

The Menace of Misinformation:

Faculty Misstatements in Management Education and their Consequences

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##### Abstract

In this essay we explore the misinformation that management professors give to students in the classroom. Although faculty do not intend to deceive students with this misinformation, nevertheless it can have damaging consequences, including undermining students' well-being and limiting their aspirations. We discuss two general types of misleading statements: misinformation about the economic model (e.g., that money and material possessions lead to happiness), and misinformation about what matters in life (e.g., that career success is the most important component in the fabric of life). Most of this misinformation is deeply rooted in our materialistic culture and economic system, and a belief in profit maximization as a predominant goal. Lastly, we discuss ways in which faculty can escape from providing this misinformation and help students find fulfilling paths in life.

Keywords:

Misinformation, materialism, ethics, social responsibility

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Over the course of history, lying has been a pervasive aspect of human existence. Some lies are vicious and harmful, while other, far less serious lies, are told commonly and with little concern (Solomon, 2007). People lie to their children about Santa Claus and to their friends about the attractiveness of their outfits – harmless lies that confer some social benefit. A lie is “...any intentionally deceptive message which is stated” (Bok, 1978: 13). When people lie, they are representing something as true when, in fact, they know it (or suspect it) to be false (Gert, 2005).

On the other hand, people sometimes say untrue things because they legitimately believe them to be true. These statements do not qualify as lies, but rather what Fetzer (2004) terms misinformation, which is simply “false, mistaken, or misleading information (Fetzer, 2004: 231). For example, people routinely say that chameleons change color to blend in with surroundings, that humans have five senses, and that scientists thought the world was flat before Columbus, although all of these are actually untrue (Toothman, 2014). These cases of misinformation have been repeated so often that their truth is an established “fact.” With misinformation there is no intent to deceive (as opposed to disinformation) (Fetzer, 2004).

It is statements consisting of misinformation that we write about in this essay.

#### **The Menace of Misinformation**

Wrong does not cease to be wrong because the majority shares in it.  
— Leo Tolstoy, *A Confession*

The focus of this article is on the misinformation that professors give in management education. Faculty do not repeat these erroneous statements to deceive or hurt students. Instead, they provide misinformation for other reasons, perhaps through a belief in the “party line” (see

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Brown, 2013) that their discipline espouses, through an incorrect assessment of the facts, or through accepting things that are not true (or rejecting things that *are* true) (e.g., Paul & Elder, 2001). But whatever the reason, the costs of faculty misinformation are the same: advancing untrue ideas, and in so doing, paving a road for our students that is pitted with erroneous notions and approaches that lead to bad organizational and personal decisions. As professionals entrusted to proffer what is true, even non-malicious misinformation should be disturbing.

In this paper we address two types of misinformation in the classroom: misinformation about the economic model, and misinformation about what matters in life. These types of misinformation are deeply embedded in the psychology of our social and professional worldviews (Koltko-Rivera, 2004). What follows is an exploration of this misinformation, the damage it does, and how faculty can endeavor to avoid repeating it.

##### **Misinformation about the Economic Worldview**

With the economic system scaffolding so much of what is taught in management, misinformation related to the economic worldview is most common. This type of misinformation is based on the materialistic values that our economic system promulgates, the purported efficacy of the system itself, the competitive approach frequently extolled in lectures, and the need to “justify” ethics economically.

##### ***Money and Material Possessions Lead to Happiness***

The good news is you came a long way,  
The bad news is you went the wrong way.  
J. Cole

A common piece of misinformation conveyed to students is that making, and wanting more, money makes people happy. It is implied by the curricula of business programs that

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emphasize profit maximization, much of it designed to direct students toward increasing both personal and organizational wealth (Baden & Higgs, 2015). According to Smith and Rönnegard (2016), business schools tend to support a “shareholder primacy norm” (SPN) that directs students (future managers) to first consider the financial interests of their actions. The primacy of this norm in business schools has been considered a fundamental environmental component in some studies (e.g., Kasser & Ahuvia, 2002). Certainly, if making money were not thought to be unequivocally good, business schools would not endorse it with such enthusiasm, develop courses to teach students how to achieve financial goals, and celebrate their most successful (wealthy) graduates. Meanwhile, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) does not mandate a foundational course in ethics for its member schools, which sends a message that teaching ethics is not as important as fields like finance, marketing, and accounting (Swanson & Fisher, 2008).

