

## LEADERSHIP

# WHY DOES TRUTH MATTER, ANYWAY?

Why should truth matter to executives? After all, these are individuals who can (and have) misled the public by spinning the facts, duped investors by overplaying a hand, and duped authorities by cooking the books. In this article, Scott Monty, who was the first executive at Ford Motor Company to lead digital communications and social media and one of the US most expert on social media, elaborates on how honesty, transparency and trust generates loyalty.

*By Scott Monty*

*Strategic communications & leadership coach*

**A**gain and again we see examples of the market rewarding those who play fast and loose with the facts. Until it doesn't. Theranos. WeWork. Nikola.

It's easy to construct a sexy story—to get people to believe something they already want to believe. A miracle testing process. High value of coworking spaces. A competitor to an electric vehicle company.

But pull one thread and the entire story begins to unravel, revealing more about the founders and the operators than previously known, resulting in investors asking the questions they should have asked all along.

When my parents raised me, they impressed this upon me: If I got in trouble (in school, around the neighborhood, etc.) they wanted to hear it from me first.

If they found out from a third party, then I'd be in trouble for the coverup, in addition to the original infraction.

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**When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.**

— Arthur Conan Doyle, 1890



Hermes Ordering Calypso to Release  
Odysseus by Gerard de Lairesse, 1670  
(public domain - Wikimedia Commons)

The truth always comes out. Always. The truth may not be pretty. It may not put you in the best light. But accepting it, embracing it, and sharing it will make you stronger, both in perception as well as in character. If done with integrity, embracing the truth will give you long-term credibility.

## Truth is a down payment on loyalty

Loyalty from your customers, from your employees, from your investors—from anyone you build a relationship with.

It's a long game, though. Relationships always are. But loyalty doesn't come from transactions; loyalty comes from being able to trust someone from repeated actions over time. Such feelings are built, not made. Another way of thinking about truth is through transparency. A little transparency can go a long way.

**1. HONESTY**  
LEADS TO TRANSPARENCY



**2. TRANSPARENCY**  
LEADS TO TRUST



**3. TRUST**  
LEADS TO LOYALTY



**4. LOYALTY**  
MEANS LESS TURNOVER

You don't have to reveal your secret ingredients, your patent, or your code. But if you take your audience along on the journey with you, they'll appreciate your honesty.

If you need to change your pricing, packaging, product design, or anything else that's going to affect the consumer, communicate it clearly and honestly.

Think about the way we see food. In the 1960s and 1970s, the food advertising industry took a turn. It used to be a free-for-all — using motor oil for syrup, Crisco as a stand-in for ice cream, etc. — all of the tricks that photographers used to try to make food look extra appealing in pictures.



**Murder cannot be hid long; a man's son may, but at the length truth will out.**

— William Shakespeare, 1599

That is until Heinz decided to break up Campbell's stranglehold on the soup industry. The Heinz folks filed a complaint with the FTC, revealing that Campbell's put marbles in bowls of soup to make it look more appealing.

You see, Campbell's knew that the solids in their soup would stay at the surface and therefore make the soup seem more hearty, when supported by invisible marbles just beneath them. The lawsuit was successful, resulting in food advertising regulations that require more attention to realistic presentations.

Now, this may have never affected the consumer, who was blithely unaware of being hoodwinked. But it leveled the playing field for food manufacturers, forcing them to create products that lived up to their advertisements.



## Beauty is truth, truth beauty, — that is all Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know

— John Keats, 1819

Truth has been debated by philosophers for millennia. What is truth? Aristotle, Plato, Socrates, the Stoics all had views on the essence of truth.

Today, you can hear the overly-enlightened talking about “my truth,” as if they’ve cornered the market on what truth is.

Perhaps a better phrase for “my truth” would be “my perception,” for your truth infers that it’s personal based on what you’ve experienced.

If we are to coexist in a society, whether it’s through business, politics, or just life, common facts are essential. We need experiences and observable realities that we share. This is the essence of history. And it’s the difference between the recorded past and the remembered past, as Lewis Lapham put it: *“The recorded past is a spiked cannon. The remembered past is live ammunition—not what happened two hundred or two thousand years ago, a story about what happened two hundred*

*or two thousand years ago. The stories change with circumstance and the sight lines available to tellers of the tale. Every generation rearranges the furniture of the past to suit the comfort and convenience of its anxious present.”*

In Ode on a Grecian Urn, Keats looks at this inanimate object, with its scenes from ancient Greece, imagining what was happening those thousands of years ago, as he stands in the British Museum.

The ancient moment is frozen in time, captured as an Instagrammable moment, but on the external portion of a funerary urn, rather than on a black mirror. But Keats reflects on his own thoughts, from his own time, and gives the urn new meaning today. The true value of history is not just to give us a journal and timeline of our past, but to give us lessons we can take into the present. This is why originalism is scoffed at by historians.

## Storytelling: universal throughout time

Currently, we have a Supreme Court nominee who is claiming to be an “originalist” in her view of the Constitution, saying “That means that I interpret the Constitution as a law... I understand it to have the meaning that it had at the time people ratified it.

That meaning doesn’t change over time and it’s not up to me to update it.”

But all it takes is a quick view of Thomas Jefferson’s own writing to understand what the Founding Fathers intended: “But laws and institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind... We might as well require a man to wear still the coat which fitted him when a boy as civilized society to remain ever under the regimen of their barbarous ancestors.”

Homer's epic poems and the Bible are part of a tradition, first oral, then written, creating a common set of stories for society. While the tales are set in a particular time, their lessons are universal, allowing us to apply them still today but in the context of a vastly different world.

They work because human nature has remained constant and because we have more in common with ourselves and our ancestors than we might think. This is what storytellers do. They capture our common experiences and create tales that trigger emotions within us. We laugh or cry, feel shame or pride, exhibit sympathy or grief, create ideas or actions. This is what storytellers do. They capture our common experiences and create tales that trigger emotions within us. We laugh or cry, feel shame or pride, exhibit sympathy or grief, create ideas or actions.

We do this because stories are based on things that are discernible. Things to which we can attest. In other words, the truth. The sooner you can be honest with your audience, the faster you'll be on your way to loyal followers.

Newsletter:



Scott Monty writes the Timeless and Timely newsletter, to help leaders make sense of today with lessons from the past, at [TimelessTimely.com](http://TimelessTimely.com).

He uses timeless lessons from history, literature and philosophy to help leaders make decisions with empathy, integrity, and wisdom.

His knowledge of history, philosophy and literature, together with his ability to trend-spot, shows teams and audiences that the key to our future is in understanding human nature while focusing on integrity and values. Please feel free to sign up: [www.scottmonty.com](http://www.scottmonty.com)



**SCOTT MONTY**

*Strategic communications & leadership coach*

Scott Monty is a strategic communications and leadership coach and advisor who helps the C-suite embrace better communication with timeless and timely advice. A Fortune 10 leader whose background in classics positioned him to see through the shiny objects, Scott can drill down to understand the common human needs from throughout history that still drive us all.

He was ranked by The Economist as #1 atop the list 25 Social Business Leaders and Alan Mulally, the CEO of Ford Motor Company, called him "a visionary."

Scott spent six years as an executive at Ford, where he helped turn the company around with an uncanny ability to merge technology with humanity.

He served as a strategic adviser across a variety of business functions, leading the company's global social media strategy. He also has a another decade and a half of experience in communications and marketing agencies.

Scott's clients have included companies such as Walmart, IBM, McDonalds, Co-ca-Cola, and Google. He is a trustee of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, a past board member of the American Marketing Association, and has advised a number of tech companies.

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