

How to do what's RIGHT

"Roger is a lighthouse, in thick fog, in the
middle of a zombie apocalypse"

Richard Watson, author, Digital Vs Human



ROGER STEARE
THECORPORATEPHILOSOPHER

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This book is dedicated to my wife Jane.
Her love, her courage and her dignity are
my inspiration.
Her life is a testimony to how we can do
what's right even after suffering terrible
wrongs.

Roger Steare
May 2007



About the author

Professor Roger Steare is The Corporate Philosopher. He invites people to stop and think in a compelling and inspiring, yet pragmatic way, and he helps people develop better thinking, dialogue and decision-making. The result? His clients are able to build cultures where every customer, colleague and investor is truly valued as a human being. Where profit is no longer a dirty word. It is now a philosophy of sustainable prosperity for all.

Key Facts

- Leadership, culture and ethics advisor to the Boards and senior executives of major corporations, public sector institutions, governments and regulators

- Corporate Philosopher and Visiting Professor in the Practice of Organizational Ethics at Cass Business School
- Visiting Professor in European General Studies at the Collège d'Europe in Bruges
- Faculty member at Duke Corporate Education
- Lecturer on Critical Thinking at the Royal College of Defence Studies
- Lecturer on Sustainability at London Business School
- Fellow at cross-party UK policy think tank ResPublica
- Fellow at the Royal Society for the Arts, Commerce and Industry
- Author of ethicability[®] with over 600,000 digital copies sold
- Co-designer of the MoralDNA[®] Profile with over 600,000 digital licences sold
- Expert media commentator for the BBC, the *FT*, *The Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*

We live in a world where we're constantly told what's right and we're losing the ability to work it out for ourselves. From politicians to journalists, from teachers to the boss, we're told, “do this,” “don't do that,” “here's your bonus,” or “you're fired.” Then we struggle when confronted by a moral dilemma where rules don't tell us what to do, or where what's legal doesn't feel right.

This book helps us to decide what's right and find the courage to do it. It is based on an uncomplicated framework called RIGHT, which is based on insights from thousands of years of moral philosophy and the latest research into human psychology and behaviour. In just five questions, How to do what's RIGHT enables us to understand and resolve a wide range of moral dilemmas

