

Introduction

Here's how these things start.

You are in a business review meeting where people are presenting their goals for the coming 12 months, following a tough year. Everyone is presenting wildly optimistic strategies for growth that are totally disconnected from each other and supported by sketchy data. You're sure that if you went around the room and asked each person, "What is our company's core strategy?" you'd get as many different answers as there are people. But you also know that the desperation behind these unrealistic commitments is being fueled by people not wanting to be seen as uncommitted or incompetent.

It's annual performance review season, and everyone is nervous about whether they'll get a raise. People are worried the boss will only give to his "favorites," so everyone is busy embellishing their accomplishments while diminishing everyone else's to make their case. There's a widespread feeling that the game is rigged.

You walk out of a meeting during which a major problem was discussed, but no clear decision was made about how to address it—no one even talked about the real reasons for it. Despite this, everyone exchanged knowing glances about the obviously unspoken explanations. Now it's unclear what's supposed to happen—and the people who *should* be taking charge seem curiously relieved there was no resolution.

Two historically rivaling departments are facing a major customer problem and are forced to work together to resolve it. Each is blaming the other for the problem, arguing over whose budget should pay to fix it and exaggerating the other department's responsibility for the calamity.

Do any of these scenes sound familiar? These are more than just routine irritating experiences in organizational life. They are the conditions that set the stage for much bigger problems. Left unresolved, here are the crossroads that can follow.

In the mid-1980s, two manufacturing companies learned that their products were poisoning people, in some cases, fatally.

One of the companies, which had suspected this was the case for decades, mounted a colossal cover-up, continuing to poison and kill people for another 15 years. The other launched a comprehensive investigation into their entire manufacturing process, leading to a transformation of their supply chain that included using only organic raw materials that no longer poisoned people.

After emerging from the 2008 financial crisis, financial services corporations had to find new ways to compete. Exploiting the deregulation that had allowed their industry to issue questionably backed subprime mortgages to high-risk borrowers with poor credit was no longer an option. One financial services powerhouse doubled down on restoring trust with their customers and ramping up high levels of service across all their markets. Another firm, (once) one of the highest-regarded companies in the world, hatched one of the most corrupt schemes in corporate history, cross-selling hundreds of millions of dollars of unauthorized products to unknowing customers.

Two employees from two different companies are each sitting around a conference table in meetings with their respective boss and peers. In both meetings, people face a complex problem that presents a major threat to the company's future. In one meeting, amidst a spirited conversation about what could be done to solve the problem, the employee offers a wildly unorthodox idea that at first draws silence from her group, making her feel uncomfortable for having spoken up. But her boss sees something insightful in the idea, invites the team to build on it, and the conversation leads to a breakthrough. In the other meeting, after finishing a long tirade about how disappointed he is, the boss asks his team for their ideas on what needs to happen to solve their problem. The room grows more silent as the boss grows more impatient. The employee in that meeting knows how to solve the problem but concludes the risk of speaking up is just too great, so he chooses to remain silent.

In organizations all over the world, people stumble upon crossroads like these daily. Some appear inconsequential, like the earlier scenes. Others show up with world-changing implications, like the latter scenes. When the rubber hits the road, some companies and leaders make inspired choices of integrity and courage. Others, well, don't. We all want to believe we'd be the honest hero in the story if faced with the challenge.

But would we? What determines which way things turn out? What influences how we choose one option over another?

Those are the very questions this book seeks to answer.

Me, And How I Got Here

Several years ago, in my role as consultant and advisor at my firm, Navalent, a strategic organizational change and executive leadership consultancy, I was sitting across the conference table from the executive vice president of strategy for a \$30 billion global food company. Let's call him Rick. His company had just been through a failed acquisition. What he told me that day stunned me: they'd suspected all along it would go bust:

We spent nearly \$3.5 billion and we all were afraid the whole time it would fail, but kept our mouths shut. It didn't fit our portfolio, and we knew we didn't actually have the capability to be successful together. But we did it anyway. Deal fever kicked in. We embellished data, we denied our concerns, and we exaggerated the upsides we doubted would ever materialize. In hindsight, we were too afraid to admit the risks. If I'm honest, we'd lost our core identity while the world of food had dramatically changed around us. And because we don't really know who we are anymore, we're grasping at straws and trying to make things up as we go.

