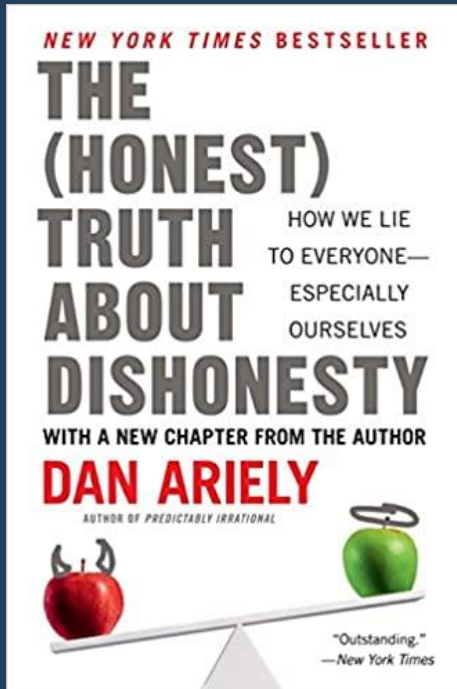


The Honest Truth About Dishonesty



Year of publication: 2012

Author: Dan Ariely

336 pages

Before you start reading this summary, we would like you to think about the following question: What is dishonesty for you?

You might have answered that dishonesty is taking great advantage of other people.

But what if we tell you that we don't need to make big cheats to be considered dishonest?

Dan Ariely explains in his book "The (Honest) Truth About Dishonesty" that we only need to take home one pen from work that we are already acting dishonestly.

But don't worry, some strategies can help us to keep our honesty and to help others from being dishonest with us!

Main ideas of the book

To teach you how to overcome dishonesty in your relationships the author talks about:

- Why dishonesty is so interesting;
- Our ability to find excuses for our dishonest behaviors;
- How tiredness influences dishonesty;
- The close relationship between creativity and dishonesty;
- How a dishonest person can influence others;
- Strategies to overcome dishonesty.

To whom is this book indicated?

The book "The (Honest) Truth About Dishonesty" is indicated for leaders and managers who want to ensure that their subordinates are acting honestly within the company.

Overview of the book

I cheat, you cheat, he cheats...

You may feel offended to be called a cheater or dishonest. However, Dan Ariely makes it clear in his book that we all cheat from time to time.

When we take a pen from the office and take it home, we are already cheating. We just don't realize it because we do it without hurting our sense of integrity.

The truth, according to the author, is that we cheat to the level that allows us to retain our self-image as honest individuals.

It is also claimed that as long as we are cheating just a little bit, we can benefit from our cheating, and we still see ourselves as moral human beings. This balance is what the book refers to as "Fudge Factor Theory" and this is what we will talk about next.

But what does this "Fudge Factor Theory" have to do with dishonesty?

As it was mentioned before, the balance between cheating and still being able to see ourselves as moral human beings are the main focus of the fudge factor theory.

One of the experiments presented in the book "The (Honest) Truth About Dishonesty" suggests that human beings are ready and willing to steal something that does not explicitly reference monetary value. That way, we can see ourselves as honest people.

How can we avoid cheating from happening?

The author's research revealed that being reminded about moral standards prevents us from behaving dishonestly. According to the author, people seem to want to be honest, we just need to incorporate moral reminders in situations that encourage us to be dishonest.

But what are moral reminders? Well, moral reminders can be oaths, signatures on some kind of pledge, empowerment with new roles, objective and clear rules, etc.

The moral reminders have proven to be effective when it comes to keeping people acting honestly, at least for a short period.

Encouraging dishonesty

Come on, any person who considers themselves moral would never encourage others to act dishonestly, right? Wrong! There is a very common behavior in the professional environment that encourages dishonesty, but without feeling like cheating.

Dan Ariely explains that we don't have to be corrupt to act in a problematic and harmful way. Many professionals, for example, end up selling themselves "unintentionally" to "incentives".

Who has never recommended a professional who did us a favor, or a product that was offered to us as an "favour"?

We need to understand how blind we can get when it comes to those financial motivations, both for not offering a product or a service that we're being biased and for not believing in someone that is being biased.

Why do we ruin everything when we are tired?

How many times did you ruin your diet because you were feeling tired and frustrated? Did you know that there is a tension between reason and desire? And that's why we ruin everything when we are tired.

But what does that have to do with dishonesty? In the book "The (Honest) Truth About Dishonesty" it was proven that to resist temptation, we need to put in effort and energy. That way, we waste our energy in every temptation that we avoid, and as a consequence, we exhaust our strength of will.

In other words, with every "no" we say, our ability to resist temptation decreases. In short, the daily attempts to act correctly during the day weakens our supply of self-control, thus making us more susceptible to temptation.

Therefore, it's suggested that we should get rid of the temptation, and if that's not possible, we should face situations that require a lot of self-control during the morning, before we get too exhausted.

When avoiding temptation is not possible, try to count until 100 and stick to your plan. It's important to learn how to avoid those harmful impulses.

The "What-the-Hell!" Effect

You probably already did something that you considered wrong. When we put too much effort into controlling ourselves, there is a good chance that we will fall for the temptation easily, and that's what Dan Ariely calls the "what-the-hell" effect.

According to the author, considering the "what-the-hell" effect, the first act of cheating can be particularly important in shaping the way a person looks at themselves and their actions from that point on.

Now, try to think like a leader. If we forgive the first crime, there is a good chance that other dishonest behaviors will keep happening.

But hold on! You don't need to fire your employees! You can adopt strategies to cut down the dishonest acts, that way, you learn not only how to prevent the "what-the-hell" effect in you, but also your employees!