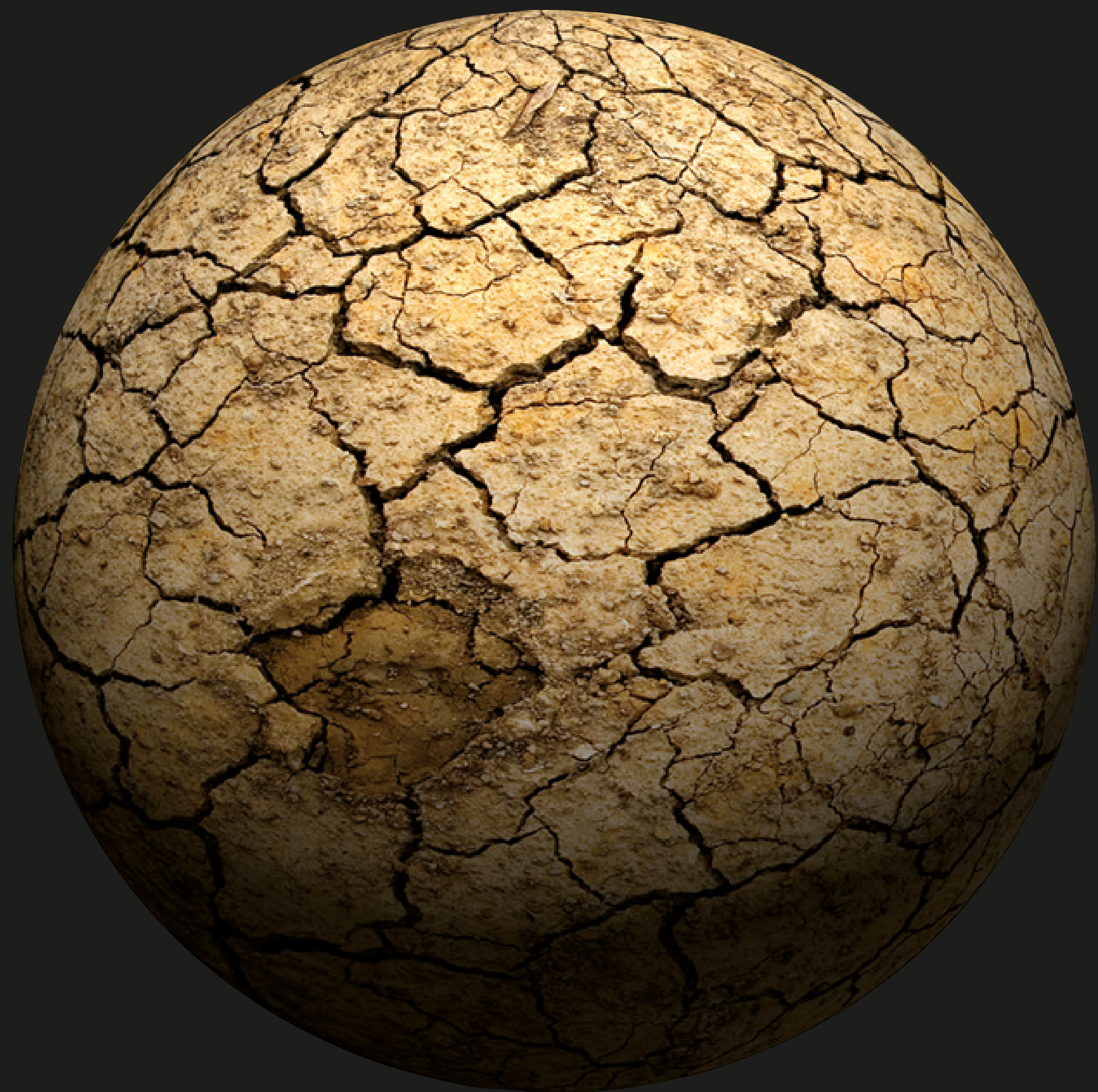
with an approach that has been tried and tested by people as diverse as business executives, public sector managers, health workers, students, parents and even the military. *How to do what's RIGHT* then helps us to find the courage to do the right thing because we now have the confidence that we've made our best decision, having considered everyone and everything, from every angle.

Doing what's right doesn't always mean immediate success or even personal happiness, because life isn't a playground. How to do what's RIGHT is about thinking right, doing right, and leaving the world a better place

.

“Man has been endowed with reason, with the power to create, so that he can add to what he’s been given. But up to now he hasn’t been a creator, only a destroyer. Forests keep disappearing, rivers dry up, wild life’s become extinct, the climate’s ruined and the land grows poorer and uglier every day.”

Anton Chekhov, “Uncle Vanya”, 1897



Why doing what's right matters

Do we care about racism, bullying, street violence, alcohol, tobacco and drug abuse, terrorism, torture, war, environmental issues and corporate scandal? How do we do what's right when it comes to abortion, euthanasia and stemcell research? At work, do we put profit ahead of principle? In our personal lives, do we put things before people? When marriages, partnerships and friendships become difficult, do we keep our commitments to loved ones or do we trade them in for a new model? Why do some of us ignore our next-door neighbours, yet feel compelled to donate to people facing disaster on the other side of the world? Why do we react so strongly to the threat of the terrorist, when more people are killed or injured in a week on our roads than murdered and maimed in a year by terrorist bombs?

These are vital questions. They are vital socially, politically, economically and spiritually. The media parades countless experts telling us what's right. Is the right-wing or left-wing politician right? Do we believe the policeman who says we need longer detention without charge, or the judge who says we ought to preserve our hard-won freedoms? Do we believe the oil-company CEO or the ecologist? Do we listen to the preacher, the psychologist or the celebrity?

In business, just because something isn't illegal doesn't make it right. Consumers are victims of legal, but unfair business practices; workers are at risk of exploitation; and let's not forget the environmental impact of "legal" levels of pollutants, or the social impact of legalised narcotics, such as tobacco and alcohol.

In sum, the ethical challenges we face today have never been greater. The prospect of a nuclear holocaust may have

receded, but the fallout we face today from our mindlessness about these issues is just as dangerous as any weapon of mass destruction. Standards of living are up, but standards for living are down. Our obsession with economic growth has been described as “the philosophy of the cancer cell” and we’ve found a lump. Will we continue to put things before people, or will we put principles before profits? Do we just do what’s legal or do we also do what’s right – and how do we decide?

