



### **Radical Honesty**

How to Transform Your Life by Telling the Truth

By Brad Blanton

12-minute read

#### ***Synopsis***

*Radical Honesty* (first published 1993, this edition 2004) is a guide to help you tell the truth. We all lie, all the time, and it's only through extreme honesty that we can escape from the moralism that surrounds us and truly be ourselves.

#### ***Who is it for?***

- People who want to express themselves more clearly
- Couples struggling to communicate
- Self-improvement fans

#### ***About the author***

Dr. Brad Blanton was trained in Gestalt Therapy and practiced psychotherapy for many years. Alongside *Radical Honesty*, his books include *Practicing Radical Honesty*, *Radical Parenting*, and *The Truthtellers*. He also conducts workshops on radical honesty in Shenandoah Valley, Virginia.

### ***What's in it for me? Discover the incredible power of the truth.***

When was the last time you told a lie? It wasn't anytime recently, was it? Ah, good. Well, kudos on your honesty! Unless, that is, you're lying right now. Are you?

No matter how you answer that question, it's a fact: people lie constantly. At least, that's what the author, Brad Blanton, believes. We lie to others about how we're feeling and we lie to ourselves about who we are and what we want. Learning to lie is simply part of growing up.

But that doesn't make it healthy. The truth is, all this lying is killing us inside. So how do you stop, when lying is everywhere?

The answer is simple, yet also incredibly difficult: you just have to tell the truth. Radically.

In these blinks, you'll learn

- what moralism is and how we can escape it;
- why there's nothing noble about bottling up your anger; and
- why you need to tell your partner every last detail about your sex life.

### ***Moralism means that your mind dominates your being.***

Let's start at the very beginning: the womb.

A few months after conception, consciousness dawns, and that's when you experience experience itself for the first time. Everything seems to be eternal, timeless.

You may not consciously remember this experience, but, on some level, it remains with you. It's this experience of eternity that you, like everyone else, long to go back to.

But you can't. Because once you're born, you learn how you're expected to behave in the world around you. As the author puts it, the *mind* takes over from the *being*. And that clarity you had in the womb is lost forever. That's what religion and philosophy are about – they're efforts to recapture that lost purity.

It's like a disease, the author says, and it slowly kills us all. He calls it *moralism*.

### ***The key message here is: Moralism means that your mind dominates your being.***

In trying to do the best for their children, parents teach them morals. These lessons learned from past behavior help keep them safe and teach them how to behave. But children also learn negative behaviors from their parents' lessons.

The author tells the story of Stephen, a young boy who made a mess while secretly making lemonade in the

kitchen. When his parents found out, they were angry and punished him. In response, *he* got angry, blaming his parents and saying he hated them.

This was only natural. In fact, it was a survival mechanism. In apportioning blame and getting angry, Stephen was imitating his parents.

The problem lies in trying to apply a fixed set of rules to the fluid and complex world around us. Lawyers do this when they try to apply the rigid dictates of law to nuanced real-life cases. They're what's called *field dependent*.

To understand that idea, picture a rod inside a square frame. The rod and frame turn independent of one another, like hands on a clock. The room you're in is dark, so the rod and frame are the only things you can see. Suddenly, the frame stops moving but the rod continues. So when is the rod vertical?

According to field dependent people, it's when it's parallel with the frame. *Field independent* people, on the other hand, realize the frame isn't a reliable reference point and instead use their own bodies to work out when the rod is vertical.

Moralists are field dependent. But there's a very basic problem with field dependence: it's a lie.

### ***We all lie our asses off, and that hurts us.***

We all lie. In fact, we lie all the time. And not just about the little things. On a deeper level, most adults are living a lie they taught themselves in adolescence.

Adolescence is when you first ask the question, Who am I? And it's human nature, unfortunately, to want a single, definitive response. So you pretend that the response you give yourself – the persona you adopt – is actually a true reflection of who you are.

This isn't the only form of lying people do – not by a long shot.

### ***The key message here is: We all lie our asses off, and that hurts us.***

In childhood, you learn the lie that there are fixed, moral rules that govern how you act. Then as an adolescent, you learn to lie about your identity. And it doesn't stop there. As an adult, you keep secrets from others – even those you're closest to.

Lying is at once a survival tactic and a disease that's slowly killing us. Just as moralism does, it encourages the *mind* to dominate the *being*.

No treatment can fully cure it – but through telling the truth, the disease becomes manageable.

This doesn't just mean owning up to minor indiscretions. It means *really* telling the truth. The author calls it *radical honesty*.

There are three levels to radical honesty. The first one is simply about putting the facts on the table. So often, people are held back by the secrets they keep from loved ones. Relieving that tension by admitting your lies is good for your mental and physical health.