But while the pursuit of money often goes unchallenged, research shows that at a certain level of income, increases in wealth no longer bring happiness or improve quality of life for individuals (Diener & Seligman, 2004). More troubling, studies reveal that often, materialistic aspirations are harmful and can actually bring *misery*. Materialists score lower on measures of personal well-being including happiness, self-actualization, and satisfaction with life (Kasser, 2002), while exhibiting higher rates of depression, anxiety, and other psychological disorders (Williams, Cox, Hedberg, & Deci, 2000). Materialistic values are also associated with greater work-family conflict (Promislo, Deckop, Giacalone, & Jurkiewicz, 2010) and lower levels of environmental ethics (Bergman, Westerman, Bergman, Westerman, & Daly, 2014).

On a national scale, the Easterlin Paradox (Easterlin, 1995) maintains that over the long-term, happiness does not increase as a country's income rises. This finding applies to both

developed and developing nations, as well as eastern European countries transitioning from socialism to capitalism (Easterlin, McVey, & Switek, 2010). Clearly, if professors are consistently supporting the pursuit of monetary gains, they are not necessarily telling students the full truth about the ideology behind this approach and the consequences that it brings. Thus, some business faculty may uncritically advocate a way of living that has damaging results, while misleadingly positing the pursuit and outcomes of wealth as uniformly good.

### ***The Economic Model Works for Everyone***

Reality is merely an illusion, albeit a very persistent one.  
Albert Einstein

The current economic model of capitalism facilitates and justifies a great deal of what is taught in business school. The efficacy of the model and the general benevolence of its players is often accepted as uncritically true, but unfortunately this is an incomplete and deceptive picture.

It is true that our capitalistic society produces enormous benefits, such as businesses that succeed by responding to customer needs, opportunities for advancement, and product innovation. Yet the presumed superiority of the economic model may be overstated, as some critical work has shown (see, for example, Korten, 2001). Widespread poverty (Ludlow, 2015), ecological wreckage (Wookey, 2013), and political systems corrupted by economic manipulations (Perkins, 2004) have all emanated from an economic model that allows and even rationalizes wrongdoing, all done under a mindset that it is “the best system that we have.” Still, some basic doctrines of the economic model are suspect in their accuracy (Ferraro, Pfeffer, & Sutton, 2005), with significant disagreements about the fairness of the system (McCall, 2004) and the very assumptions that buttress its formulations (e.g., Miller, 1999). The negative “externalities” of economic transactions are real and sobering – such as the impact of business

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activities on climate change (Stern, 2006) – and students need to appreciate these concerns when judging how well our system is actually working.

The problem is not simply with the economic model and the system it created, but with the players involved. With the adulation of successful executives as icons (Wade, Porac, Pollock, & Graffin, 2008), along with the confluence of celebrity and entrepreneurship (Lee & Turner, 2004), we have ignored another reality—as a group, the powerful and wealthy exemplars who represent successful role models are sometimes characterized by undesirable attributes, and engage in despicable behaviors.

As compared to those with less power, the powerful have greater moral hypocrisy (Lammers, Stapel, & Galinsky, 2010), are more socially distant (Lammers, Galinsky, Gordijn, & Otten, 2012), engage in dehumanization (Lammers & Stapel, 2011), show less differentiation between strong and weak moral arguments (Briñol, Petty, Valle, Rucker, & Becerra, 2007), and punish others more severely (Wiltermuth & Flynn, 2013). In the most serious cases, power is associated with psychopathy and sociopathy (see, for example, Vries, 2014).

