

SELLING THE TRUTH

A “SEMOIR” WITH INSIGHTS
FOR LIFE AND BUSINESS

by

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SELLING THE TRUTH: A “Semoir” with Insights for Life and Business.

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CHAPTER 1:

Selling the Truth



I love that authenticity has become a thing. Every time I hear how “Gen L” (my name for whatever the *latest* generation is called) “craves authenticity,” I wonder if the implication is that all previous generations were simply hungry for bullshit. I do think it’s reasonable to observe that the past decade has been globally polarizing in that we have flung to one of two extremes: obsessed with bullshit or obsessed with reality. Whether we call it a post-truth world or an era of relative truth, as a society, we no longer agree about what’s real and what’s fantasy. So, how do we “sell the truth” to our audience when they may have a different definition of what’s true?

Big, scary question, right? But here’s the good news: Establishing mutual trust with your audience is possible, even when “truth” has become so hard to agree upon. You just have to develop a new litmus test for reality.

The first order of business in creating this test is to accept that even in today’s world, not all truth is relative—this is the first of the

Nine Knowings we will explore in this book—and the fact is, simple facts are truly discoverable.

Knowing No. 1: Not All Truth Is Relative

For example, if you stub your toe, and you register intense, sudden pain that causes you to release a string of swear words—that's real. That happened. If you come down for breakfast, and you are out of your favorite cereal—that's a fact.

Here's another fact, from my life:

I grew up in Florida. I crave the ocean, and viewing the horizon over glimmering water fuels my spirit. I loved living in Florida, and I relished my twenty years in Los Angeles. Yet, for the past eight years, I have lived in Iowa. Now, there are reasons for and benefits to this. However, I cannot change the past, so those eight years are not up for discussion, regardless of how I feel about them—the truth is not dependent on my likes and dislikes. No degree of rationalization will change reality. Accepting what is allows the greatest amount of hope to influence the future. I can take action today and change the story for tomorrow, but that cannot happen until I accept the past.

So, what do these three examples of reality have in common?

- Evidence
- Simplicity
- Frustration

The first two in this list are the operative ones, but it's interesting that frustration is also such a big part of our reality. So, if we are going to try to isolate the truth away from relativity, we not only need simple, fact-based evidence, we also must accept that we are going to bump up against frustration along the way...

...Regardless of who moved the couch or turned out the light.

...No matter who finished the cereal.

...Apart from what we want tomorrow to look like.

But no matter how frustrating things might be, we must begin relearning the truth by discovering facts for which the evidence is simple. These may not be the hot button issues of our day, but before we come to the negotiating table on truth, we need to brush up on reality.

I propose we start with those examples that are closest to our personal experience. Am I sitting on a chair right now? Do I really accept the rationalizations for my current geographical placement? How much money did my business bring in last month? How is my brand really perceived by my audience? We must get back to basics. We must *relearn* the truth.

As I noted in the Introduction, truth can taste funny if we aren't used to experiencing it. We have become so confused by our tenuous tether to reality that artificial intelligence now threatens to take over our lives. We are terrified of being vulnerable—reality has become too big and scary and the mirror too hard to look in.

Fear of the truth, since much of our truth has become so massively overwhelming, is what makes it essential for us to start with simple, evidence-based facts. Again, we must *relearn* truth so we can stop being afraid of it, face it, embrace it, look in the mirror instead of pretending we aren't who we are, and that our business is not what it is, and that our brands aren't what they are. As noted in the last chapter, we must befriend truth and enlist it in our endeavors, both personal and professional.

For me, that's meant creating a new "life marketing model" based on simple facts about my life. Over the past few months, those facts have included stubbing my toe on the couch seven times, running out of my favorite cereal twice, and wondering, almost every day, why we don't just pick up and move to a tropical locale.

These are basic truths, simple facts I have kept track of daily. I have also kept track of the fact that in the past year, I have worked with numerous coaches on various aspects of my business, attended a four-day immersion to get the most out of my meditation practice, and used humor often to help sell truth in my work as a communicator. The results of these endeavors are subjective. But the fact is, I've taken these steps.

As you keep track of the simple truths about yourself, your brand, your product, and your voice, you will have the power to begin building the foundation for a better, more fruitful relationship with your audience, clients, business partners, associates, and even your own family.

Another thing this "simple accounting of the truth" accomplishes is to help you swim where you can tread water instead of drowning in the sea of "truth is relative" nonsense. For example, social media is a wicked shitshow that's pretty easy to get bogged down in. Even though there's a steady flow of data, there seems to be very little reality within it. These social media apps feel somewhat like a murky swimming hole, where we tend to be drawn into the deepest, darkest parts, awash in a swirling haze of muck of our own making: we state, overstate, and restate the obvious, and we do verbal battle with one another from politics to entertainment to everything in between. But to what end? Our species appears predisposed to hanging out in muddy waters, where simple facts are hard to come by, instead

of swimming to clearer pools where we can see our own feet where we can keep track of the simple facts, where we can make an actual accounting of what really matters. We complicate things.

And no, by saying social media is a shit show, I'm not making a moral judgment, despite how insidious and ill-intended some of the people behind these apps are, and what they are doing to our kids (see *The Social Dilemma* on Netflix). After all, you and I, no doubt, use social media to help run our businesses, right? The fact is, I'm on Instagram and Facebook, and I had a TikTok account. The only thing I feel good about is LinkedIn (although in addition to being a great platform for professional networking, it does seem to serve as a "Facebook for retirees" so there's that).

The point is, even a wicked shitshow has a silver lining.