The carnage in the wake of this failure was extensive—damaged careers and families, demoralized employees, cynical customers, distrusting and angry shareholders, and the loss of public trust.

Why did a group of reasonably smart, well-meaning people so willingly lie to themselves, their employees, and their shareholders? How was it possible that such destructive choices were made by leaders with so many punishing outcomes? Why couldn't they have just been honest with each other?

In the years since this meeting with Rick, my colleagues and I have had hundreds of similar conversations and conducted thousands of interviews that sounded just like his. Whether we are speaking with global powerhouse

brands, promising start-ups, midcaps or non-profits, the patterns in the stories feel the same regardless of the size or type of organization. During these comprehensive conversations, employees prophesy about the impending doom they believe their company is ignoring. They lament about their boss's pathological behaviors. They opine with deep insight about the "unfair" dysfunctions surrounding them and offer practical wisdom about what they would do to correct them if they could. They even confess their own shortcomings and contributions to the madness.

They're willing to speak honestly to a stranger, but not to their colleagues, and not when it matters most. Sometimes the reason is a sin of omission, and not speaking up. Other times it's a more active form of duplicity—embellishing data, throwing a colleague under the bus, or making promises they know they can't keep. But either way, the consequences are devastating.

I left that meeting with Rick feeling particularly discouraged about my work as an organizational behavior expert, and with a sense of futility about my role in creating organizations that were more honest, just, and fulfilling. I'd devoted my entire career to helping organizations be honest with themselves because I believed that self-honesty was the only real path to transformation. But if they weren't willing to take action on what they'd learned about themselves and the advice I offered, what was the point?

I stewed over this. And then my problem got personal.

I realized I was no different than Rick. Scenes of my own dishonesty and injustice came streaming into mind as I tried to imagine why Rick and his colleagues made the choices they did. I recalled the time I was interviewing for a job at a prestigious company where they kept telling me I didn't have "the right pedigree" for them, and feeling so inadequate and offended that I made sure I sounded like I had "pedigree"—which is really just code for pretentious and condescending. I was so determined to get them to hire me that I succeeded. I hated the company, and after two years, I left.

I also remembered a time when my boss was being pressured to accelerate a major change project and feeling so bad for him that the person leading it was failing, damaging the reputation of our team and credibility of the program before it even rolled out. Seeing the opportunity to be the hero—and win points with my boss despite the risk to my peer's image—I committed to stepping in and getting it done. I justified my critique of my colleague's failure as empathy for my boss and his frustration. Or the time when I took my five-year-old to a birthday party in a neighborhood of people far more successful and wealthier than I ever hoped to be and had to listen to other dads talk about their expensive cars and ritzy vacations. When one dad turned to me and asked about my summer vacation plans,

suddenly I was going to Europe. Of course, in the back of my mind, I was already planning the lie I would later have to tell about why the trip was abruptly canceled due to “a work emergency.”

I reflected on the significant pain Rick and his colleagues were in, and in turn, had caused. They had feared extinction as a century-old company and were desperate to act because they couldn’t admit they didn’t know what to do. I thought about the astounding implications of how the story *could* have gone had they shared those truths *with each other* instead of just *about each other* after the fact and wondered what could have possibly prevented them from doing so.

Likewise, if I had decided to be honest and fair with that hiring manager, my boss, or my fellow dads, and not given into the dark emotions those situations made me feel, how else might my story have turned out?

Reflecting on these moments, the interplay between an individual’s choices to be honest and do the right thing—or not—and the systemic factors surrounding those choices, came sharply into view for me. Why, under certain conditions, would otherwise honest people choose to be dishonest? Why would otherwise kind-hearted people choose self-protection and to be unfair to others? And if we could understand what those conditions were, could we change them to make honesty and justice more likely?

I decided to find out. And what I discovered radically upended my understanding of honesty... in the best possible way.

I suspect it will do the same for you.

Charting a New Course

Many are also growing weary of organizations that say one thing but do another, driven by fear and self-interest. In August 2019, 181 Business Roundtable CEOs from some of America’s top corporations signed a revised statement of purpose of the corporation. Business Roundtable is an association of chief executive officers of America’s leading companies. To set sweeping change in motion, this is what they declared:

Statement on the Purpose of a Corporation

Americans deserve an economy that allows each person to succeed through hard work and creativity and to lead a life of meaning and dignity. We believe the free-market system is the best means of generating good jobs, a strong and sustainable economy, innovation, a healthy environment and economic opportunity for all.