The pattern with the wealthy is troublesome as well. Compared to those with lower class status, upper class individuals are less cognizant of others (Kraus, Piff, & Keltner, 2009), less engaged in social interactions (Kraus & Keltner, 2009), less able to identify others' emotions (Kraus, Côté, & Keltner, 2010), and are more selfish (Piff, Kraus, Côté, Cheng, & Keltner, 2010).

As we can see, success, in the form of power and wealth, does not have the unequivocal positive spin that faculty sometimes imply to our students. While certainly these results should not be generalized to all individuals who are wealthy or powerful, the inclinations seem well-

established in the literature and again point to faculty's assertions about the economic system as, in reality, only half-truths.

If faculty give only one side of the story, they provide lopsided knowledge about the economic model buried inside a positive spin, endorsing our capitalistic system under the guise that no better model has emerged. Faculty should not deny the rather apparent harms that the model creates, but too often it seems that some professors accept the system's problems and implicitly justify them because other systems have purportedly been less successful.

To be clear, we are not advocating an alternative economic system, but rather a critical understanding of both the positive and negative consequences that capitalism brings. Weaknesses in the system that are not recognized and acknowledged cannot be anticipated, mitigated, or fixed, and as such, misinformation about the economic model fails to prepare our students for the problems they will encounter. By focusing only on the positive aspects of our economic system, faculty provide students with an incomplete picture rather than an education designed to lead humanity toward both wholeness and generative sustainability.

### ***Competition Is Always Good***

Nature is based on harmony. So it says if we want to survive and become more like nature, then we actually have to understand that it's cooperation versus competition.

Bruce Lipton

Much of what we teach assumes that competition is always a good thing. The data simply does not support this contention. It is true that competition increases individual effort, and as such, can increase output compared to non-competitive work (Nickell, 1996). However, competition also creates a slew of negative outcomes, and faculty should not shy away from discussing these.



Deutsch (2012, p. 281) notes that competition is associated with impaired communication, obstructiveness, lack of helpfulness, negative attitudes, exploitation, threats, and coercion. Competition has been shown to elicit tactics that denigrate rivals (Buss & Dedden, 1990), increase cardiovascular reactivity due to stress (Harrison et al., 2001), impact perceptions of aggression (Balas & Thomas, 2015), negatively affect happiness (Brandts, Riedl, & van Winden, 2007), and provide less effective outcomes than cooperation (Johnson, Maruyama, Johnson, Nelson, & Skon, 1981).

Thus, competition appears to hurt long-term interpersonal connections and well-being. An unwillingness to tell the full truth about competition makes cooperative work, which can be more effective than competition for complex and interdependent tasks (e.g., Stanne, Johnson, & Johnson, 1999), seem less appealing in our students' eyes. While there can be problems with cooperation in some cases (e.g., Egbetokun & Savin, 2014), the competitive approach is wrought with troubles that undermine both business and non-business outcomes, most of which our students never imagine, and cannot consider, if they do not learn the whole truth. When faculty provide misinformation about the unequivocal benefits of competition, their students are handcuffed in their future managerial choices. Not only do they fail to see that cooperation is sometimes a better alternative, but they also may not recognize the causal relationship their competitive strategies have on other dysfunctions in their organizations.

### ***Ethics Needs To Be Justified Financially***

It is in the nature of the human being to seek a justification for his actions.  
Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

Giacalone and Thompson (2006) noted that the business literature has transmogrified ethical discourse by focusing on *justifying* ethical actions primarily in financial terms. Instead of working from principles, some scholars appear concerned with whether we can either “afford” to

be socially responsible (e.g., Orlitzky, Schmidt, & Rynes, 2003), or whether behaving ethically is profitable (Vogel, 2005). While it is true that a significant percentage of any modern firm's success stems from its reputation, there is a great danger in coupling ethics and profitability, namely that our students may begin to quantify decisions that should be crystal clear on simple moral grounds (Beatty, 2004).

