

To Be Honest



# To Be Honest

*Lead with the Power of  
Truth, Justice, and Purpose*

Ron Carucci



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*For all those who fight every day for a world of greater truth, justice, and purpose. For your unsung heroism, your silent suffering and sacrifice, and your inspiring example, this book is dedicated to honoring your stories so that the rest of us might, in some small way, emulate them.*

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*([www.eji.org](http://www.eji.org))*

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*to support the extraordinary work they do in the world.*



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## FOREWORD

I am a social psychologist who moved from a psychology department (at the University of Virginia) to a business school (New York University's Stern School of Business) in 2011. The bridge I crossed was business ethics—my entire career has been spent studying moral psychology, and in 2011 the world was still digging out from the rubble of the global financial crisis, which was caused in large part by bad ethics at many financial institutions. I therefore thought this would be easy; all I have to do is apply my research, and the research of others, to corporate life. I thought, “Surely when business leaders see the research on how to promote ethics in their organizations, they’ll want to apply it.” I founded a non-profit collaboration of researchers at [EthicalSystems.org](http://EthicalSystems.org) to make the academic research accessible and applicable to anyone trying to improve their organization and its ethical culture.

If you are in the business world, you are probably now laughing at my naïveté. It is hard to understand what is really happening inside a company, and harder still to change its culture. Furthermore, everyone is busy, they don't have time to read research summaries; they want answers to the problems they are facing right now.

That is why this book is so important. *To Be Honest* is the best book I have read about corporate culture, and Ron Carucci is the best guide I can imagine for anyone who wants to set off on the arduous journey to strengthen their culture.

What makes this book so great?

- First, Ron is charming and disarming. His love for this work shines through on every page. You get to know him and trust him as you read the book.
- Second, Ron backs up his claims with hundreds of citations from the academic literature. He is building the bridge between behavioral science and business that we try to build at [EthicalSystems.org](http://EthicalSystems.org).
- Third, the book distills the lessons gleaned from his own 15-year research study comprised of over 3,000 interviews Ron and his firm conducted with corporate executives and employees. To understand a company, you can't just gather quantitative data; you have to be something of an anthropologist—an expert listener and observer. That's Ron, and his firm, Navalent.

- Fourth, Ron gives you a simple yet powerful framework for thinking about ethics: honesty is the goal, but it's an expanded conception of honesty, incorporating truth, justice, and purpose. To be honest, you have to say the right thing (truth), do the right thing (justice), and say and do the right thing for the right reason (purpose).
- Fifth, unlike any book that an academic like me could write, Ron gives you hundreds of specific ideas for increasing honesty in your organization. Each chapter ends with suggestions for how to “get busy,” followed by a recap of the most important ideas in the chapter. This is a book designed to be turned into practice, to help you address the problems that you face right now, as well as heading off the problems you'd otherwise face down the road.

In short, *To Be Honest* is a practical, fun-to-read and backed-by-research guidebook for improving your ethical culture. It would be an ideal common read for the leadership team at your company—or perhaps for all employees. If your team were to read one chapter each week and discuss it each Monday morning, I can almost guarantee that in 10 weeks, you'd have a more honest company, one better able to gain the trust of all stakeholders, and better able to attract and retain the most talented employees.

In our age of social media, anxiety, and political polarization, corporate cultures are changing. I can see this change in the MBA students I have taught since 2011. With each passing year, students care more about sustainability, ethics, and corporate social responsibility. They expect to have more “voice.” So, change *is coming* to your company. It's going to involve some difficult conversations, and perhaps elevated levels of internal conflict. In the last few years, I have heard people in many organizations say they feel like they are “walking on eggshells,” or “walking through a minefield.” Anchoring your culture and your conversations in a rich and shared conception of honesty will help you to navigate these hazards, and guide your company or team to a healthier, more cooperative way of working together.

*Jonathan Haidt*  
*Thomas Cooley Professor of Ethical Leadership*  
*New York University Stern School of Business*

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