Businesses play a vital role in the economy by creating jobs, fostering innovation and providing essential goods and services. Businesses make and sell consumer products; manufacture equipment and vehicles; support the national defense; grow and produce food; provide health care; generate and deliver energy; and offer financial, communications and other services that underpin economic growth.

While each of our individual companies serves its own corporate purpose, we share a fundamental commitment to all of our stakeholders. We commit to:

- Delivering value to our customers. We will further the tradition of American companies leading the way in meeting or exceeding customer expectations.
- Investing in our employees. This starts with compensating them fairly and providing important benefits. It also includes supporting them through training and education that help develop new skills for a rapidly changing world. We foster diversity and inclusion, dignity and respect.
- Dealing fairly and ethically with our suppliers. We are dedicated to serving as good partners to the other companies, large and small, that help us meet our missions.
- Supporting the communities in which we work. We respect the people in our communities and protect the environment by embracing sustainable practices across our businesses.
- Generating long-term value for shareholders, who provide the capital that allows companies to invest, grow and innovate. We are committed to transparency and effective engagement with shareholders.

Each of our stakeholders is essential. We commit to deliver value to all of them, for the future success of our companies, our communities and our country.¹

This radical departure from shareholder primacy, the paradigm that has governed corporate priorities for decades, earned an understandably mixed reception. For many, it was a shining glimmer of hope that equality and opportunity could be within reach for all, and that honesty and justice could prevail, stemming the tide of growing inequality. But for others, cynicism abounded. Where was the tangible action behind the words? Would shareholders tolerate the possible implications for their investments? Who was going to enforce adherence to these new norms? Business Europe, a leading business advocacy group for growth and competitiveness at the European level representing 35 European nations, issued a similar declaration for their 2019–2024 agenda of “prosperity, people, and planet.” Their ambition is

one of unity and resolve, saying, “We will all have to join forces to deliver a European Union that will create prosperity for Europe and its people, while also managing the transition to a sustainable future to protect our planet.”²

In the time since their release, several dramatic events seemed to have accelerated growing commitment to the sentiments inferred within these statements. The Covid-19 global pandemic, at least thus far, has revealed the best of corporate humanity and compassion from many companies, who have stepped up to provide new levels of service, generosity, sacrifice and care for their employees, customers and communities. And on top of that, we’re facing a global uprising of civil unrest in response to centuries of racial injustice set in motion by the brutal murder of George Floyd (both of these events were happening during the writing of this book). Here again, many corporations came up with unapologetic statements of intolerance for racial injustice and pledged unwavering commitment to anti-racism. And behind those statements, many await tangible action. The long-term implications of these events remain to be seen, but experts predict that they will be catalysts for long-overdue reckonings.³ A 2020 report card issued by KKS advisors and research group Test of Corporate Purpose, and funded by the Ford Foundation, evaluated signatories of the BRT Statement performance during the Covid-19 pandemic and racial unrest to see if their commitments to stakeholder capitalism played out in their actions, citing these as “their first test” of real commitment. Candidly, the results weren’t positive for many of the signatories, citing payments of dividends to shareholders despite mass layoffs and other actions that seemingly contradicted the statement’s promises.⁴ Ultimately, the shift to stakeholder-centricity is a long game, and will take years before we can draw evidence-based conclusions about how committed companies are.

And outside the world of organizations, the war for truthful information that barrages us on a daily basis has many of us soul-weary and disgusted. The suffocating skepticism we are fed by the media, political leaders at every level, and experts we once trusted, has spread like a bad rash. Most of us are sick of feeling manipulated and lied to, and long to feel like someone is shooting straight with us.

I believe each of us must resolve to *be that person* rather than waiting around for that person to appear. It is my deepest hope that this book will serve as one more arrow in the quiver of courageous leaders who want to use the power of their role and organization to bring about a more honest, fair, and purposeful world... starting with their own teams, divisions, communities, and families.

Truth, Justice, and Purpose: Three sides of the same coin

Three forces are colliding into the business world with increasing intensity.