While I'm ashamed of the time I spent trying to be clever or snide on Facebook and Twitter between 2015 and 2020, those apps, which I used more deliberately during the pandemic, served as a wakeup call for me and the catalyst for discovering the more basic, simple truths about myself and my own personal brand. For instance, during lockdown, I used Instagram to create a new account called 3xDailyComedy, where I posted a few silly character videos each day to provide the requisite dose of humor required (for me, anyway) to survive 2020 and 2021. I think I posted something like 300 videos. Many featured my younger kids and the journey we took into our imaginations while bumping up against the frustration of an uncertain reality.

Since the pandemic triggered an internal reaction to the news, where we all felt like the Four Horsemen might be parking their steeds up our asses, the truth was, we needed a spoonful of humor to get all that "news" down. The 3xDailyComedy posts were my way

of swimming to where I could tread and getting back to the basics of my own truth—which is that humor is a powerful way to sell the truth! I’ll talk a lot about comedy in this book, mostly in the context of how it can work for you and your business—it’s an amazing icebreaker, tension-easer, and sanity-saver. That said, it’s important to know yourself before wielding this tool. Comedy is as powerful as Thor’s hammer. And I’m sure he smashed his toe more than once before learning how to throw that damn thing.

The humorous videos—the product of my attempts to escape the clutches of the fake social media world when COVID was a thing—became a springboard for helping others discover more reality in their own lives. These videos also laid the foundation for the launch of my *Truth Tastes Funny* podcast.

In May of 2022, I was approached by Kyle Sullivan of Pantheon.FM’s *The Lucky Titan* podcast about launching my own show. He and Lucky Titan creator, Josh Tapp, were putting together a network of “one thousand of the world’s best humans” and invited me to join the team. Sticking with my theme-in-progress, I launched a podcast called *Truth Tastes Funny* about staying sane, surviving, and thriving in an absurd, chaotic world. With the guidance of Pantheon.FM, I set about creating the podcast, doing all the work myself—tech, recording, editing, outreach—all of it.

While we shared laughs in the face of reality, the podcast attracted guests dealing with the heaviest topics: addiction, suicide, abuse, PTSD... and this was in the first 10 episodes! I wasn’t sure that I was equipped to conduct these interviews. That’s how I knew I was onto something. I categorized *Truth Tastes Funny* as a “personal development” podcast instead of a “comedy” podcast. In its first nine months, the show crossed 50,000 downloads, ranking in the Top 2

percent of podcasts globally, according to ListenNotes. Apparently, that's good.

Since I had not constructed a business model around *Truth Tastes Funny*, I had the freedom to do with it what I wished. This was a blessing because my only allegiance was to each guest—to make sure I was serving them and honoring their purpose—and to the audience we would attract together. Nine months, some really nice reviews, and nearly 10,000 monthly downloads later, I realized that all the while, without monetizing this show at all, I was getting back to the basics of who I really am as a communicator and brand builder. I was relearning the simple truths about myself and my ability to sell the truth, and I was *building my brand*. Not a comedy brand. Not a self-help brand. Not a brand messaging brand. Not an entertainment brand. A *Hersh* brand. I was “selling the truth,” even if I was giving it away. I didn't worry about which box I fit into. I built my own box to fit my persona like a glove. I dived deep into the process of finding myself, and it was truly liberating (more on that to come in the next chapter!).

So, the takeaway from this chapter may be that while we cannot control external realities or perceptions; truth is not relative (Knowing No. 1), and is, in fact, quite discoverable. As Tony Montana reminds us, all we really have are our balls (or similar) and our word. These are the simple truths about life... let them speak volumes about who we really are.

Onward!

Nurse Mildred Ratched

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest

Rather than treat her patients as numbers or names on a chart, Mildred Ratched, head administrative nurse at Salem State Hospital, knows the quirks and proclivities of each and every one. From disruptive patients, like Randle Patrick McMurphy (Antisocial Personality Disorder), to Billy Bibbit (Generalized Anxiety Disorder)—whose mother Mildred speaks to regularly, providing updates on her son's progress—she is cognizant of them all.

For many, the vision of a psychiatric treatment center is one in which patients are viewed as a problem. And yet, it is astounding to watch Mildred maintain her composure in the face of uproarious behavior, including such rebellious acts as an unauthorized bus ride and the smuggling of illegal substances and visitors into the ward. Make no mistake: Mildred does not suffer fools, nor does she believe licentiousness is the path toward healing. Rather, she fosters a spirit of meritocracy, rewarding patients for their adherence to the rules, and ensuring that infractions will be answered with consequences, just as they would be in the outside world. It is worth pointing out that, while not every inmate is pleased with the system, some patients remain in the hospital on a voluntary basis, testimony to the touch of this singular caregiver, one with no known equal in the nursing profession.



Nurse Ratched, who sprung from the mind of novelist Ken Kesey and whose character was portrayed with terrifying precision by Louise Fletcher in the 1975 film, is unflappable because she knows her brand (both she and Jack Nicholson as McMurphy, won Best Acting Oscars for their performances). There is no confusion around her purpose. This makes her hard to break, but Kesey's counter character, Randle McMurphy—likewise committed to his brand—succeeds. It's a battle to the death: she lives, but he wins.

About the Author



Hersh Rephun is a speaker, author, and consultant who specializes in crafting incomparable personal brands for ever-evolving achievers. He has worked with startups and billion-dollar brands, challengers and market leaders, fledgling filmmakers and Oscar nominees, operating on one simple principle: Sell the truth with humor and humanity. Having spent a decade as a standup comedian, appearing at The Comedy Store, Comedy Cellar, Funny Bone, and more, Hersh incorporates comedy into his talks and workshops. He also hosts the popular Truth Tastes Funny and YES, BRAND podcasts.

Hersh is a married father of five and follows the sun.