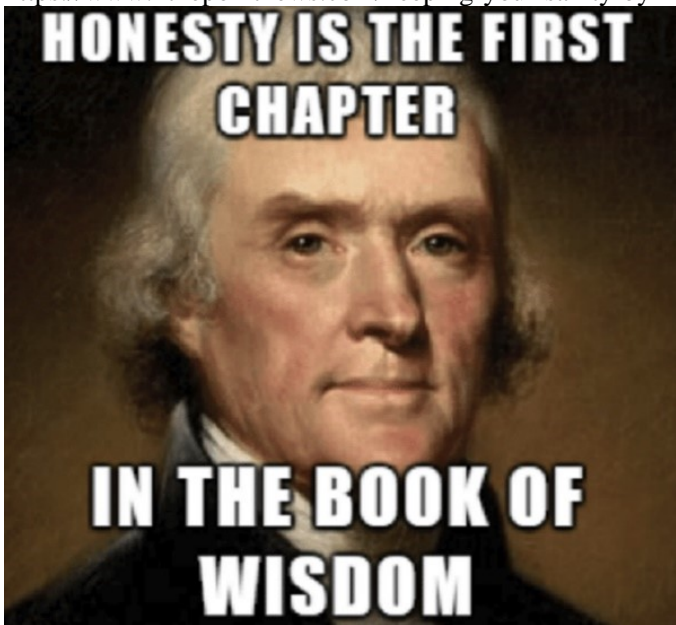


KEEPING YOUR SANITY BY KNOWING HOW TO TELL THE TRUTH

<https://www.2thepointnews.com/keeping-your-sanity-by-knowing-how-to-tell-the-truth/>



Thomas Jefferson

Lying takes a huge toll on our relationships, our physical health, and our mental health. But sometimes we're not so clear about what it means to be honest. Does it mean we say everything that we think or feel?

There are very strong benefits to honesty; and also some common sense guidelines as to what's appropriate to express.

Let's start with outright lying. Americans lie an average of 11 times per week.

In one study, two groups were asked each week over a ten-week period how many lies they told while they were given a lie detector test. One of these groups was also encouraged to stop telling major and minor lies for the ten weeks.

Both groups ended up lying less, which is not surprising. When we focus our attention on something specific we are much more likely to improve our behavior around it – if we weigh ourselves regularly, we are more likely to lose weight; if we carry a pedometer to measure the number of steps we take, we are likely to exercise more – if you want to change something, measure it.

Not surprisingly, those who were encouraged not to lie, lied less than those who weren't.

In any given week, when people lied less, they also reported that their physical health and mental health was better. But those in the group who were encouraged not to lie also reported that their relationships were better.

This is not shocking. Honesty is one of the foundations of trust; lying leads to greater distrust. When we lie, we're not as sneaky as we may think. People figure it out eventually, and they trust us less. Our relationships suffer dearly for it.

Lying also is stressful; we feel more disconnected, isolated, and there is pressure to keep track of the lies that we tell. When we lie often, we have in effect a long list to keep track of in our mind, and that can wear on us. The clients I have worked with over the years who have been habitual liars have also been chronically anxious.

In another study, Sally Theran of Wellesley College reported that, "My research on girls and boys... indicates that the process of being authentic, or being honest and open in meaningful relationships, is significantly related to feeling less depressed and having higher self-esteem.... There may be increased conflict, as a result of being open and honest, but it leads to a better quality of friendships."

This is common sense, but here's where this can get tricky: I have colleagues who believe that if we don't express *every* feeling or impulse, that we're being dishonest. I've watched these folks say the most awful, hurtful, vile things to each other, calling each other the most insulting names in the process. Their impulse is sometimes to hurt the other, and so they do it.

It doesn't really work very well for them.

By this philosophy, the whole concept of honesty and authenticity becomes nebulous. By this way of thinking, if we don't express *literally everything that goes through our mind*, we can't be honest.

This is of course ridiculous. To be *honest* is not to be *brainless*. To be honest does not mean that we let fly anything that comes to mind.

Honesty is one facet of integrity. To have integrity is to integrate our thoughts, feelings, experience, values, and knowledge. In other words, real honesty requires *consciousness*.

We may feel, at a given moment, annoyed with something that our spouse or child or friend is doing. It may be appropriate to say in that moment, "that's really annoying me right now, could you please stop?"

Or it may not be appropriate. Our child may be practicing a skill that he or she is trying to master – playing an instrument, for example – and at this stage of the game it doesn't sound very good.

Do you express your feelings at that moment? Do you say, "That sounds awful! I can't stand listening to this!" I hope not. Those might be the words that come to mind, and you may *feel* that way, but...

Your reactions, passing feelings, and impulses *are not you*. They're often the result of pathways that you have laid down in your brain over time, consciously or unconsciously, so in that sense they are *part* of you; but in a very real sense, taking responsibility for your life means *choosing* which of those pathways – which of your habits – you will reinforce, and which you will inhibit.

What is authentically you includes your values, your priorities, and how you choose to be in relation with the people in your life. To be authentically honest requires that you *integrate* your feelings, impulses, and reactions with your values and priorities, and with how you choose to be in relationship.

That will probably mean that we focus on our love and support for our child when they're practicing their musical instrument, and not our momentary feelings of annoyance at the sound... we might also, of course, want to see about creating a practice room with soundproofing.

The bottom line is that there is a quantitative difference between lying, on the one hand, and choosing when and how we express our thoughts and feelings, on the other. People who lie tend to keep this difference tangled and muddy.

The truth is, we know with some self-reflection, when we are lying to cover something up, to save face, to avoid an inevitable conflict. There may be times when this is appropriate – we have no obligation to tell a criminal where our loved ones or valuables are hidden, for example.

We also know, with some self-reflection, when expressing our feelings is actually indulging an impulse rather than communicating something important that has integrity with our deepest values. The mission then is to understand what we're feeling as best we can, and to decide what we want to do with those feelings.

Lying does harm to us. It compromises our relationships, our health, and our well-being.

But *choosing how and when* we express our thoughts and feelings is not dishonesty, it is *self-possession*. The capacity to own our own life, to regulate ourselves, is a function of the choice to live with integrity in accordance with our consciously held values.

These are two separate practices, with two very different consequences.

PS: *A Master's Course in Happiness* can help you to take charge of your habits and your life in ways you may not have thought possible; and my new course, *Mastering Emotions, Moods and Reactions* can help you grow a deep understanding and practical skills for mastering these systems and living well.

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