university, and the Spanish country office of a global luxury goods corporation. Combining this with results from surveys filled out by a large group of MBA students, they ultimately collected and studied data from over 10,000 work relationships.

Everyone they spoke to was plotted against two characteristics based on how they answered questions and how their peers rated them: their likeability and their competence. They then asked participants to imagine they had a job to do at work. Which of their colleagues would they choose to work with? On one level, the results were completely predictable.

Everyone wanted to work with the highly likeable and highly competent individuals (who the study dubbed the “Lovable Star”), and no one wanted to work with the low competence and low likeability individuals (the “Incompetent Jerk”). The unexpected results came when looking at the other two categories.

The study demonstrated that when faced with a choice between a more likeable person who workers had a stronger personal relationship with, or someone who had better job performance, but was less likeable—most people chose to work with the “Lovable Fool” (low competence, high likeability) rather than the “Competent Jerk” (high competence, low likeability).

The conclusion of the study was clear: “When faced with a choice between a ‘competent jerk’ and a ‘lovable fool’ as a work partner, people usually opt for likeability over ability.” This is not an isolated
The answer comes down to something called the Likeability Gap (see Figure 2.1).

When you are likeable, you can bridge this gap, and the benefits are almost endless. More likeable businesses hold on to their best employees longer. More likeable people hear about the best job openings first. For more likeable people, the things many of us attribute to good luck just seem to happen. Many of the examples you’ll find in this book are of people and companies that have managed to bridge this likeability gap in order to find their success.

To see why the likeability gap is such a powerful force in our lives and how we make decisions, let’s look at a few examples of the principle in action, beginning with the story of a guy who started his career doing something many people wouldn’t even consider—and continuing to do it for 20 years.
3. **The truth is hard to see.** Sometimes the real truth can be very hard to uncover. Organizations have long histories with dispersed information. More importantly, many people are used to simply accepting that the truth has been given to them, without digging any further.

4. **The truth can depend on you.** An engineer might look at a product, for example, and see a perfectly usable design, but when that same product is in front of a consumer it becomes an enigma. The truth about that product can differ depending on who you are and how you look at it.

   From the rise of Oprah, to Avis embracing their silver medal position in the car rental business, to Domino’s admitting their product was bad and fixing it, the truth has many potential ways it can work in your favor. More importantly, as we learned in Part I, there is an urgent need for each of us—and our organizations—to be more believable, and the truth is a critical first step in achieving this.

   Still, in having facilitated dozens of meetings and workshops with clients where this question has come up, finding the *right* truth is hard. The truth can be buried. It can feel wrong to share. Sometimes what you uncover may just be a fact and not the underlying core truth at all. So how can you actually find the truth in a way that will be useful?

### The Three Elements of Truth

![Diagram of the Three Elements of Truth]

In 2004, two business school professors—James M. Kouzes and Barry Posner—conducted a series of studies that were designed to uncover
why anyone would follow a particular leader in what they called “cynical times.” As we have seen in Chapter 1, this is a vital question to ask because so many institutions and their leaders still need to earn the trust of their stakeholders.

As part of their research, they asked their participants about the personal values and traits that were most important in a person that they might willingly follow (i.e., take their advice, follow their guidelines, or sign up for their team). “In virtually every survey we conducted,” they noted, “honesty was selected more often than any other leadership characteristic.”

Every story profiled in this chapter features people and organizations that were able to start with some sort of honesty, but honesty alone is only the first of three elements of truth:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unexpected Honesty</th>
<th>Unbiased Fact</th>
<th>Proactive Integrity</th>
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<tr>
<td>Honesty offered in an unusual way or on an unexpected topic that will make it more significant.</td>
<td>Something that has actually been done, occurred, or is actually the case, shared in a way that doesn’t reveal an inherent bias.</td>
<td>Consistently acting in a way that keeps the promises you have made proactively before anyone forces you to.</td>
</tr>
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Domino’s act of honestly admitting their pizza tasted awful is unexpected. Oprah honestly revealing intimate personal details about her childhood is unexpected. It is the unexpected that separates really powerful honesty from the type of honesty that people expect to see, which is usually described as “transparency.” Your goal should be to demonstrate unexpected honesty with the truth, and not simply to aim for being transparent.

