New Book Looks at How to Cultivate Integrity in a Culture of “Permitted Promise-Breaking,” White Lies and Other Seemingly Harmless Deceptions

"The Law of Small Things: Creating a Habit of Integrity in a Culture of Mistrust" (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, $19.95 paper, January 15, 2019) reimagines integrity as the habit of keeping promises—an antidote to a culture of “permitted promise-breaking,” white lies, and other small deceptions.

OAKLAND, Calif. (PRWEB) March 27, 2019 -- Hogging a table at Starbucks, telling a little white lie to get out of an appointment, using a disabled parking permit though able-bodied, or listening regularly to public radio without donating are some of the ways many of us have breached integrity. If we want to see integrity restored to public life, we must start with ourselves and these “harmless” habits, says author Stuart H. Brody. In his new book, The Law of Small Things: Creating a Habit of Integrity in a Culture of Mistrust (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, $19.95 paper, January 15, 2019), Brody reimagines integrity as the habit of keeping promises—an antidote to a culture of “permitted promise-breaking,” white lies, and other small deceptions.

Brody raises questions about how reliably any of us act with integrity. “Our culture doesn’t really ask much in the way of practicing integrity,” Brody says. “Staying out of trouble is all that it really demands.” In this view, integrity is “no more than a collection of techniques to avoid embarrassment.”

For Brody, integrity is “a practice of discerning promises—express and implied, large and small—and fulfilling the duties they create on the pathway to personal authenticity.” This habit of decision-making must be applied to all matters, even the seemingly inconsequential. “Integrity is not a state of moral perfection, it is a commitment to engagement. It is a rigorous but uplifting way of moving through the world,” Brody says.

As much as we like to think otherwise, we are not naturally skilled in discerning the right thing. We operate under what Brody calls “illusions of moral competence” that allow us to breach integrity in small ways without acknowledging that we’re doing so. “We’re not good at acting with integrity because we don’t practice,” Brody says. Discernment, or figuring out the right thing, is indispensable. Brody recommends counting promises as a way to avoid thinking and acting automatically. “Facing any decision, we must ask ‘Have I made a promise to another, person, either expressly or implied in our relationship with that person, that creates an expectation that I will keep the promise?'”

In The Law of Small Things, Brody focuses on solutions. In each chapter, he poses an ethical dilemma from personal life, the workplace, or politics. He explains why even a seemingly mundane habit like hogging a table at a coffee shop poses a significant social problem, and offers a way to change the behavior. There’s even a quiz you can take to measure your IQ (Integrity Quotient).

Surprisingly, the person who taught Brody the most about integrity was a politician: the late Philip J. Rock, a state senator from the Chicago area with whom Brody worked in the 1980s. Brody recounts how facing a tough decision, his moral sense defaulted to loyalty without a thought of his duty to the people. “Phil redefined loyalty as truthfulness. He suspended his self interest and urged me to do the same. It would be years before I heard any political leader speak like that. And mean it.”

Bio
Stuart Brody is the founder of Integrity Intensive, a consulting firm concentrating on decision-making,
leadership training, and the practice of integrity. His thirty-five-year career as a lawyer took him before the Supreme Court. He has held leadership positions in the Democratic Party, held numerous public offices, and advised presidential candidates. His speeches and workshops have brought his work to thousands of public officials across the country.
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