First, the world is clamoring for insights on ways to live lives of, and become organizations of, purpose. And why wouldn't it be? The data is unmistakable. Purpose-driven companies outperform competitors on many levels, and employees are so eager to have meaning in their work that they'll take pay cuts to get it. Consider the following findings.

As judged by their financial performance on the NASDAQ and NYSE from 1999 to 2019, purpose-driven companies outperformed similar S&P 500 companies by 100 percent.⁵ Globally, a study of more than 60 countries conducted by Insights 2020, found that 83 percent of companies that overperform on revenue growth link everything they do to brand purpose, as opposed to only 31 percent of underperformers.⁶ And in the UK, Certified B Corps are growing 28 times faster than the national economic growth of 0.5 percent.⁷

Purpose-driven companies posted a 9.85 percent compound annual growth rate (CAGR), compared to the 2.4 percent for the S&P Consumer Sector, from 2011 to 2015.⁸

Employees who feel their work is meaningful at work are:⁹

- more productive, on average, by \$9,000 per worker per year;
- willing to work extra hours per week and take two fewer paid sick days;
- better retained, and on average, 69 percent less likely to quit within the next six months;
- willing to work for less money, and on average, are willing to give up 23 percent of their total future earnings—nearly a quarter of their income—in exchange for work that is meaningful;
- happier, with 51 percent higher job satisfaction than those who don't find their work meaningful.

As far as market loyalty is concerned, the data is even more compelling:

- 77 percent of consumers feel a stronger connection to purpose-driven companies over traditional companies;
- 66 percent of consumers would switch from a product they typically buy to a new product from a purpose-driven company.¹⁰

Unfortunately, the pursuit of these wonderful results has many companies devolving into “purpose washing,” whereby they work hard to create the *appearance of purpose*. Marketers are pulling every lever they can to put

halos over their brands and companies, spinning a narrative of goodwill. Employees and consumers aren't buying it, though. While 84 percent of consumers consider trust when purchasing, only 34 percent actually trust the brands they buy from, and 53 percent believe companies purpose-wash.¹¹

When it comes to purpose, you can't "fake it 'til you make it." You either mean it or you don't, and if you don't, people will see right through it.

The second force is inequality, which has become the moral and ethical issue of the day. The world's sensitivity to how underrepresented identities are treated unfairly is increasing, an important step forward toward true equity. But we have a long way to go before our organizational systems have rooted out their institutional biases and replaced them with justice and dignity. Diversity, Equity & Inclusion efforts, with the best of intentions, are *campaigning* for justice rather than creating more just organizations, meaning they are more focused on advocating for equality rather than creating it. From 1985 to 2015, the proportion of black men in management increased just slightly—from 3 percent to 3.3 percent.¹² And in 2019, 45 percent of Americans reported experiencing workplace discrimination and/or harassment in the previous year.¹³

Third, employee voice—the field of study that looks at the degree to which people freely speak their minds—is becoming an increasing factor of an organization's employer brand. Many internal functions like HR and ethics & compliance are mounting noble efforts to foster "speak up" cultures where people feel psychologically safe enough to share radical ideas that drive innovation, offer candid feedback, raise concerns of misconduct, and openly dissent when decisions lack sufficient rationale. Here, again, intentions and consequences do not always match up. Short training programs and communications campaigns promoting these ideas are nice, but a far cry from having employees practice them daily.

Further, our polarized political climate and a vindictive social media landscape have painfully confused the notion of "speaking *your* truth" with the need to "speak *the* truth." The social gathering places of organizations have become veritable seas of eggshells on which everyone is terrified of offending someone, saying something politically incorrect, or being accused of being racist, sexist, judgmental, homophobic, intolerant, hostile, biased, privileged, angry, retaliatory, victimized, or power-hungry. So, we opt not to talk about them at all. The problem, of course, is that these issues do exist all around us, often unconsciously and unintentionally. But since we can't have productive conversations about them within our organizations, we have vitriolic, nasty conversations outside the workplace *about* people we think personify these things instead of *with* those people.

Individually, these three forces seem to fall short of making their intended impact. But what would happen if they joined forces?

- *Purpose*—serve a greater good.
- *Justice*—do the right and fair thing.
- *Truth*—tell it, respectfully and directly, without compromise.

Working together, they create a new, even more powerful capability. Call it “honesty.”