Of course, honesty is usually meaningless without an idea of what information you will be sharing honestly. For that reason, you need to have facts. Facts should be the most objective part of the truth, but often they can be the most subjective because of the inherent bias that we all might have toward them.
relevance can be different for different people. As a result, offering something that is truly meaningful often requires the extra step of really understanding the people you will be talking to.

3. **Relevance can be tough to scale.** When you have a principle that can change based upon whom you are talking to, you can’t necessarily count on the same thing to make something relevant to a wide group of people. When it comes to considering how you interact with multiple groups of people, this might lead you to share something differently from conversation to conversation.

People care about other people and the relationships they build. The best way to combat these barriers is to first find a way to be personally relevant to people around you, and then build the right relationships.

**The Three Elements of Relevance**

![Diagram showing the three elements of relevance: Relevance, Active Listening, Meaningful POV, Surrounding Context.

Julian Treasure is an expert in psychoacoustic theory and one of the leading experts in the world in how sound affects business. Aside from his consulting business, Treasure is also a noted speaker on the impact of sound and listening in our lives.

In a TED presentation in 2011, he shared that the greatest problem facing the world right now may be what he calls our loss of “conscious listening,” where we truly pay attention to what is happening around us. It is an insight similar to what drives Paolo Nagari to teach executives how to relate to different cultures by seeing the similarities instead of the differences.
Active Listening | Meaningful Point of View | Surrounding Context
---|---|---
Paying attention to the world around you in order to identify the right opportunities where people might care about you and what you have to share. | Having something useful to say or do that adds value to a particular situation or someone’s life. | The situation surrounding an event or object makes a big difference in how we perceive it, and whether it will matter to us or not.

Listening cannot just be a passive activity, though. When James Wolfensohn was looking to make an impact at the Bank, he had to look outward and pay attention to how the Bank was perceived by others before he could act. For Mohamed Nasheed, it was only by paying attention to greater world events that he could find the right opportunity to make his country relevant on a world stage. The first element, therefore, involves an ongoing dedication to more active listening.

Once you have built some level of understanding about the situation and perceptions around you, offering a meaningful point of view is critical. One of the hottest topics in the business world today that will continue to grow is the importance of content in communications. People use terms like content marketing and curation to describe this concept in various ways.

Fashion brand Louis Vuitton, for example, has a “luxury storytelling” website called NOWNESS, where they collaborate with designers and thinkers to tell stories influencing contemporary culture and global lifestyle.

What multiple companies have realized is that having a meaningful point of view is a necessity to make your organization relevant to your customer and the world. Nothing makes a message fade into the noise.

Relevance has to start with understanding, and understanding always starts with listening.

The main idea is that all forms of communications actually work better when you have something meaningful to say.
What makes a good big ideaL?

Over four years, they led teams to conduct research to investigate the theory. They interviewed clients and spoke with industry analysts. Ultimately they learned that having a big ideaL came down to two parts. The first required understanding the cultural tension of the world at that point. This was the world within which the brand had to be relevant and meaningful. The second part was what the team dubbed the brand’s best self and represented an aspirational statement of what the brand would like to be. The big ideaL was the intersection.

But simply defining the big ideaL wasn’t enough. If they were going to bring it to real clients, it needed more real proof. To accomplish this they commissioned a study in 2009 to conduct interviews with over 2,000 consumers across the United States, the United Kingdom, Russia, China, India, Brazil, Spain, and Germany. The results were encouraging. It showed that brands with stronger big ideals outperformed the lowest rated brands by 2.8 times.²

Going further, the study profiled the example of the Shangri-La Hotel brand, which had struggled to stand out in an Asian market where luxury business hotels all focused on treating their customers like kings. Thinking through the big ideaL, their key insight was simple: “It isn’t the chandeliers that bring guests back, it’s the people. Shangri-La has a culture of treating guests like family—as kin, not king.”³

That nuance made all the difference. The mission energized employees and reminded them that the human warmth of how they treated guests was most important—not putting them on a pedestal as you might for royalty. Once they realized this unique point of differentiation, their marketing communicated it and their team delivered it.
The impact on sales was immediate. Occupancy increased by almost four times the industry average. Revenue did even better, growing 24 percent versus the industry average of 6 percent. And the experience of the Shangri-La brand was not an isolated incident.