How to do what’s RIGHT won’t give you the answers, but it will give you the know-how to work them out for yourself. In the end, we are each responsible for the lives we lead and the legacy we leave for our children and grandchildren



Double your money?

You try to withdraw €100 from a cash machine. Instead, it dispenses €200, because it's been incorrectly stacked with €20 notes instead of €10 notes. So would you keep the extra cash? Or why would you decide to return it? If you did decide to return the money, which isn't yours, would it be because:

- a That's the law. To keep it would be theft. I must obey the **Rules**.
- b I have **Integrity**. I believe in moral principles like honesty and trust.
- c We must think of what's **Good** for everyone, not just me. We must do what's best for society as a whole.
- d Stealing someone else's money will **Harm** them. Banks are ultimately owned by millions of ordinary shareholders and pensioners.
- e If we get caught, we must face up to the **Truth** of our actions.

**“Did you ever stop to think,
and forget to start again?”
Winnie the Pooh**

Which of these reasons was closest to how you would actually feel in this situation? Did you think of more than one of these reasons? If so, you're already well on the way to learning how to do what's RIGHT. And as you can now see, RIGHT stands for

Rules – What are the Rules?

Integrity – How do we act with Integrity?

Good – Who is this Good for?

Harm – Who could we Harm?

Truth – What's the Truth?

So, is that it? Just five short questions? Well, yes. And no.

The RIGHT questions may be short, but that's so we will remember them. Understanding and mastering them takes a little more effort. A good analogy is learning how to write. A pen and paper are quite simple objects, yet it takes many lessons and lots of practice to write well. The RIGHT questions are your pen and paper. This book is your first lesson. The rest is up to you.



What are **the Rules?**

How to do what's RIGHT begins with Rules simply because we already have so many of them. Rules are there to TELL us what's right. There's no discussion; we just have to do as we're told.

As babies, we were born with no moral conscience other than the primitive will to survive. Our selfishness, our greed and our rage when we didn't get what we needed kept us alive. Our parents not only tolerated this behaviour, they accepted it

as both normal and necessary. But as we matured into infants, we began to learn right and wrong from our parents. If we did right, we were praised and rewarded. But if we did wrong, we were punished. So being told what's right through Rules is the first stage in developing a moral conscience. We can call this philosophy "rule compliance". The technical term is "deontology" from the Greek word "deon" meaning duty. And for those who constantly demand their "rights", we must all remember that rights cannot exist without duty.

"Good people do not need laws to tell them to act responsibly, while bad people will find a way around them."
Plato

Even as grown-ups, if we meet people we don't know or if we buy something over the Internet, we still need Rules to protect us. We live with more than 7 billion other human beings, but can only build trusting

relationships with a relatively small number of family, friends and work colleagues. So it's fine if we go out for a meal with people we trust, we don't need to sign a contract saying who pays! But if we buy goods or services from strangers, we need to rely on contracts and guarantees to protect ourselves from faulty goods or fraud.

Rules keep us safe. Rules and laws are also supposed to protect us from violence and theft or from being killed by a drunk driver. Rules are also useful as a quick reminder about what's right in many everyday situations. And although we learn Rules as moral infants, even as moral grown-ups, having a strong sense of duty and responsibility to others is a cornerstone of a just society.

However, even with all the rules and regulations that govern our lives today, we constantly face situations and moral dilemmas where there are no Rules to tell us what's right. And from time to time,

we'll believe that a law is unjust and, as voters, we must then try to change it.

Another problem with Rules, which is all too apparent, is that we live in a world where whenever someone somewhere does something wrong, people in authority often believe that if we have even more Rules, then more people will do the right thing. Unfortunately, the opposite happens. Although Rules work well with young children, grown-ups hate being told what to do. We find ways to bend the Rules or ways to break them without getting caught. The result is more wrong-doing and then more Rules. It becomes a vicious circle. Too many Rules turn us into moral dummies; we behave like naughty kids. Too many Rules also make life complicated. There are always so many boxes to tick. That's why, for moral grown-ups, what's right must also be about Integrity...



How do we act with Integrity?

