

The Honest Truth About Dishonesty Summary

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1-Sentence-Summary: *The Honest Truth About Dishonesty* reveals our motivation behind cheating, why it's not entirely rational, and, based on many experiments, what we can do to lessen the conflict between wanting to get ahead and being good people.

Read in: 4 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:



Why do we cheat? What is it that causes us to write test answers on our hands, take our roommate's Coke and lie about our age?

Dan Ariely really wants to know. He's a professor of psychology and behavioral economics at Duke University and he's fascinated by the way we make decisions, especially in an economic context.

The Honest Truth About Dishonesty is his third book on the subject of irrationality and how it influences our tendency to cheat.

Here are 3 good lessons to walk away with:

1. You don't decide to cheat based on rational thinking.
2. You're more likely to cheat when there's a psychological distance between you and cheating.
3. Don't wear fake designer clothes. Ever.

Ready to cheat a little less? Here we go!

Lesson 1: The decision to cheat is not a rational one.

When I ask you how you think people decide whether to cheat when they have a chance to, or not, you'll probably say something like:

"Well, they consider how much they can get from cheating and then of course how likely it is for them to be caught. I guess the consequences will also play a role."

Yup, that's the picture we usually paint for ourselves – we're so rational, right?

Actually, we're not.

None of these things have as big an influence on cheating as you think.

Ariely did an experiment where people took a math test and were promised 50 cents for each correct answer. In one group, all answers were checked for correctness, in the other, they weren't.

Of course, people in the second group cheated, they reported 6 solved problems on average, as opposed to 4 in the normal group.

However, **even when the reward for each single answer went up to \$10, people didn't cheat more** – the average remained 6 for the number of reported problems in the group without checking their results.

When he tweaked this experiment and allowed people in 3 different groups to shred either half or the entire sheet, plus eventually pay themselves from a big bowl of money, cheating remained the same on average as well.

Even though the likelihood to be caught was a lot less from each group to the next, this didn't seem to influence how much people cheated at all.

So no, potential gains and likelihood of getting caught don't really influence how much you cheat.

Then what does?

Lesson 2: You're more likely to cheat when there's a psychological distance between you and the deed.

It's about who you're cheating to and what for.

Whether you're not correcting the waitress who gives you back too much cash or cheating on your spouse, now that makes a big difference!

You don't know the waitress at all, and after all, it's her mistake if she gives you back too much money. **There's a big psychological distance between you and cheating, and this makes it easier for you to accept it.**

But when you're about to cheat on the person you love the most and you know it's entirely in your control and based on your own actions, justifying making the next move becomes a lot harder.

Ariely tested this by placing a six-pack of Coke in the fridge of a student dorm and six \$1 bills in the fridge of another. In both cases the students knew these items were off limits.

While the \$1 bills remained in the fridge safe and sound, ALL Cokes were stolen.

Why?

Because it's much tougher to steal money than it is to steal something that was purchased with it.

There's one more step between you and the deed and that makes it more likely for you to cheat.

Lesson 3: Stop wearing fake designer clothes. It'll only make it worse.

Where'd you get those Gucci shades?

Hope you didn't buy them in some tourist souvenir store or, even worse, from a guy on the street, because wearing them will make you more likely to cheat.

Why?

Because consciously performing some dishonest act, no matter how small, makes it more likely for others to follow.

Ariely proved this in the following experiment:

3 groups of participants were given designer sunglasses to wear during a Math test – well, maybe not during, but they could keep the glasses.

One group was told the glasses were authentic, one was told they're fakes and the control group wasn't told anything.

Each participant had the chance to cheat on the test. From the control group, 42% did, establishing that as the average (which is a shocking statistic in itself, if you ask me).

For the authentic group, this went down to 30% – knowing they had the real deal boosted their self-image.

But for the fakes group, cheating went up to 74%, **meaning 3 in 4 people cheated!**

Once you've justified doing something wrong, you're more likely to justify it again or even take the next step, so yeah, you can throw out those fake sunglasses.

The Honest Truth About Dishonesty Review

Maybe it was just the way this particular summary was written and Blinkist's writers had an extra eye for detail here, but I've never read a summary on there that was so packed with experiments and studies.

This is really cool about Dan Ariely, he does all of his research himself. He's not too much of a theorist, instead, he just goes out and does the experiments necessary to find out.

Very great summary on Blinkist, a good foray into this field of research. I suggest you read *The Honest Truth About Dishonesty* and also watch one of Dan's TED talks (I like this one) to see if these topics resonate with you.

[Read full summary on Blinkist](#)

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What else can you learn from the blinks?

- How Enron and a Washington DC arts gift shop proved that cheating is not just something a few black sheep do
- Where our inner conflict around cheating comes from
- Why you should read The 10 Commandments more often (even if you're not religious)
- What happens when people cheat and are then asked to assess their performance
- The chocolate cake vs. banana experiment that showed we cheat more when our willpower is low
- Which other thing fake sunglasses wearers do that adds to their dishonesty (you've done this before, trust me)
- What happens when we spot a cheater in a group get away with it
- How your mouth can ruin the honesty your eyes created
- The maiden and the freezer story, which brilliantly shows how we can overcome cheating

Who would I recommend The Honest Truth About Dishonesty summary to?

The 17 year old, who often cheats on tests and tries to rationalize her behavior with logical arguments, the 31 year old, who took a lot of his roommate's food in college, and anyone who's ever worn fake designer clothes.