

Martha Beck on Living with Integrity

by Sandra Yeyati

A monthly contributor to *O, The Oprah Magazine*, for the last 17 years, Martha Beck, Ph.D., is a Harvard-trained sociologist and *New York Times* bestselling author of nine nonfiction books, one novel and more than 200 magazine articles. Her most recent book is *The Way of Integrity: Finding the Path to Your True Self*.

Why did you write this new book?

They say the truth will set you free, so 30 years ago, I decided I wouldn't lie once for an entire calendar year, and it completely changed my life. Ever since, I've done integrity cleanses: if anything doesn't feel like my real self, if it isn't what I really want to do or what I truly believe, I just won't do. I started my last integrity cleanse seven years ago, and I'm still in the middle of it because it's so liberating, dramatically improving my health, business and relationships. After 30 years, I have a method, so I decided to share it with people.

How do you define integrity?

The word comes from the Latin *integer*, meaning whole or undivided. In engineering, if an airplane is in perfect structural integrity, it can do amazing things. But if its parts aren't all working in harmony with each other, it may not take off, it may be impossible to steer, it may crash. Being in harmony with your true self enables you to do all the things that will most fulfill you and to realize your destiny if you believe you have one—and I believe we do.

Why, when and how do we lose sight of our true selves?

From the moment we're born, we start



getting messages from people about how they'd like us to behave. We try to do it to fit in, to belong. When someone tries to get us to do something that isn't true for us, we abandon ourselves and decide to do what pleases them. Every person I've worked with, including psychopaths and murderers, has at some point said, "I need to please people. I need to be admired. I need to be liked. I need to be accepted." It's such a deep part of the psyche that we will abandon our own comfort to satisfy it, and we won't even know that we're out of integrity.

How does this inner conflict manifest itself?

When you stray from your integrity, it's an abandonment of self. You'll feel a deep but sometimes subtle unease. Most of us are trained not to notice, but if you're not paying attention to your own truth and what you really want, you eventually develop symptoms. The most painful is loss

of meaning in your life. Without a sense of purpose, our lives start to feel dull, and then we start to experience anger, sadness, grief, irritability, anxiety and depression. If we don't pay attention, our bodies start to give out because we're deeply biologically programmed to tell the truth. Our career and relationships start to fall apart, and often we end up being addicted to cope with the pain.

How do we regain our integrity?

You feel what you're feeling and notice any place you're uncomfortable, which is information that's always available to you. Many of us are frightened to do that and maybe haven't done it for many years, but once you find out you're not comfortable, I advise making a series of one-degree turns away from the things that aren't right for you, nudging yourself gently toward things that make you happy every day. As you edge your life in that direction with small changes, enormous things can happen.

What are the benefits of living with integrity?

Any time we yearn for something in a very deep, intense way, it's always immediately given to us, but it's sent to the place that is our real home, which is peace. It waits for you there. When you get into your integrity, you find incredible peace. And at that point, everything you've wanted in your whole life seems to be waiting for you. Peace is your home. Integrity is the way to it, and everything you have ever longed for will meet you there.

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