Teaching students to entertain monetary considerations in the context of ethical decisions is deceptive and can be countered by both consequentialist and deontological ethical arguments. Consequentialist ethics directs us to consider the outcomes of our decisions, and whether we are creating good vs. harm (Thiroux & Krasemann, 2011). A holistic understanding of unethical behavior goes beyond monetary concerns to account for the significant human suffering and pain that is caused by immoral actions (Promislo, Giacalone, & Jurkiewicz, 2013). It recognizes that ethical decisions may fail to make more profits, or even cost the organization money, but that the damage caused by unethical behavior requires that we not do it. In one example, the water safety crisis in Flint, Michigan was caused by callous decisions to operate more cost-efficiently, regardless of the potential harm to human life (Kennedy, 2016).

More broadly, research demonstrates that the damaging impact of unethical behavior stretches across organizational contexts and decisions. In their review, Giacalone and Promislo (2010) found an array of cross-disciplinary literature demonstrating a relationship between unethical behavior and negative well-being, not only for the victims of unethical acts, but also for the perpetrators, witnesses, and others indirectly affected (e.g., family and friends). Research has linked unethical work behavior to depression (e.g., Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2001), anxiety (Niedl, 1996), job-induced stress (Agervold & Mikkelsen, 2004), low self-esteem (Zapf, Knorz, & Kulla, 1996), suicide (Rayner & Hoel, 1997), coronary disease (Kivimäki et al., 2005), and

sleep disorders (Elovainio, Kivimäki, Vahtera, Keltikangas-Järvinen, & Virtanen, 2003). Thus, from a consequentialist viewpoint, the repercussions of unethical acts on individual well-being make clear that such behavior must be avoided (Promislo et al., 2013).

From a deontological perspective, faculty should teach students that they are moral agents and thus have duties towards other people, such as their coworkers, employees, customers, and community (i.e., the full range of stakeholders) (Alexander & Moore, 2016). These duties (or rules) include telling the truth and respecting people as human beings (Thiroux & Krasemann, 2011). Thus, the intrinsic nature of the students' actions, not the consequences, determine their morality. When people possess a strong moral identity, it makes deontology even more effective in reaching ethical decisions (Xu & Ma, 2016). In the case of Flint's water crisis, the government agencies acted unethically because they breached their moral duty to the residents of the city; deontology leads to this conclusion without even considering the awful consequences of the decision.

Without a full accounting of what really happens when unethical behavior occurs, and an understanding of the moral imperatives that are involved, the more practical financial drivers and considerations will predominate, organizational outcomes will trump damage to individual well-being, and ethical concerns will be framed in a "market" context. It is not an accurate picture of what is truly at stake when individuals and organizations behave unethically.

### **Misinformation about What Matters in Life**

Lastly, faculty provide students with misinformation about what matters in life, subjecting them to platitudes that are not true and detouring them from finding their way and confronting real obstacles in both their professional and personal lives. Thus, the following types of misinformation may be the most damaging of all because they concern life itself.

***Career Success is the Most Important Component in the Fabric of Life***

Consult your memory to know what matters most in your life.

Amit Kalantri

Even with the ongoing attempt to be more interdisciplinary in our education (Hazen & Higby, 2005), students are often taught to segment their work decision-making in a way that prevents their understanding from a more holistic view. In focusing on decisions within purely competitive and materialistic terms, some faculty unwittingly teach students to make the fabric of life disappear. Beer (1997, p. 366) notes:

“...I usually point out that if you take a radio set to pieces, you can certainly understand how it works... But although you may survey all the components, neatly spread out and labelled, you never seem to find the voice. And the same thing happens when you dismantle an engine: you cannot find the speed. But the voice and the speed are just the things that matter.”

If faculty lead students to think about business, the decisions they make, and the profit motive as what matters more than everything else, they have narrowly defined “important” for them. Professors need to help students recognize the reality of a systems understanding of organizations and society (Senge, 1990), where everything they do at work is connected to the various identities they hold and where the many manifestations of life operate in an interconnected and interdependent way.