Finding excuses for dishonest behaviors

Everyone has already tried to justify their dishonest acts because no one wants to be seen as an immoral person.

Now, there is a type of cheating that ends up being good for our ego, and that's why we should avoid it!

In the book "The (Honest) Truth About Dishonesty" it's explained that when we lie to benefit others, we are telling a "harmless lie" because we are not doing it for selfish reasons.

Often these harmless lies are social niceties that strengthen our relationships and help people get through difficult circumstances.

That way, be careful with the level of the lies, because unfortunately, sometimes they are necessary, but they should not be an excuse for lowering our level of morality.

We are all storytellers

Everyone has already tried to improve a story to make it more exciting, right?

Considering this, have you ever thought that there is a relationship between creativity and dishonesty?

Dan Ariely explains that the connection between creativity and dishonesty is related to the ability to justify our actions to ourselves, even when we are not acting correctly. The greater an individual's creativity is, the greater is their ability to create a story to defend their selfish interest.

Therefore, it is good to adopt strategies that prevent the creative individual from finding innovative (and dishonest) solutions when it comes to rules.

At no point does the author say that we should not hire creative people. After all, how could we innovate if not through creativity? However, he says we need to limit the cases where creative people can use their abilities to break rules and to justify their bad behavior.

A cheater bothers a lot of people, two cheaters bother much more...

If dealing with a dishonest person is hard, imagine dealing with a whole dishonest team.

In the book "The (Honest) Truth About Dishonesty" it is claimed that dishonesty is like a virus capable of infecting people around.

You have probably been in a situation where a friend or a colleague did something wrong and suggested you do the same.

The truth is, when our friends cross the ethical line with us, our actions start to seem more socially acceptable in our own eyes.

When we see someone cheating, we tend to think that it might be normal.

Imagine that you are a boss and that every day you spend 15 minutes beyond lunchtime doing non-work-related things. Don't you think your subordinates would find spending 15 minutes to themselves acceptable?

If someone in our group cheats, we feel that cheating is socially acceptable.

The problem is that one dishonest act attracts another one even bigger. The author claims that:

"As the "virus" mutates and spreads from one person to another, a new, less ethical code of conduct develops."

Thanks to that, we need to be more vigilant to curb even small infractions.

And most importantly, public figures and figures of power have a greater impact on their observers. That way, their dishonest behaviors can cause a greater impact on society.

For that reason, we need to be more careful of any dishonest act and demand an ethical commitment from our superiors and our peers.

Team cheating

If dishonesty is contagious, then in a team it must be easy for it to spread, right? Correct!

Only those who have worked in a team know that teamwork requires agile management. There are countless meetings, experiences of collaboration, the delegation of roles, that is, many hours of work are required.

The point is, when we work in a team, we tend to worry more about others, increasing the chances of being dishonest and unethical if our behavior benefits others. It's like a "harmless lie", but here Dan Ariely calls this "altruistic cheating".

Research suggests that we humans have a weakness for altruistic cheating.

But don't give up on hope! The studies have also shown that direct supervision is capable of reducing dishonest behavior and even eliminating it completely!

Therefore, it's enough to choose some members to act as monitors, when we know that we are being observed, we end up being less inclined to act dishonestly.

If everyone is dishonest, what can we do about it?

Hold on, you don't need to lose faith in humanity. The book "The (Honest) Truth About Dishonesty" presents a semi optimistic ending!

As shown in the book, some forces influence dishonest decision-making. But the truth is, we humans don't cheat nearly enough according to the opportunities we have.

Most of us cheat just a little bit, by rounding up their billable hours, claiming higher losses on their insurance claims, recommending unnecessary treatments, etc.

This shows us that, in the end, we need to discourage bad behaviors. But what can be done about dishonesty?

According to the research carried by the author, it's recommended to put moral reminders on situations where temptations are. We need to understand the effects of the environment, and how it can wear us out physically and mentally so that we are less likely to give in.

And finally, we need to understand how dishonesty spreads. We need to ensure the moral behavior of everyone around us so that there is no degradation of behavior inside the company.

What do other authors say about it?

As we saw, dishonesty is a great problem in our professional lives. Therefore, if you wish to guarantee that your employees are making the best decisions within the company, we suggest the reading of **"Noise: A Flaw in Human Judgement"**.

We've also seen that saying "no" to temptations weakens our energy. So, what about reading **"No Excuses! The Power of Self-Discipline"**? In this summary, you will learn how to achieve your goals through the power of self-control!

And finally, it is clear that the "what-the-hell" effect is harmful when we commit our first dishonest act, but you should know that this effect can be helpful sometimes. By reading **"The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F*ck"** you will learn how to not waste your energy on the wrong things!

Okay, but how can I apply this in my life?

We saw that behaving dishonestly is pretty easy, right? So, what about remembering some tips that the book gives us to avoid temptations?

- Use moral reminders. Create an oath to the employees, put some notes where temptation is present. We tend to be honest, we just need to be reminded once in a while when we face temptation.
- Avoid tempting situations during the night when you are already tired. If you eliminate temptations completely, try to deal with them in the morning.
- Don't accept financial "favors" so that you do not form a biased opinion. Always remember to ask if someone that is offering you a service is being influenced by their interests.
- Delegate functions. Do you have a team? Put one of the members as a monitor. Nobody wants to get caught cheating.
- Remember that the "what-the-hell" effect is like a snowball. If you give in to a dishonest act, your standards will lower even more.
- Be an example! Dishonesty is contagious. You don't want to be the one who influences others to act dishonestly, right?



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