Integrity is a really powerful word. It sounds great and everyone talks about it, particularly people in business and politics. But what does it actually mean when we want to do what's right?

At it's simplest, Integrity is a word that summarizes all the moral principles or values we believe in, such as courage, patience and love. Look at the box on this page for some of these principles and begin to think about which are important for you. Integrity is not just one principle; it means ALL our principles – an “integrity of principles” if you like. These principles GUIDE the way we do what's right, not like Rules which TELL us what's right. We act with Integrity when we say we believe in certain principles and then behave accordingly. If, however, these principles are just talk and we actually do the opposite, we call this not Integrity, but hypocrisy. Philosophers call

this approach to doing what's right, "virtue ethics" – as in "patience is a virtue". We could also call it "principled conscience". Just as Rules are imposed on us by others from the outside, Integrity comes from deep inside. It's what we mean by character. It's our moral DNA, or perhaps our soul.

Many philosophers and psychologists agree that acting with Integrity is the same as being a moral grown-up. Moral grown-ups don't have to be told what's right; they're trusted to work it out for themselves. This isn't to say that you have to be an adult to act with Integrity, or that children cannot act with Integrity. On the contrary, we live in a world where many adults behave like moral infants and many younger people can be seen acting with Integrity.

an integrity of principles:

wisdom | fairness | courage | patience

loyalty | hope | love | honesty

excellence | respect

So Integrity represents all those wonderful principles or virtues that we have valued for thousands of years. It is something that we aspire to as moral grown-ups. Integrity is also the philosophy that drives our closest human relationships, particularly with family and friends. Rules don't tell us how to behave with a spouse, partner, relative or friend. It's the Integrity of principles such as love, respect and trust that are the bonds that bind the basic and most important units in our society – our family and our circle of friends.

The Integrity question has many strengths, but it also has two weaknesses. First, what do we do if our principles conflict? What do we do if a friend at work is fiddling expenses? Do we tell the truth or do we keep loyal? Both principles are good, but which one is more important? The second weakness is that acting with Integrity often demands the courage to do what's right, knowing that it might harm either ourselves or people we care about. When principles

conflict, we have to choose which is the most important in that particular situation. If this becomes too difficult, then looking at each of the other RIGHT questions can help us make that decision, as we will see later in the book. As for finding the courage to do what's right, then again all the RIGHT questions help out. If you ask and answer each of the RIGHT questions, you will gain the confidence that you know you're doing the right thing. From confidence builds the courage we need to show other people that we have made both a reasoned and a fair decision.

Speaking of others, we next turn to Good and Harm in learning *How to do what's RIGHT...*

“Integrity has no need of rules.”

Albert Camus



Who's Who
it Good could we
for? Harm?

So far, in thinking about *How to do what's RIGHT*, we've thought about the concepts of Rules and Integrity. So what's happened to all the people our behaviour can affect? Shouldn't we also be thinking about the consequences of our actions on others?

Yes, we should, and that's why we need to ask and answer both of these questions and think about what Good and Harm we do to others. Together, these questions give us what we can call our "social conscience", or what philosophers call "consequentialism" and "utilitarianism". Utility, in this case, means that what's right is what benefits the greatest number of people. We will also look at the consequences of our actions and consider who might benefit or be harmed by what we do. For example, we might decide to report a bully at work because we don't want others to suffer.

Thinking about the Good and Harm of others is something we begin to learn as children when we realise that unless we share our sweets or toys, we become unpopular and

lonely. As teenagers, this drive for social identity often becomes so strong that we constantly check for the approval of our friends in almost everything we do. If Rules are for moral infants and Integrity is for moral grown-ups, we can now say that thinking about the Good and Harm for ourselves and others is the moral teenager stage of growing up.

We can also look at Good and Harm in the same way that Rules help us deal with strangers and the Integrity of principles guide us with those we love and trust. With Good and Harm, this is how we relate to acquaintances, neighbours and people at work. We might think twice about having a noisy party because we don't want to upset our neighbours. At work, we think about how we can get along with people we have to see day in and day out. In both cases, we will try to maximize the Good and minimize the Harm.

