
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

Self-help

This is not a word-for-word transcript

Neil

Welcome to 6 Minute English. I'm Neil, and today we're going to improve ourselves.

Rob

Haha, how could we possibly get any better? I'm Rob, and yes, today's topic is **self-help** – and the **self-help** industry.

Neil

What do we mean by **self-help**? Well, it means trying to improve yourself – psychologically, economically or in other ways – without seeking official help.

Rob

For example, bookshops these days are full of titles which claim to boost your self-confidence, your wealth, your love life... or your career!

Neil

Yes, in just seven days! There's a clear demand for this kind of thing – the **self-help** industry is worth \$10bn in the US alone.

Rob

That's a lot. That includes things like gym memberships, diet plans and life coaching apps.

Neil

We'll be looking at why. But first, the **self-help** industry has been around for a long time. Which of these well-known books was published first?

- a) How to Win Friends and Influence People
- b) Think and Grow Rich
- c) The Law of Attraction

Rob

Mmm. I could do with some help here. I'll go with the first one – How to Win Friends and Influence People.

Neil

OK, well before we go further, let's take a trip inside a bookshop in Manchester to find out which **self-help** books are selling well.

Rob

Let's listen to Emma Marshall, a manager at Waterstones bookshop. What's popular now?

Emma Marshall, Assistant Manager, Waterstones

At the moment we're in the tidying up, getting rid of things **trend**. But before that we saw colouring in, which became a huge thing. It's kind of **dwindling** now, because these sorts of **trends** come in and then they go. Like last year we saw 'hygge', which is the Danish art of living well, apparently. So we're taking from all sorts of cultures. And so I think the **trend** right now is about slowing down in your life.

Neil

Emma says there are a couple of **trends** right now. A **trend**, here, means something new which is popular for a period of time.

Rob

Yes, so she mentioned tidying up and getting rid of things. Would you buy a book about tidying up, Neil?

Neil

I'd be more likely to buy a book about it than actually tidy up! She also mentioned a current trend about slowing down in our lives.

Rob

I can agree with that! And previous **trends** included colouring-in – these books have black and white outline pictures that you fill in with colours.

Neil

I used to do that as a child. Very **therapeutic!**

Rob

Therapeutic – making you feel more relaxed and less anxious – it's related to the word therapy...

Neil

Although the colouring-in **trend** is **dwindling** - it's becoming weaker. They're selling fewer colouring-in books.

Rob

So – **trends** come and go, but the industry is **going from strength to strength**.

Neil

To go from strength to strength means to remain strong, or get even stronger! Why?

Rob

Dr Jennifer Wild, a psychologist from Oxford University, believes that the internet is a big factor.

Neil

We've got used to searching for solutions online, and now these solutions even include how to fix or improve our lives.

Rob

And psychologist Caroline Beaton, writing on Forbes.com, said she believes that **millennials** are a big factor.

Neil

How do we define the term '**millennial**'? Also known as Generation Y – are people born between the mid-1980s and early 2000s. It's a common term in the news – often because people born in this time in the West are seen to have certain characteristics.

Rob

They're sometimes described as lazy and obsessed with themselves – and while that's not necessarily true, Caroline Beaton says **millennials** are highly self-critical.

Neil

Self-critical – they are aware of their own faults – which also means they're more likely to spend time on money on **self-help**. She says they spend twice as much as Generation Xers. Generation X refers to people born between the late 60s and around 1980.

Rob

And one more possible reason why the **self-help** industry does well: it's very resistant to recessions. When the economy does badly – as we say it goes into recession – people are perhaps even more likely to reach for **self-help** to improve their situation.

Neil

So there we are. Now, let's go back to another recession – the Great Depression of the 1930s in America – and to my question about which **self-help** book was published first?

Rob

Well – I said a) How to Win Friends and Influence People.

Neil

In fact – two of these books were published in the late 1930s, How to Win Friends and Influence People, by Dale Carnegie, was first in 1936. It has since sold over 30 million copies.

Think and grow rich, by Napoleon Hill, was published in 1937, and is believed to have sold over 100 million copies!

Rob

That's a lot of self-help. Wow – have you read either of them?

Neil

I haven't read either of them but, perhaps, I should

Rob

Well, before we rush home and improve ourselves, let's improve our vocabularies.

Neil

Of course – today we had: **self-help** - the activity of improving yourself – physically, mentally or in other ways – often through courses and books.

Rob

There are lots of **trends** in the **self-help** industry. And we also see **trends** in fashion, in music, in popular culture... Like the **trend** for men to grow beards.

Neil

Are you talking about me? Anyway, I think the beard trend is **dwindling**. It's getting smaller, less influential.

Rob

Really? I stroke my beard here. I think it's very **therapeutic**. It makes me relax and feel good.

Neil

Maybe you're right. What about our next phrase – to **go from strength to strength**?

Rob

You could say a business is **going from strength to strength** if it's earning a lot of money.

Neil

Indeed. And what about our term for young people – **millennial**. Are you a **millennial**, Rob?

Rob

Didn't quite scraped in there. I'm still a Generation X. But I do like to think I'm in touch with what **millennials** do. Which includes – having lots of different social media accounts.

Neil



Just like us – do look up BBC Learning English on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube.

Rob

And good luck with your self-improvement!

Both

Bye!