visiting town and brought me a book. It wasn't just a gift, he said, it was a new way of looking at the world. "This book changed my entire life," he added. "I owe my career to this book."

The friend in question is a highly successful and ambitious young animator living in L.A. and making buckets of money drawing talking sea sponges for Disney. He's a smart, talented, hard-working guy who has earned every inch of his success, so I decided to give the book, *The 48 Laws of Power*, a chance. The volume, as it turned out, was not so much a book as a bald-faced dictum on how to charm, cheat and flatter other people (namely those in positions of power) into doing things they don't want to (such as giving you more money, power etc.).

I'm not much for self-help guides, particularly those that promise success but are written by unsuccessful people you've never heard of. You've got to think: Either this author isn't following his own advice, or his advice is flawed. Either way, it's not a very good recommendation for the book.

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In the months since reading *The 48 Laws of Power*, I have noticed dozens of others like it. These manuals of manipulation — spearheaded by Dale Carnegie's sixties bestseller *How To Win Friends and Influence People* — are part of a new self-help genre dedicated to encouraging otherwise decent people to behave in deceptive ways in order to reap the supposed

benefits of social manipulation, be they financial, romantic or political.

Don't Take No for an Answer: Five Proven Steps that Get You to Yes is a guide for "exceptional success in business and everyday life" written by Bruno Gideon that recently landed on my desk. In it, Gideon outlines a not very exceptional list of recommendations for hoodwinking others into doing what you want them to do through a process of business negotiations.

In the introduction, he even provides a moral defence of his method of manipulation: "Getting your own way," he writes, "is a creative process calling for new ideas and new, unconventional ways of thinking. Remember that someone 'losing' to someone who has mastered this process is learning; their own game is being elevated."

The dating industry, which preys on the lonely and financially liquid among us, has also been bitten by the manipulation bug. Bookstore shelves bulge with best-selling guides about snagging and bagging the right mate, including *The Rules*, *The Surrendered Single*, *Make Every Girl Want You* and Rachel Greenwald's much-gabbed

about *Find a Husband after 35 Using What I Learned at Harvard Business School: A Simple 15-Step Action Program*.

In her book, Greenwald commands women to package, market and scheme their way into a happy marriage. Her supposedly simple program is actually more like a boot camp. Desperate singletons are instructed to quit work for a year if they can afford it and devote every fibre of their being to a cunning campaign of grooming, parties, dating services and social networking in an effort to find a suitable mate.

How does Greenwald intend to provoke thoughtful single women into taking on this insanely arduous and desperate-seeming personality diet? By spreading hysteria, of course! "Remember," she writes, "after age 35, it's Marriage 911. This is an emergency!"

Yikes. I don't want to sound like a Pollyanna here, but when did it become okay to go to such lengths in order to manipulate other people into doing what you want them to? Is there no benefit to be had in knowing that you got the promotion, or the proposal or whatever it is you're after because the person

who bestowed it gave of his of her own volition, rather than having been tricked by means of some book?

And besides, are business associates and romantic partners really this easily manipulated? I've never tried the Rules, or Gideon's five proven steps to yes, but I suspect most people I work or socialize with could see through me if I did. For starters, I wouldn't be behaving like *me*, which, I find, is always a dead giveaway of ulterior motives.

According to author and therapist Catherine Gildiner, while manipulation can be an effective tool for getting your way with others, it's also a fundamentally unhealthy way to conduct relationships. "There is a school of thought," she said in a recent interview, "that says if you control yourself, then it's easier to control others. B.F. Skinner, for instance, says it's easy to control other people — but only for a short period of time."

Gildiner takes the example of children, who, she says, are extraordinarily easy to manipulate through shame. But exercising complete control over other peo-