Thinking about the Good and the Harm we might do to others are, therefore, vital

steps when we try to do what's RIGHT. There are, however, three dangers we must be aware of when asking these questions. The first concerns the minority who are harmed by our decision to do what's best for the majority. If the same minorities keep getting harmed, it is perhaps not surprising that they will resort to crime, violence or even terrorism to make it stop. The second challenge is that we might sometimes believe that the end justifies the means and, therefore, do something that we know to be wrong if the outcome will be good for most people. For example, we may believe that it's right to suspend or restrict civil liberties if it reduces the risk of terrorist atrocities. The third problem is that maximizing what's Good in our lives can deceive us into believing that material happiness should be our goal in life, rather than what is right.



*“We don’t need bigger cars or
fancier clothes.*

*We need self-respect, identity,
community, love, variety, beauty,
challenge and a purpose in living
that is greater than material
accumulation.”*

Donella Meadows

What's the Truth?

The last question in How to do what's RIGHT challenges us to test both our actions and our decisions for openness, accountability and the Truth.

Very young children are very good at the Truth. How often have grown-ups been embarrassed by the directness of a child's question or observation? "Mummy look – that man has big ears!" So we teach young children not to be so open and honest and sometimes even to lie. If a child is given a present he or she doesn't like, we would prefer them to lie and say they like it, even if we know it's going to end up in the bin. Children also learn very quickly that if they do something wrong, that if they can deny it or hide the evidence, then they might get away with it. As grown-ups, we tell white lies constantly, just to get along with people. The ritual "Hi, how are you?"

is followed by the ritual “I’m fine, thanks. How are you?” We ask the question without really meaning it and we say we’re fine, even if we’re not. Or a friend will ask us if we like their new sofa, the meal they’ve just cooked us, or the new dress they’re wearing...

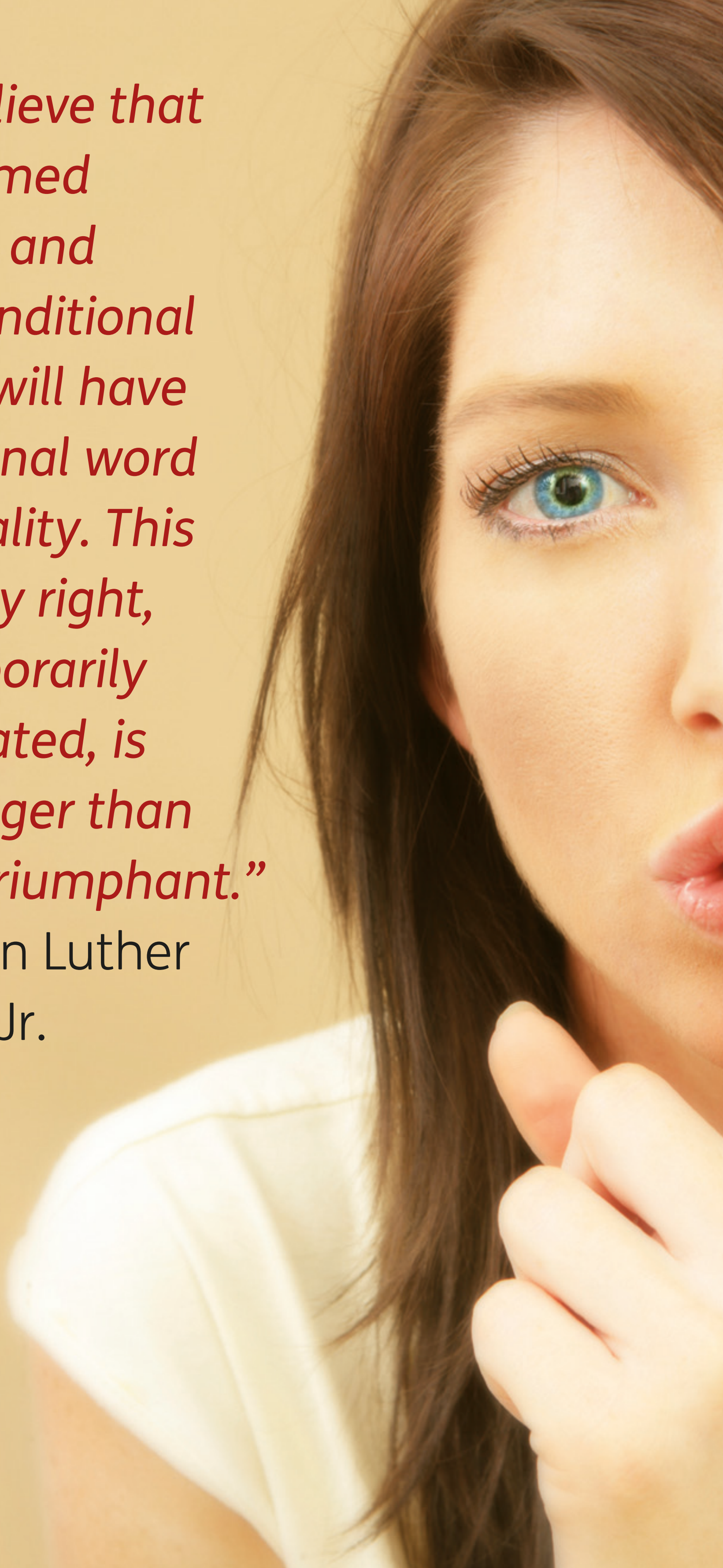
So, if we’re conditioned to tell little white lies in order to get along with people, what does it mean when we ask, “What’s the Truth?”