Seems simple. Without all three pieces, honesty is impossible. To be honest, you have to say the right thing. Do the right thing. And say and do the right thing *for the right reason*.

Without an authentic desire to serve, and a genuine belief that serving an organization’s purpose enhances their own, an employee has no motivation to contribute toward a more equitable workplace. People will just continue serving their own interests.

Without a hardcore commitment to justice within our organizational systems, employees will never believe their voices matter, because the system will reinforce the truth that only *some voices* matter.

FIGURE 0.1 Honesty



Without the capacity to have hard conversations among the many identity, cultural, and functional differences within companies, we can't build the trust needed to unify our organizations, leaving conflicts and inequities undiscussed and out of view.

Do you see how interrelated these forces are? Indeed, the fundamental conclusion of my research for this book is that to build an honest company, you need a power that can only be harnessed when truth, justice, and purpose operate in harmony.

To have one, you need all three. This is how you build the capability of honesty.

It's important to note that the definition of "honesty" I use here, and throughout the book, may expand on your current understanding of the term, which many think of simply as "not lying." Throughout the book, when I use the word "honesty" I'm referring to the combination of all three factors. When I use the word "dishonesty," I'm referring to the absence of all three.

What You'll Find Ahead: Four Dimensions of Organizational Honesty

I recently completed a 15-year longitudinal study analyzing more than 3,200 interviews my firm and I conducted during 210 organizational assessments. Interview subjects ranged from individual contributors all the way up to C-suite executives, and they exposed many different types of organizational challenges. To help us make sense of the data, we deployed IBM Watson's artificial intelligence analytics tools to extract patterns across and converted the data into validated statistical models.

Each section of the book is devoted to exploring one of the four major findings from the research. Each has two chapters, one exploring the organizational or *systemic* aspects of honesty and the other exploring the individual or *leadership* aspects of it. There are case studies, stories from history, excerpts from the many interviews I conducted with executives, thought leaders and regular employees, and stories right from organizations I work with (names and some details have been changed to protect anonymity in those stories).

This book is about exemplars, not villains. The vast majority of stories I've chosen highlight companies I'd want you and your company to emulate. These aren't the stories that typically make headlines, but they are the stories

that inspire us to be better. I'll briefly examine a few particularly scandalous stories of dishonesty for contrast, but my hope is to compel you with a front-row seat to some of the most inspiring leaders and organizations for whom honesty—truth, justice, and purpose—is fundamental. And alongside these stories, you'll find compelling data from other great researchers that expands on my findings. Here's a breakdown of what you can expect in each section.

Part 1: Honesty in Identity: Be Who You Say You Are

When we don't know who we are, we make things up. When organizations say one thing about themselves, but their actions don't match, or when they set lofty goals but don't connect those goals to employees' everyday work, their company identity becomes muddled. A misalignment in mission, vision, values, purpose, and/or brand promises is a big, flapping red flag—for management and employees alike. My research reveals that workers at companies whose statements of identity are unclear or inconsistent with what employees experience day-to-day are almost *three times* more likely to withhold or distort the truth and behave unfairly. You can guess what this means for your bottom line.

The chapters in Part One will show how organizations, leaders, and individuals can align the words they say about themselves with the actions they take to embody those words. You'll see how companies like PepsiCo, Best Buy, and Microsoft have embedded purpose deeply into the core of their organizations. You'll hear groundbreaking research from Contexis, the UK-based B Corp whose purpose is measuring purpose, and the astounding results you can achieve when you activate it yourself. And, we'll take a look at the vital role hope plays in the process of being who you say you are.

Part 2: Justice in Accountability: Putting Dignity First

When we believe we're being unfairly assessed, we exaggerate our contributions to self-protect and cover our asses. Fewer things are more painful in organizations than performance management. When leaders fail to judge performance in ways their employees feel are fair, employees respond by making sure they get the credit they deserve—by whatever means necessary. But instead of inflicting stressful, paint-by-numbers performance reviews, leaders can learn to foster honest and trusting relationships with those they

lead, creating an environment where they can talk openly about when contributions were exceptional, and when they fell short. Employees are *four times* more likely to be honest about their results and fair to others when working at a company where they feel they can ask for help without fear of judgment and are empowered to see failure as a learning experience.