Students should realize that work can interfere with their family role (Ilies, Wilson, & Wagner, 2009), that work stress can impact their well-being (Giacalone & Promislo, 2010), and that their decisions can impact future generations (Lacroix, Lussier, & Ouellet, 2014).

Professors should help students achieve the necessary transcendence to live meaningful lives; if we fail to do so, our instruction has not simply taken the life colors of the world and faded them into washed-out hues, it has achieved Leavitt’s (1989: 39) prophetic accusation that business schools create students with “...icy hearts and shrunken souls.”

Students should learn that there is more to life than satisfying Wall Street analysts and their bottom line imperatives. By not enlarging their psyches and their spirits, faculty may inadvertently encourage them to ignore the spiritual side of life (e.g., Conger, 1994), their own physical and psychological well-being (Murphy, 1996), the transcendent beauties of life, and vibrant connections to their community. Thus, professors can lead students to believe the ultimate materialistic deception: that jobs, work, organizations, and all the benefits accrued through them *are the crux of existence* and provide the only meaning of success.

Students should learn in our classrooms that their career is but one strand that should be woven into their lives and that of others – to achieve what Sheldon and Kasser (1995) term “coherence and congruence.” Too often, as a result of business education, they define success predicated solely on professional fulfillment, status, wealth, and security, while ignoring a multi-faceted understanding of *life* success – one filled with social contributions, healthy family relationships, and personal fulfillment. Unless faculty espouse this truth clearly, forcefully, and without equivocation, they deprive students of the very essence of what it means to be human and to live a fulfilling life.

#### ***People Count***

The truth that survives is simply the lie that is pleasantest to believe.  
H. L. Mencken

The idea that “people are a company’s most important asset” is a central tenet both of the business practitioner and the management literatures (Lawler, 2008). The idea is so critical that one hears executives say words to this effect repeatedly, almost as an adage attesting to their wisdom, business acumen, and humanitarianism.

But in its execution, the adage sometimes turns out to be a thinly veiled “dodging dialog” for public consumption (Pewewardy, 2003). While many organizations are committed to their workers, treat them with dignity and respect, and provide supportive work environments (Fortune Magazine, 2016), a disturbing number of companies do not behave in this way (Pfeffer, 2010). Thus, we do not teach the reality: in too many organizations, people are important strictly in terms of their utility. Beyond their utility, employees seem to be the object of disinterest at best, and hostility at worst. There is an increasing recognition that organizations’ newfound focus on diversity, for example, is exaggerated. Companies may pay lip service to diversity, but their true commitment to it is questionable (Woods, 2012). For example, recent events in the technology sector have exposed a severe lack of diversity among firms such as Google (Yurieff, 2017), and the prevalence of sexual harassment in prominent companies like Uber that too frequently continues unchecked (Noguchi, 2017).

While organizations claim people are important, they seem plagued by problems that would indicate otherwise. Case after case of employees who are hurt or killed on the job occur with disturbing regularity (e.g., Barab, 2018), such as the tragedy at a BP refinery plant in Texas that was caused by reckless cost-cutting (Schorn, 2006). Further, one cannot help but wonder why these “most important assets” are besieged with the ill-effects of overwork (Galinsky et al., 2005), work-family conflict (Berkman, Buxton, Ertel, & Okechukwu, 2010), abusive supervision (Tepper, 2007), sexual harassment (Glomb et al., 1997), bullying (Namie, 2004), and discrimination (Gee, Ryan, Laflamme, & Holt, 2006). Either the adage is a lie or many managers are utterly incompetent in executing it; either way, our instruction is not preparing students to recognize and deal with the realities they will confront.

The varied and negative outcomes workers suffer would appear to indicate that, too often, people are treated as though they do *not* count. Faculty should teach their students compassionate treatment because they are interacting with humans who deserve it, and concern because people are inherently worthy. Indeed, Cardao-Pito (2016: 217) proposes a law that "...human beings are not commodities, and therefore, human beings are not assets, capital, or resources in economic production." A focus on people as human "resources" signals to our students a kind of manipulative, misanthropic ideology encouraging decision making driven to help enrich organizations' interests above all else.