Since 2007, the Ethisphere Institute has been producing rankings of the *World’s Most Ethical Companies*. In 2011, they released their fifth year of rankings, and more companies than ever before had made the list. They also found that the gap between companies categorized as “ethical” and those listed on the S&P 500 was increasing each year. By 2011, ethical companies were outperforming those listed on the S&P 500 by over 30 percent (see Figure 6.1).

The conclusion of the report stated definitively that ethical companies do have a consistent edge when it comes to being more profitable.

Clearly, there is a real value for brands in choosing to focus on making an impact on society beyond profits. Whole Foods, Patagonia, TOMS Shoes, Starbucks, and

![Figure 6.1 Percent Returns—World’s Most Ethical Companies versus S&P 500](source: Ethisphere)
The Three Elements of Unselfishness

Likeonomics Principle:

- **Unselfishness**
- **Human Empathy**
- **Giving Freely**
- **Offering Value**

It is not often that you hear someone ask to pay more taxes. Yet, billionaire investor Warren Buffett has said over and over again that he would prefer to pay more taxes, and he isn’t alone. A survey in 2011 from Spectrem Group reported that 68 percent of millionaires (people with investments of $1 million or more) supported raising taxes on those with $1 million or more in income. This desire to give back also led Buffet to work with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to create the Giving Pledge. Described as an effort to get the wealthiest people in the world to help solve the biggest problems in society, the pledge encourages billionaires to promise to give at least half of their wealth to charity during their lifetimes or upon their death. Over 40 families have signed up so far.

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<td>There is no substitute for actually caring, and that requires a level of empathy where you can relate to someone on a human level.</td>
<td>True unselfishness requires giving without expectations for something in return. Nothing can poison an unselfish act quicker than the sense you are only doing it in exchange for something else.</td>
<td>When you can offer value through answering a question or providing service in an unexpected way, you can make unselfishness tangible in a powerful and necessary way.</td>
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### Human Empathy

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### Giving Freely

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### Offering Value

When you can offer value through answering a question or providing service in an unexpected way, you can make unselfishness tangible in a powerful and necessary way.
presentations called “The World’s Best Presentation Contest.” Roam’s entry to the contest was a collaboration with physician and health-care strategist C. Anthony Jones, which was designed to explain how health care worked in America. Through a series of images, he explained how the health-care system was dependent on three critical groups—the “providers” (docs, hospitals and pharma), the “payers” (insurance companies), and the patients (you). The challenge in health care, he noted, is that you are stuck between the providers and the payers, and they both want your money (Figure 7.1).

It was a brilliantly simple way to explain a topic that was (and still is!) confusing millions of Americans as they were hearing about health care reform but not really understanding the options or the proposals that politicians were making. His presentation won the competition easily, and has been seen hundreds of thousands of times.

There are plenty of signs that the popularity of visual thinking extends far beyond a few pioneering management consultants, as well:

• In the Netherlands, Dutch psychologists have founded a nonprofit organization called the “Maria J. Krabbe Stichting Beelddenken” to study the phenomena of picture thinking and whether there may be some portion of our population who predominantly think in terms of pictures.
3. **Saying less can take more time.** Good simplification is rarely a quick process. The reason is because often it requires you to spend time figuring out all the things that you won’t do, or all the features that you won’t build. Remember that real simplicity can be a process of elimination, where you are only left with the most important ideas or features at the end.

   We tend to hear over and over from focused leaders that simplicity is more driven by what you decide to leave out rather than what you keep. John Maeda focused on reduction as his first law of simplicity. In that process, it can be easy to lose meaning or reduce the wrong things. For that reason, what really matters is not just making something simple, but also ensuring that the best ideas and elements of an idea or business are not lost.

**The Three Elements of Simplicity**

![Likeonomics Principle](image)

When Sakichi Toyoda founded Toyota Industries in 1926, he brought with him an idea that has since become legendary in the world of manufacturing and beyond. Known widely as the concept of the “five whys,” his idea was that if any problem occurs, simply asking *why* five times to each answer you come up with will usually be enough to get to the root cause of the problem.