The second level is about emotional truth. People seldom admit how they really feel because they're worried about how it'll sound to others. But it's not enough to admit you had an affair, for example – you also need to be honest about how it *felt*. Otherwise, you're still lying.

The third level of truth-telling is where you also start to *live* the truth. It's where you can fully admit that your true identity – your *being* – isn't the same as the identity you've been presenting to the world.

This means acknowledging your vanity, your egotism, your true desires in life. The author, for instance, acknowledges that he wrote his book because he wanted to become a famous intellectual and to help millions. He wanted to be a bit like Jesus.

It's tough to be that unflinchingly honest about yourself. But you have to try. And in the next few blinks, you'll find out how.

***Radical honesty means telling the whole truth, no matter how uncomfortable that is.***

Radical honesty is a simple concept – just stop lying and tell the truth. Putting it into practice is hard, though. As an example, imagine this difficult situation: you've slept with your husband's best friend, and now it's time to come clean. You might think that being honest would simply mean telling your husband that basic fact. You'd probably then have a fight about it, and end up resenting each other, maybe forever.

But radical honesty is different. It means being real – uncomfortably real – right down to the smallest detail.

**The key message here is: Radical honesty means telling the whole truth, no matter how uncomfortable that is.**

Radical honesty means sitting your husband down and telling him everything, including how many times you had sex, whether you had orgasms, what you did afterward, how much you enjoyed it, and so on. Simply telling your husband the basic details isn't enough – unless he has the full picture of what the experience was, you're keeping things back from him.

This is because of moralism again. Usually, when conversations about this sort of thing take place, people use *evaluative* language – they talk in terms of rights and wrongs. The more honest approach is to use *descriptive* language. Stop trying to justify your actions, or waiting for your partner to judge you. Simply acknowledge that it happened and that you felt how you felt.

It's hard to do that. But it's better for your relationship. And in the long run, it's better for your stress levels, too. Lying takes such a physical toll on us that it wears us down. Radical honesty like this can save lives.

As a society, after all, we're still somewhat repressed. Sex itself is less taboo than it used to be, but we're still a long way off being truly open about our sexual desires. At the heart of all this repression is *neurosis*, which the author defines simply as refusing to accept whatever is happening right now. If you're neurotic, you're demanding that your life should be different in some sense. You might be denying your sexual feelings, anger, grief, or anything else – but whatever it is, it's deeply unhealthy.

Psychotherapy is one way to attempt to relieve neurosis – but even in the sessions he conducts, the author recommends the same approach. To work through problems like this, the solution is simply being honest.

One of the biggest things we repress, of course, is anger. So let's take a look at it.

***Holding on to your anger isn't noble self-sacrifice – it's just repression.***

You've probably heard some version of this story: An enemy soldier throws a grenade into a camp. One soldier dives on top of the grenade, helmet first. He dies, but everyone else survives.

He's a hero, right? Sure. But not every act of self-sacrifice is heroic.

Like the soldier covering up the grenade, you probably cover up your anger sometimes, absorbing the full force of it when it explodes inside you. This can seem like the noble thing to do, as if you're sparing other people.

But unlike the heroic soldier, you're actually being foolish. You need to let your anger out – not just for your own good, but for the sake of those around you, too.

**The key message here is: Holding on to your anger isn't noble self-sacrifice – it's just repression.**

When you accumulate anger, you inevitably start to resent your friends and family. You believe you're doing them a favor by hiding your true feelings, but the opposite is true. Nobody likes being lied to or having feelings withheld from them, so bottling anger up only makes situations worse.

So you have to let it out. And that means letting it out *as it is*, without trying to make it seem reasonable or morally correct.

For instance, a couple once had a fight in a therapy session with the author. Anne accused David of never listening. As an example, she mentioned a time when she'd come home from work stressed and he wouldn't

turn off the television. David said he'd just asked her to wait until the commercial break.

At this point, both of them were looking to the author for approval, wanting him to judge who was right and who was wrong. But that was irrelevant. What was important was that she *was* angry.

Eventually, Anne articulated her anger – yelling at her husband that she resented him not simply turning the game off. Just articulating that proved liberating – it made her realize that 30 years ago, her father had done the same thing as David had. Without allowing herself to get properly angry, she'd never have made that breakthrough.

Sometimes anger is less reasonable than Anne's. Is it reasonable to resent parents for aging, or babies for making a noise? Not really. They can't really help those things, after all. But you might still get angry anyway, and you have to allow yourself to feel what you feel. Don't let moralism tell you otherwise.