Accordingly, the chapters in this section will redefine what “accountability” means. We’ll define what it means to build justice and dignity into accountability processes. We’ll look at how Microsoft revamped their performance management process to enable employees to learn from mistakes and failure. We’ll examine how institutional biases create inequity and hear from renowned experts on how to eliminate them. And we’ll look at what restorative justice can teach leaders about engaging people in conversations about their achievements and their shortfalls, making dignity the cornerstone of the relationship between a leader and her followers.

Part 3: Transparency in Governance: Make Trustworthy Decisions Through Honest Conversations

When there are no healthy forums in which the truth can be told, it goes underground, leaving collusion, rumors, and gossip in its place. How decisions get made—or not—in companies is a common source of confusion for people (even the ones who seem to be making the decisions!). When employees don’t know or trust how resources are distributed, how priorities are set, or how hard decisions get made, they are more than *three and a half times* more likely to lie or distort the truth. At the core of great governance—the way organizations make decisions—are effective meetings where decisions are transparent, and difficult issues can be discussed openly. Every company can learn to do these better.

The chapters in this section will look at governance structures that are especially well-suited to fostering healthy debate and open sharing of ideas, no matter how radical. The chapters will look at the importance of psychological safety, how it’s established, and the implications for companies when it is or isn’t present. We’ll contrast the stories of DuPont and Patagonia, and the stark differences in how they responded to the crisis of learning that their manufacturing processes had potentially lethal consequences. Finally, we’ll look at how leaders can create courageous conversations that inspire honest exchanges of challenging feedback and radical ideas, de-risking truth-telling for those they lead.

Part 4: Unity Between Groups: Connect Everyone to a Bigger Story

When we fragment an organization, we create dueling truths. The seams of an organization, the places where functions come together to form unique capabilities, hold tremendous but often untapped value; too often, though, these are treated as no man's land, with each party making an exclusive claim. Left unchecked, interdepartmental conflict at a company makes it almost *six times* more likely that workers will lie or distort the truth, or act unjustly. Such conflicts between functions or regions are more than annoying—they create the silos that pit “my truth” against “your truth.” Despite these natural tendencies, companies can learn to create healthy collaboration across their seams, fostering partnerships, not rivalries, between people who must work with different departments.

The chapters in this section will take a close look at companies like Cabot Creamery and their remarkable story of creating unity out of long-strained relationships. We take an intimate look at the ways we “other” people who are different than us, the role tribalism plays in dividing people across organizations, and what it means to connect to those outside our echo chambers.

Each of these four sections articulates what it takes to build companies and leaders that integrate truth, justice, and purpose into their actions. Together, they show what it actually takes to be honest.

Honesty Is a Muscle

Of all my findings, the revelation that honesty is more than a character trait or moral principle was the most important. It's more than an aspiration; it's a capability. To be good at it, you have to work at it. And that begins with believing you can be better at it than you currently are.

To be sure, leading this kind of life and team takes work. It demands practice. Embodying truth, justice, and purpose requires real competence. These aren't just ethical qualities you either have or don't. My research revealed that honesty is a muscle, and like any muscle, to make it strong you have to work on it. Regularly. When an athlete leaves the gym or a patient leaves physical therapy, they feel sore but satisfied. Becoming good at honesty is no different. When you declare that you and your organization wish to serve a worthy purpose, you have to eliminate the distractions and contradictions that keep you from doing so. This process takes insight,

ongoing feedback, and creativity. It takes grit to deflect the naysayers and courage to remove the obstacles.

When you set out to create a more just organization, you will be tampering with deeply embedded institutional biases that, likely unknowingly, have privileged some people over others. You have to be willing to interrogate your processes of accountability—what you measure, how you acknowledge contributions, how you create opportunities for others to advance and shine, and how you talk with those you lead about their contributions—to make sure everyone has the same chances of being successful, no matter who they are. That may require disappointing some people who've benefited from the biases in the old system and helping them recognize the need to create accountability that is based on dignity and justice for all. It means being vulnerable with those you lead and building sufficient trust with them, as only then will you be in a position to hold them to account for commitments they make and talk openly about when they fall short. And you have to model what it means to acknowledge your own shortfalls and improve.