Thus, some faculty may unwittingly teach students to state one ideology (people count) while enacting another (they actually don't). It would appear that many managers do so without remorse, shame or guilt when they cut jobs (Murray, 2002) in order to make the numbers, or show callous disregard for human lives, such as in the disaster at the Upper Big Branch coal mine in April 2010 (Berman, 2016). Psychologists would refer to such indifference to other human beings as sociopathic or, at least, pleonexic (pathologically greedy) (Nikelly, 1992).

### **The Consequences of Misinformation**

Death is not the greatest loss in life.  
The greatest loss is what dies inside us while we live.  
Norman Cousins

Much like the butterfly effect (Lorenz, 1969), where small changes in the system can result in large differences in a later state, the consequences of promulgating misinformation in management education have significant effects in our students' lives. By telling half-truths in the classroom, faculty diminish their students' understanding of the facts and the worldview they extrapolate from those facts. This leaves them believing things that are not true, rejecting things

that are true, and making decisions that can alter the course of both their lives and happiness, as well as that of others.

First, *misinformation in management education limits or alters students' aspirations.*

Students come to school to learn what professors have to offer, to distill from our facts and worldviews an understanding of reality that informs them toward effective personal and organizational decisions. It is from our different perspectives as educators that they fully come to understand their own choices and make them, (hopefully) fully cognizant of the many potential avenues in front of them.

But when information is erroneous, or when reality is misrepresented, students' thinking is altered in substantive ways. When, for example, faculty reify materialistic goals as imperatives that supersede all others, students may not see how their actions can positively impact organizations in non-financial ways, or how social entrepreneurial outcomes can have a positive impact on the world (Grimes, McMullen, Vogus, & Miller, 2013). Instead, students' aspirations may be limited or blunted and ultimately changed to fit the worldview that business programs "sell" them.

Second, *students' physical, mental, and spiritual well-being is undermined.* When course content, for example, focuses on the importance of financial gains and competition, it diminishes the spiritual and emotional well-being that gratitude brings (Emmons, 2013). That focus undercuts those non-pecuniary virtues (e.g., honesty) that are the mainstays of cultures across the ages and keep our lives vital (Kawall, 2009).

Armed with wrong information, students begin to see major inconsistencies in the real world. They become frustrated as a result, because success cannot easily be achieved without significant personal, moral, and spiritual costs, and faculty set them on a course toward



disreputable actions. People who feel they have been deprived of their due are far more likely to retaliate against the organization (Brebels, De Cremer, & Sedikides, 2008) or become demoralized (Cheung, 2005). In extreme cases, people become so distraught over the unethical actions they have taken that they can no longer live with themselves, as was the case with J. Clifford Baxter, who committed suicide in the wake of the Enron scandal (McRoberts & Simpson, 2002). His suicide note read (in part), "I've always tried to do the right thing, but where there was once great pride now it's gone... The pain is overwhelming,"

Third, *misinformation in management education leads to generative deception*. Instead of leading the next generation to a better place, misinformation saddles students with a set of erroneous beliefs about their world. Students are then burdened with ideas that are flawed and values that debase rather than affirm humanity. Indeed, if faculty fail to acknowledge the negative effects of our economic system, they may leave behind misinformation that students will act on and pass onto their coworkers, subordinates, managers, children and grandchildren — unknowingly and without malicious intent.

There is little quite as treacherous as leaving a legacy of deception for the next generation, for it undermines their lives in ways that fail to bring meaning and improvements to the world. It leaves people unable to truly understand an environmentally sustainable paradigm (Dunlap, Van Liere, Mertig, & Jones, 2000), comprehend why we need human-centered organizations (Giacalone & Thompson, 2006), or find the roadmap to living a meaningful life (Baumeister, 1991).