Repressing anger is dangerous and it can destroy relationships. Don't let it. Instead, just tell the truth.

***Telling the truth – the whole truth – is vital for any relationship.***

The author has been married five times, and people sometimes joke to him that four failed marriages hardly make it look like he knows what makes for a successful relationship.

But he argues that, actually, it does. Not only does he consider each of his marriages to have been a success – his divorces have been successful too, and he remains on good terms with former partners, with friendly and effective relationships in place for issues like coparenting.

The real tragedy, he argues, isn't that there are a lot of divorces nowadays. It's that a majority of the couples that *don't* split up have bad relationships.

**The key message here is: Telling the truth – the whole truth – is vital for any relationship.**

We've already looked at several examples of communication within relationships. But what underlies that sort of communication?

The philosopher Martin Buber suggested that people have two basic attitudes they can present when they speak. One, he called "I-You," and the other, "I-It." And they are effectively different versions of yourself.

Even though you'll just use the word "I" in either case, that word can mean two different things. If you're saying "I-You," you're talking to your partner while acknowledging that they're their own person, with complex feelings of their own. If you're saying "I-It," it's like you're relating to an object, rather than a conscious being.

That's why the author recommends using clear, declarative statements like "I resent you for" or "I appreciate you for." These encourage people to see their partner as a being, not a thing. When you're communicating in "I-It" mode, you'll seldom end up doing anything other than fighting.

Being honest with your partner is a serious commitment, and the author recommends taking steps to make sure you know everything you can about each other. So sit down and tell each other your life stories, including your full sexual histories, sparing no detail. The author also recommends being completely sexually honest by masturbating in front of each other. And once you've done all that, take turns talking for half an hour, with no interruptions, about what you think of each other – the good and the bad. This is what being honest with each other really means.

Being in love with someone is a beautiful, magical thing, but it involves letting your own identity become part of something bigger. If you don't let your whole self become part of it, you're not doing it right.

***To free yourself from moralism and start living a radically honest life, take responsibility.***

The pace of life is quick these days, and we're surrounded by stimulation. Given that, it's no wonder that lots of us are stressed – our bodies just aren't designed to be this busy all the time. And our commitment to moralism just makes things worse.

So how can you get out of this stressful state, free your mind, and revert to a state where you can acknowledge your true being? Well, dealing with the problem means learning to tell the truth. A psychotherapist can help people with this, but that doesn't always work. Ultimately, it's all about taking responsibility for yourself and putting plans into action.

**The key message here is: To free yourself from moralism and start living a radically honest life, take responsibility.**

Your mental and physical selves are connected in more ways than you might imagine. That's why the author starts his patients on body therapy. Physical disciplines such as yoga help people attune themselves to how they're really feeling. The patient also has to promise to get into decent shape through exercise and healthy eating.

That's partly because it's vital that you take responsibility for yourself. The author is fond of an episode in John Steinbeck's novel *The Grapes of Wrath*, in which Tom Joad encounters a bitter and depressed mechanic with one eye. He complains about how badly people treat him on account of his appearance, but Tom takes him to task, pointing out that the mechanic hasn't even cleaned himself up and covered his missing eye.

There's a simple truth here. It's all too common to blame the world around you when you haven't yet done all you can for yourself. But the mechanic's attitude also says something about internal conflicts.

Deep within most of us, there's a contradiction between our wishes and beliefs. On the one hand, we resent something – the way people treat us, our job, whatever – but on the other hand, we make apologies and excuses for why things are as they are. There are two voices inside us, arguing opposite points.

This is the mind, again, messing with us. It wants hope and change in the future, but it also wants the certainty of tradition.

What's the way out from this paradox? The truth. It's only by being unafraid to acknowledge this contradiction, and accepting it within ourselves, that we can resolve it.

It's the same thing again – stop making moral judgments about whether things are right or wrong. Simply describe how you feel. Tell the truth. You'll be amazed how far it'll get you.

### ***Final summary***

The key message in these blinks is that:

**Growing up means learning to lie, to ourselves and to those around us too, because we all become trapped in the world of moralism. This does damage to our true selves – the *being* that lies within each of us. The only way out is by unflinchingly telling the truth, even when it's ridiculous or unreasonable. Only then can we truly be ourselves.**

And here's some more actionable advice:

#### **Come clean on a secret.**

Almost everyone holds something back about themselves. What's the one thing you've never told your partner, or your parents, or your children? You might feel like withholding this information from them is in their best interests – but it could actually be doing you harm. So maybe it's time to be radically honest. Pay them a visit. Sit them down. Take a deep breath, and feel the weight lift off your shoulders.

#### **Got feedback?**

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