There are plenty of platitudes I could offer about why being more honest and just is “good for you,” though you've undoubtedly heard those since kindergarten. But I deeply believe that understanding the conditions under which we, and our organizations, encourage dishonesty and injustice can bring greater levels of contribution and satisfaction, and ultimately meaning. I want you to discover, painful though it might be, the ways your organization unknowingly encourages employees to withhold or distort the truth or act unjustly, and how to fix the conditions that create this behavior. From there, you will be much more empowered to make different choices. And, as you will see in the following chapters, choosing truth, justice and purpose can make you and your organization healthier, higher-performing and significantly more competitive, and ultimately, more joyful.

In the end, my hope is that this book will help you live a more honest life—one in which you tell the truth, act with justice toward others, and live your purpose with deep satisfaction and impact. I have no intention of defining your moral compass or value system; that's yours to do. But I want you to feel proud of the people and organizations you lead, knowing that you've created the conditions in which people will choose honesty. That way, when you return home at night, you'll be able to look your loved ones in the eye and know you are exactly the person they believe you are.

What you will find on the pages ahead is the roadmap for doing just that.

Finding Hope in Bigger Stories

At the start of each chapter, I will set the context by “zooming out” with a broader story from an unlikely context in history and life. As leaders, we must be able to learn, find inspiration, and glean hope from stories much different than ours. We have to look at circumstances and challenges we would never face to discover our common humanity and hard-won wisdom from communities and leaders vastly unlike us. I believe that some of the greatest examples of this book’s concepts can be found in the most unexpected places if we allow ourselves to be curious and open. Read these stories with fascination. Don’t look for their immediate relevance to organizational life, but instead let them reveal a unique form of honesty—truth, justice, and purpose—from people, places, and communities you’ve likely never heard of, but will enjoy the privilege of meeting. You’ll probably never face the challenges of these heroes, but trust me, their stories have relevance. Resist the temptation to compare your story to theirs, making yours feel smaller or less significant. Instead, see how much larger your story could be as you consider the triumphs and tribulations of amazing people and communities from around the globe. For example, we’ll travel to South America and learn from how the nation of Columbia made peace after decades of conflict with combatants. We’ll explore one man’s fight for justice for wrongfully convicted prisoners, and one woman’s fight for justice in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. From Baltimore to Thailand, from Oklahoma in the 1930s to Vietnam in the 1960s, from New Zealand to Compton, CA, I will introduce you to organizations and leaders whose stories can enlighten and inspire you. Your job is to open your mind and heart and let them.

Get Busy

Decades ago, during a painful season, I was coming to terms with a part of my story I’d long ignored. A few close friends provided loving support and encouragement as I leaned into areas of my life where I needed help. I decided to confide in my big brother to enlist his support. After all, that’s what big brothers are for. As I expected, he listened compassionately as I shared my challenges. He asked questions and shed a few tears of empathy.

I emphasize “a few” because growing up in a New York Italian family of five, I understood “showing emotion” to take on many unique forms. We

could be loud and intense, and if you were watching from the outside, you might assume we were angry. But within the family, you knew what you were seeing was fierce, uncompromising love. When hard things needed to be done, there was no mincing words or coddling. Empathy looked practical, not sentimental. You said what needed to be said and helped where help was needed. So, in that moment, my big brother leaned over to me, gave me a hug, looked me squarely in the eye, and said, “I love you. Get busy.”

Since that moment, I’ve ended every keynote address I’ve given by charging the audience with those same words: “get busy.” And throughout this book, I’m going to charge you the same way. You will quickly see that much like my family, I won’t be mincing words or trying to make honesty easy for you. To transform our organizations into places of truth, justice, and purpose, we’re going to have to dig deep into parts of our stories we have ignored. We’re going to have to acknowledge issues we’ve denied were issues. So, at the end of each chapter, you will see a section titled “Get Busy.” Within those sections, I will be giving you practical ideas and advice for how to take the key points from that chapter and apply them in your world. (Hint: You may want to get a notebook to keep all your notes in one place.) Those sections are my way of encouraging you—the way a New York Italian no-nonsense big brother would when there are hard things to be done. So, try to hear the ideas and assignments in those sections—some of which will make you uncomfortable—in that loving spirit, and, well... get busy.

Endnotes

- 1 Business Round Table Statement of purpose from (website) reprinted with permission
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