It is a simple and often repeated technique used to simplify problems so they could be more easily solved in a complex manufacturing environment. The same idea works when it comes to simplifying to help
you get to the core idea or message. The aim is an idea that is, as Einstein once said, “as simple as possible, and no simpler.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Concept</th>
<th>Highly Shareable</th>
<th>Natural Language</th>
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<td>When you have distilled the complexity around you into a single clear concept that you can easily explain, you have found the core that matters.</td>
<td>Making anything shareable will be the way that the simplicity you have defined will be able to spread.</td>
<td>Speaking in a plain way without using overly academic words is a critical element in making anything simple enough for people to truly understand.</td>
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When Frank Batten and John Coleman had the crazy idea in 1982 to start an entire cable television channel dedicated to nothing but weather 24 hours a day, cable network executives said they were crazy. What kind of audience would watch a channel just about weather? The channel had a strong core concept and idea of what it would do, however, and launched on May 2, 1982, with the slogan “We Take the Weather Seriously, but not Ourselves.” This year, the network is celebrating its thirtieth anniversary of continual programming.

Simple ideas also tend to be highly shareable from person to person and so this is the critical second element of achieving simplicity—building something so simple that the most important people you should care about, from your customers to your employees, can easily understand and adopt the ideas into their lives as well as tell others about them.

The final piece is one that we spent quite a bit of time talking about in this chapter and that is used throughout this book: The power of natural language can be huge when it comes to building a more human connection with people.

One example of this is proverbs that are often repeated from person to person and convey a simple meaning in a way that uses natural language. “The early bird catches the worm” is one common example in which the proverb conveys meaning, but does it in a nonthreatening way.
Gall named his theory the “Gall Orthographic Projection” and wrote an article about it for the magazine (see Figure 8.1). When published, it unfortunately met with the same fate as before and was quickly dismissed. What did a reverend from Scotland know of cartography anyway? Time and history would forget Gall and his map projection again—this time for nearly 100 years, until something interesting happened in 1974.

That year, a German historian named Arno Peters proposed an almost identical idea that he had developed independently without knowing of Gall’s work. His projected map appeared to be nearly the same as Gall’s, and was based on similar calculations of longitude and latitude. But Peters’ map (which he called the “Peters projection map”) was introduced at a much different time in history.

In 1974, the world was consumed by the promise of racial and political equality. People had lived through two world wars, numerous revolutions, and race and gender rights were hot topics. The Peters projection map was seen to offer a symbol of hope and redemption for cultures around the world that had been colonized by Western nations. For many, it offered proof of the skewed worldview that many Western countries still held toward the rest of the developing world. It even found some advocates in the Western world itself.
suggested that most consumers weren’t seeing an ad and going straight into a retail store to consider purchasing and then buying an item. There was an intermediate step, and that step had everything to do with the web and with Google itself. Google’s Vice President of Sales Jim Lecinski described this as a “grabbing-the-laptop moment” in an ebook he authored on Google’s view of the importance of timing in retail and something they called the Zero Moment of Truth (ZMOT) (see Figure 8.2).

ZMOT was the real first step people took any time they saw an ad or a billboard, or someone walking down the street with a product they liked. *I wonder where she got that handbag? ZMOT. Is this Burger King the closest fast food or is there a Taco Bell around the corner? ZMOT. This restaurant menu looks good, but how do I know for sure? ZMOT.*

For any decision from looking for a new house to buying ballpoint pens, Lecinski wrote, “The buying decision journey has changed.” Thanks to vast amounts of information and reviews on the web, as well as better mobile technology that allows us to get that information much faster, the moment when the buying decision is made is fundamentally shifting.

The conclusion of the report was clear. For anyone selling or buying anything, timing is critical; because if you don’t reach a consumer exactly
The Three Elements of Timing

Likeonomics Principle:

Timing

Necessary Urgency

Habitual Connection

Current Events

When the United Nations Summit on Climate Change, which was profiled in Chapter 5, was complete, critics who were disappointed with the results pointed to a lack of urgency as a critical reason why the talks had stalled. When it comes to timing, having a built-in sense of urgency is crucial as the first element, because it lets people know that something is important in the moment when you are trying to influence them to care.

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<th>Current Events</th>
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<td>The first element in getting timing right is having a built-in sense of urgency so it is clear that someone needs to act or pay attention in the moment that matters.</td>
<td>The best timing will connect your message or idea to a habit that the people you are trying to influence already have.</td>
<td>There are plenty of external factors that can influence getting timing right, so linking something to current events can only help with relevance.</td>
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