It simply challenges us to ask if we have the courage to justify and account for what we’ve done or what we intend to do. The Truth is that doing what’s right may be uncomfortable and even hurt us, but doing what’s wrong and being found out hurts even more.

We have to ask ourselves, “What’s the Truth?” to know whether we face shame, humiliation and dishonour, or whether we can sleep at night.

“I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality. This is why right, temporarily defeated, is stronger than evil triumphant.”

Martin Luther
King Jr.



How to do what's RIGHT for real

Now it's time to see how we can work out how to do what's right – for real! The following ethical dilemma is based on a true story and one that has reminded many people of similar situations they've found themselves in.

One of your colleagues at work is also a good personal friend. Tomorrow, she will complete the purchase of a new and more expensive home. She is a single Mum with a very young child. Your boss calls you into her office to tell you in strict confidence that, as a result of overspending, several members of your friend's team are to be made redundant next month, including your friend. What would be the RIGHT thing to do?

1. Tell your friend
2. Drop a hint
3. Say nothing

Rules – What are the Rules?

Integrity – How do we act with Integrity?

Good – Who is this Good for?

Harm – Who could we Harm?

Truth – What's the Truth?



How to do what's **RIGHT** - for real.



What are the Rules?

Remember that when we speak of rules, we mean any relevant laws, regulations, rules, codes, contracts or anything else that state our legal rights and duties. If we find any rule that clearly tells us what or what not to do, then this is the beginning and the end of the process. However, rules, like principles, may conflict, especially between legal jurisdictions; or they might not tell us clearly what to do; or they might not address the

issue we face. If in doubt, this is the time to check with a lawyer, a compliance officer or the company secretary. However, just because something isn't illegal doesn't mean it's right.

In this dilemma, the rules are clear. We have been given this information in strict confidence. All employees have a contractual duty to maintain confidentiality when specifically told. Whilst our hearts might tell us clearly that we must do something to help our friend, we would be breaking the rules. So when we ask, "What are the Rules?" telling our friend or dropping a hint are clearly wrong. Why is it, then, that in these or similar circumstances, many good people would believe that what's right would be to tell our friend or at least drop a hint? That's why we still have to look at the other questions...

How do we act with Integrity?

To answer this question, we need to know what our principles are. It sounds obvious, but you'd be amazed at the number of people and organisations who have never thought about what their principles are, or if they have, fail to apply them.

If you are in any doubt about what your principles are or should be in this situation, remember the list we had earlier: wisdom, fairness, courage, patience, loyalty, hope, love, honesty, excellence and respect. So how do they guide us?

We may feel that loyalty and concern for our friend's welfare are paramount. However, we should also remember that moral principles ought to be universal insofar that these same principles should guide how we act in relation to everyone

else involved. We might believe that being loyal to friends is a great quality in life, but what about others who deserve our loyalty? What about everyone else in the team? How about our own family if we get fired? How can we build loyalty and trust if we break confidences?