Fourth, *misinformation stifles preventative motivation*. Dr. Phil McGraw is known for his dictum, "You can't fix what you don't acknowledge." What our students don't know about, they cannot fix. What they don't understand, they cannot confront and change. What they don't see

coming, they cannot prevent. When faculty fail to give correct information, they stifle students' ability to confront reality and prevent those things they could otherwise avert if they were aware of them. For example, when faculty fail to say that people *should* count, but that too often our organizations do not treat them that way, students may not look for ways to raise the value of human beings when they ultimately become managers or leaders.

Finally, *misinformation inhibits students' empathy for others*. When faulty information guides students, they can remain disturbingly unaware of the harm they are causing, and lack the empathy to mitigate it. Empathy is a critical foundation for an array of management skills, including communication, motivation, and leadership (Robbins & Hunsaker, 2011). Further, empathy is associated with a number of positive outcomes, such as prosocial behavior (Telle & Pfister, 2012). Without the ability to "put themselves in other people's shoes" and understand their situations, students are likely to feel little compunction for focusing exclusively on the bottom line, regardless of the human costs involved. They may also be more willing to follow orders to commit unethical behavior, unable to see the hurt and suffering their actions can cause (Milgram, 1974). Without empathy, students may act as if people do not count after all.

### **Escaping Misinformation: Paving a Road Toward the Recovery of Truth**

The world we see that seems so insane is the result of a belief system that is not working. To perceive the world differently, we must be willing to change our belief system, let the past slip away, expand our sense of now, and dissolve the fear in our minds.  
William James

Let there be no ambiguity: professors are responsible for repeating the misinformation we describe in this essay, and for failing to mitigate its consequences. Indeed, while the world our students enter from is fraught with information overload (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2011) and

inaccuracies (e.g., Jacobsen, 2014) that lead them to hold dysfunctional views and to stigmatize goodness (Giacalone & Promislo, 2013), faculty should know better. They are the adults in the room. They own the credentials that warrant their positions. Professors must take responsibility for what they teach or fail to teach. It is faculty who must provide students an alternative – an education established in facts rather than fear. As educators we must confront our misinformation if there is any hope of making our students less fallible. The goal is not to change the students, but to change ourselves, and how we approach our teaching. How might we do this?

***First, faculty need to discuss the limits of our existing knowledge.*** What do professors really know about the knowledge base from which they operate? Faculty should explain to students the potential problems with the knowledge they impart. For example, much of what is discussed in the classroom is based on one-time studies, ignoring the realities of data that is sometimes fabricated (Fanelli, 2009), the history of retracted studies (Grieneisen & Zhang, 2012), and unreplicable results (Stanley & Spence, 2014). Often, what professors call the “science” of management is simply a series of studies that have never been replicated and whose results have not been generalized. Our students need to see the knowledge base as tentative—not simply because what we know changes, but because the accuracy of our information and the content of our assumptions must be critically evaluated at a fundamental level (see Paul & Elder, 2001).

***Second, faculty should move students to act ethically within the current economic system.*** Our goal in the classroom is not simply to educate young persons who will later work for businesses, in NGOs, academia, and the government, but to develop socially responsible inhabitants of the world and keyholders of the future. It matters less whether these inhabitants are leaders or followers, but rather, how they learn to gauge their impact on the world.

Therefore, in addition to teaching them the rules of the “game,” professors should ask students whether the game is worth playing, and whether it is helping to make the planet better. Such expansive thinking requires asking students what kind of world they want to live in and courageously advancing that agenda. To help achieve this, Deer and Zarestky (2017) present critical thinking tools that allow students to develop a deeper understanding of the connection between business and social responsibility. For some students, it may mean “piercing the bubble” they live in to make them more empathetic to those who are less fortunate (Rosenbloom & Cortes, 2008). This self-leadership may be the moral imperative of but a few (Kohlberg, 1973), but it holds the hope for humanity.

