

Truth

How the many sides of every story shape our reality

Hector MacDonald

In this book, Hector MacDonald explores how truth is used and abused in politics, business , the media and everyday life. He shows how a clearer understanding of truth will better help us navigate our world.

**There is no worse lie than a truth
misunderstood by those who hear it.**

A mindset is a set of beliefs, ideas and opinions that we hold about ourselves and the world around us.

Mindsets are flexible in some respects

We all see the world through different lenses, formed largely by the different truths we hear and read. Whether intentionally or unintentionally other people regularly steer us towards particular facets and interpretations of the truth.

For years Colgate ran an ad that said that 80 % of dentists recommend Colgate. Most consumers understood this as dentists recommending Colgate in preference to other brands. In reality the question the dentists were being asked “was which brands would you recommend’ and Colgate was one of them. This slogan was banned by the advertising standards council.

Everyone has an agenda and it is only natural for communicators to select truths that further their agenda. This can be done ethically or deceitfully, communicators can choose either path.

Truth is a much debated topic amongst philosophers. They argue over the relationship between truth and knowledge, the objectivity and universalism of truth.

Since there are different truths, we call them 'competing truths'

There are four classes of competing truths:
partial truths
selective truths
artificial truths and
unknown truths

Complexity tactic No 1 ; Omissions

Omission is a natural tactic. The more complex the subject, the greater the opportunity to omit unhelpful truths.

Complexity tactic # 2 : Obfuscation

in south Africa , the wealthy Gupta family was under attack and they hired Bell Pottinger , a British PR firm to spread a narrative in south Africa around economic apartheid.

Complexity tactic#3: Association

Rudy Giuliani's presidential campaign went off the rails because people close to him were indicted for cocaine distribution, tax fraud etc.

Association hurts leaders when partial truths are written about people close to them

History tactic # 1: Forgetting the past

this happens by omitting past sins and also ignoring and downplaying the success of their competitors

If omission is the simplest form of truthful historical manipulation, biased selection is the most common. This happens all the time in making CVs(resumes)

History tactic # 2 : Selectively remembering the past

A school teacher of mine once compared history to a bowl of spaghetti. There are many strands and historians have to pull out one strand to paint a coherent view of the past.

Context makes all the difference to our impression of reality.

A modest gift from a child to you might mean more than a costly gift from an adult.

Context tactic # 1 : Framing
setting a context that favors your agenda is
a particularly powerful communication tool

Context tactic # 2 : Ignoring relevant context.

Politicians like to misrepresent opponents' positions by quoting them out of context, making it easier to refute them

We like our information bite sized these days. Long form journalism has given way to news tickers and twitter feeds

Numbers are wonderful, they give us a clarity about our world that words often fail to provide. They allow us to compare things, to rate things, to measure change, to sum up a galaxy in a single figure. Numbers can speak to anyone in any culture.

Canada and Australia have the highest rate of kidnappings in the world. This could startle you. The truth is that both countries include parental disputes over child custody in kidnappings and hence the number is high.

Numbers tactic #1 : Choosing helpful units
President Trump told Congress in 2017 that 94 million Americans are out of the labor force. This number includes all students above 16 and retired people. The number of people who want to work but don't have a job which is the right definition was just 7.6 million people!!

Numbers tactic # 2 : making numbers look bigger or smaller
this happens via charts in business.
Politicians tend to break everything down to a day's expenditure or per tax payer. The daily Express said the Royal family costs you only 56 pence a year, in actual that number is 35.7 million pounds per annum. Putting it like 56 pence makes it look inconsequential

To make a number look bigger, just make the timescale longer. Some of our most important truths derive from the way in which important numbers change over time.

Numbers tactic #3: Concealing or exaggerating trends

Graphically, misleaders can transform truths by changing the scale of graph or using axes that don't start at zero. With this downward trends look flat and upward slopes can appear significant

Statistics aren't lies, but as truths, they can be much more malleable than one might expect from simple numbers

**Smart politicians, union leaders and activists
will choose the type of average that suits
their agenda**

Numbers tactic # 4 ; Cherry picking statistics

How we understand the world depends on how we measure it. This determines our votes, our actions and our attitudes. We must not lose trust in numbers, but we have to get better at interpreting them and holding misleaders to account when they use numbers that lie to us.

Story tactic # 1 : linking facts to imply causation

Story tactic # 2 :using stories to define identity

company origin stories are popular devices to bond employees or engage customers. Nike has built a complex story around the co founder and how he made shoes at home with a waffle iron

Anecdotes are a powerful tool in any organization

Story tactic #3 : using example stories to inspire or change behavior

Story tactic # 4 : positioning stories as evidence

Stories are immensely powerful. They convince easily, sometimes unjustifiably. They help us make sense of a complex world, we are inclined to accept them as truths even though they might be one truth.

Morality tactic # 1 : Demonization

**Morality tactic # 2 : shaping group
moralities**

Morality tactic # 3 : making morality irrelevant

**Fashion is the most conspicuous
manifestation of the subjectiveness and
changeability of desire.**

Because desirability is subjective, it can be changed with the right competing truth.

Desirability tactic # 1 : Persuading people to like what's good for them.

Gallup published a report that said that only 13 % of people are engaged at work. How can we make work more desirable?

**Desirability tactic # 2 – Turning people
against entire groups
we have seen Trump denounce Mexicans.**

Pricing is never based on the effort of production alone.

Competing truths about financial value are essential to trade. The main reason we exchange or trade things is because we value them differently.

How we value

1. What is the benefit to me?
2. What is the benefit to someone else?
3. How rare is it?
4. What are the risks of buying it?
5. What does the future hold?

Financial value tactic # 1 – including all relevant factors in subjective evaluations. De Beers in between the two world wars persuaded women to view the quality and size of diamond as representative of their suitor's love. The campaign was spectacularly successful

We are much better at making relative valuations than absolute valuations.

Without previous pricing knowledge, we don't really know what anything should cost us, but we can generally say if one thing is worth more than the other.

Financial value tactic # 2- using price anchors and other tricks to influence other people's valuations

As more and more people enter the gig economy, those of us who work for ourselves have got to get better at valuing ourselves- for everyone's sake

**Definition tactic # 1- interpreting
circumstances to fit a definition**

Bottled water manufacturers stretch definitions to breaking point. What does pure drinking water mean?

Definition tactic # 2 – Warping a definition to fit circumstances

Naming has at times been considered a magical act, because the name we give the person shapes the way the world sees them. Names influence the way we respond to people and things