This is why acting with Integrity is tough. That's also why it's dangerous just to focus on one or two principles like loyalty and love. We must consider all our principles together. That's what Integrity means – whole, complete and undivided. To act with Integrity means we cannot pick and choose our principles to justify what's easy. We have to embrace them all in order to do what's right. Most people now believe that, as with Rules, to act with Integrity also means that to tell our friend or drop a hint would be wrong.

How to do what's **RIGHT** - for real.



How to do what's **RIGHT** - for real.

Who is this Good for?



How to do what's **RIGHT** - for real.

Asking and answering this question is the first stage in thinking of the consequences of our actions on others. What we have to do is to take each of our options and ask who's involved; and how they might benefit from each of our options.

So we can argue that to tell our friend or drop a hint might be Good for our friend and her child. It might also be Good for me and our friendship. But that's pretty much it. If we break the Rules, fail to act with Integrity, and tell our friend, just two or three people might benefit. If, on the other hand, we decide to do nothing, we could argue that no one actually benefits because all we are doing is maintaining the status quo. So, if we break confidentiality, we might do some Good for our friend, her daughter and our reputation as a good friend. But then again, telling our friend or dropping a hint could also Harm each of us.

How to do what's **RIGHT** - for real.

*“My country is the world,
and my religion is
to do good”.
Thomas Paine*

How to do what's **RIGHT** - for real.

Who could we Harm?



How to do what's **RIGHT** - for real.

Telling our friend or dropping a hint could also Harm us because we're panicking and thinking that the worst might happen. It's our primitive baby-brain reacting to a hostile situation. But is it really that bad? Let's just assume we tell our friend and she also reacts with fear and pulls out of the deal. She's lost a new home that she's been looking forward to for weeks. Someone has also overheard our whispered conversation and we've been fired for gross misconduct.

But if we say nothing and keep the confidence, sure, your friend will lose her job, but she'll also get a payoff, and then can get another job. And if it takes time, we've still got our job because we've done the **RIGHT** thing and so we can help her out with the bills, because that's what good friends do.

How to do what's **RIGHT** - for real.

*“It is always good men
who do the most harm
in the world.”*

Henry Brookes Adam

How to do what's **RIGHT** - for real.

“There is
no god higher
than truth”
Mahatma Gandhi

CONFIDENTIAL



How to do what's **RIGHT** - for real.

What's the Truth?

Having run this scenario in many different workplaces and cultures, most people say that most people would drop a hint. This is exactly what happened in the real-life incident on which this scenario is based. The Truth reminds us that dropping a hint is just as bad if not worse than simply telling her straight. If we're found out, we'll get fired – and again, this is what actually happened.

But it also hurts to keep quiet. How will our friend feel when she finds out that we knew and did nothing? Well, we can argue that doing nothing in this case is the same as doing what's right. I think good friends will understand that good friends do what's right. Do we think life would be better if true friendship was about breaking rules, acting without integrity, and reacting with fear? Or do we want friends who we can rely on to do what's right, even though it takes courage?

How to do what's RIGHT - and remember it

I hope that this book has given you some practical insights into how to do what's right. The RIGHT questions have been road-tested by thousands of people just like you and me. We face challenging decisions everyday. But we can now be confident of making the RIGHT decision when we ask these questions:

Rules – What are the Rules?

Integrity – How do we act with Integrity?

Good – Who is this Good for?

Harm – Who could we Harm?

Truth – What's the Truth?

To answer these questions, we need to know the Rules; we need to know what our principles are so that we act with Integrity; and we need to think about who's involved before we can work out whether they will experience Good or Harm. Finally, we must find a Truth and a choice that mean we can sleep at night.

Doing what's right doesn't always mean immediate success or even personal happiness, because life isn't a playground. *How to do what's RIGHT* is about thinking right, doing right, and leaving the world a better place.

“Roger makes the compelling case for why doing the right thing is not a function of good business, it is good business.”

Joe Garner, CEO,
Nationwide Building Society

“Roger has demonstrated that he has one of the most important traits of great thought leadership, the ability to make simple, what others find complex. Politicians, business leaders, employees and people the world over will benefit from this book”

Alison Gill, Organisational Psychologist,
Bvalco and former Olympic rower.

Roger Steare

The Corporate Philosopher

ethicability®

**(n) how to decide what's
right and find
the courage to do it**

5th edition

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