

Think and grow Rich
Napoleon Hill

50 new reviews a year for an 80-year-old book? Yes! This is the classic you have to have read

This book came out in 1937; my edition is copyrighted 1960. It is quaint; it is a product of its time. However, given that by most measures it was a better time, the book is worth reading.

The author assumes that your objective is to grow rich. Although he cites successes from other fields, such as the prophet Mohammed and Mahatma Gandhi, he always returns to the notion of money. He is very concrete, advising readers to have a specific monetary goal in mind, write it down, think about it daily, and plot their path to that end. Specific goals and specific plans are at the heart of Hill's philosophy. He backs it up with a sort of mysticism. Although not overtly Christian, he makes frequent reference to tapping our "sixth sense" and to the "Infinite Intelligence."

He assumes that this is true of people of all races. His anecdotes are a large part of the charm of the book, and a couple are about black success stories. The inside jacket notes that his last book was entitled "Think and grow rich: a Black Choice." Throughout the book he advocates a colorblind approach to people as the best recipe for success. Take each person on his own merits.

His message is consistent with other self-help books of the era, such as Dale Carnegie and "The Power of Positive Thinking." Once you make up your mind, and convince yourself you can do it, you are halfway there. Each person should look within his soul for his strengths, identify and overcome his weaknesses. Hill is fond of lists. He enumerates the negatives that most of us must overcome. Here is, for instance, his list of "The Seven Major Negative Emotions (to be avoided)". They are fear, jealousy, hatred, revenge, greed, superstition, and anger. On the positive side, he names desire, faith, love, sex, enthusiasm, romance and hope.

The lists are interesting. He gives more credit to sex than may be due, offering the opinion that men's sex drive impels them to success, and it is quite different than love and romance, other entries in the list. Where he is on the money is observing that salesmen tend to be used highly sexed, charmers who are quite frequently capable seducers. We could note also that at the time of the writing successful men, up to and including Roosevelt, had mistresses and it was not considered something amiss. The book does not cover successful women – there were not that many in Hill's day and age – and it certainly does not address sexualities other than hetero.

Among his lists are 31 major causes of failure. The second and third ones are right on the money – lack of a well-defined purpose in life, lack of ambition to aim above mediocrity. He is saying that unless you desire to succeed, you won't. The most notable is the first item in the list: unfavorable hereditary background. He writes "There is but little, if anything, which can be done for people who are born with a deficiency in brainpower.... Observe with profit, however, that this is the only one of the 31 causes of failure which may not be easily corrected by any individual." Hill must assume that anybody with the gumption and literacy level required to read his book is probably a candidate for success. I would agree with that, but it is worth noting that these may be a minority of mankind.

Hill's observations are somewhat tied to his place and time. He observes that most men achieve success between the ages of 40 and 60. This may have been true in the age of the robber barons, when success was attributable to getting along with other people, wheeling and dealing

and managing. Things have certainly changed in the Internet age. Bill Gates, Jeff Bezos, Mark Zuckerberg, Larry Ellison, Andy Grove, Pierre Omidyar, Elon Musk, Sergei Brin, Michael Dell, Steve Jobs, Steve Wozniak, and almost all of the other computer billionaires were well on their way by the time they hit 30. He also wanted to observe that behind every successful man there was a successful woman. That has not been the case with these young billionaires. They got underway as single individuals, and their wives have not, in general, been critical to their success. Some, like Peter Thiel and Tim Cook, are gay.

All things considered, however, the book has held up remarkably well in the 80 years since it appeared. The key to success is the desire to succeed and the willingness to work hard in that direction. Hill's lists will be valuable reference points along the way. What else can one say except five stars?