It requires aspirational thought and an understanding that the rules of the economic system need to be changed when they engender terrible outcomes. Selling cigarettes used to be an amoral decision until we began to connect the dots—to illnesses and grave societal impacts. Showing students the links between facts, decisions, and outcomes, when well understood, will no doubt make terrible things less palatable. Without these links, new moral pathogens are introduced into the environment, making companies designed to facilitate marital affairs (Browning, 2013) or provide “sugar daddies” for young women (Fairbanks, 2011) acceptable modes of commerce.

Faculty should also present a more balanced picture of the economic players in the system. CEOs have become celebrities in today’s world, but they are human beings, prone to flaws and errors in judgment like the rest of us. Steve Jobs was a visionary genius, but he also mistreated people and denied responsibility when he fathered a child (Isaacson, 2011). The blind adulation of successful leaders damages our students’ ability to embrace whatever position they are in and to make a positive difference.

***Third, professors should teach their students to care deeply about other people and show them organizational role models.*** The ethics of care promotes protecting the well-being of others and preventing harm to them (Held, 2006). Operating within this framework, students see that people *do* count, and they will not make decisions that they know (or suspect) will hurt people. For example, General Motors' decision to use a faulty part in their ignition switches led to horrific deaths and suffering for years (Gardella & Reynolds, 2014). This kind of immoral decision making is impossible within the ethics of care (Tronto, 1993). Professors can give students examples of companies that demonstrated empathy and caring, as did Merck when the company developed and donated Mectizan, a treatment for river blindness that has begun to eradicate the terrible disease (Lawrence, Sodahlon, Ogooussan, & Hopkins, 2015).

But it is also our duty to remind students that there can be costs to caring about other people and acting accordingly (Giacalone & Promislo, 2013). These costs can include suffering the wrath of coworkers and bosses who care more about the bottom line than about people's well-being. Ultimately, it takes courage to care about others (particularly people one doesn't know) and demonstrate that caring through actions that may come at a personal price. This is one reason that students, while they can resolve some ethical dilemmas effectively in the classroom, find it much more difficult to do so in the workplace when the stakes are higher (Soltes, 2017).

***Fourth, faculty should work to overcome the systemic challenges within management education.*** Professors who endeavor to avoid the menace of misinformation can face daunting challenges. For example, large class sizes can make management education less personal and inhibit the types of faculty-student interaction we have advocated in this essay (Chapman & Ludlow, 2010). Professors who work in schools that reward faculty primarily on research productivity often face constraints in the time and energy they can devote to teaching. While

there are no easy answers to these challenges, in such circumstances faculty need to be creative in how they engage students to think critically about issues beyond profitability. For example, one study found that the use of wikis can facilitate collaborative learning and active student involvement (de Arriba, 2017).

***Finally, faculty must teach students to pursue truth rather than the voice of public consensus.*** Professors can start this process by admitting that they don't know some things and teach students to admit the same, and to not use this as an excuse. "I don't know" is a good answer, short-term, that requires a search for an answer and a long-term solution. It is a far better answer than "I know" when you really don't know and, as a result, lack motivation to find out the truth.

Unfortunately, some students come to college poorly prepared (American College Testing, 2012), are ignorant about some basic things (Holland, 2014), and quick-tempered about issues that they do not like to hear about (Lukianoff & Haidt, 2015). Such a profile opens our students up to accepting information that is neither factual nor reasonable to believe, and makes them unwilling to critically evaluate what they find uncomfortable or runs counter to what the culture has told them. Helping them to understand and embrace their lack of knowledge may be a road long traveled, but at least that journey can start in our classrooms.

### **Conclusion**

Our schools were created as a means for enhancing lives, not as a way to prop up dysfunctional thinking and approaches. Faculty owe students the opportunity to develop a world worth living in, a society worthy of its gifts, and a planet on which its inhabitants are greeted each day with possibility and joy. An education founded on misinformation cannot proffer such a

world. It can only advance the limited interests of some in the culture and eventually hail the dysfunctional outcomes this misinformation brings. As discussed, these harmful outcomes include limiting students' aspirations, undermining their well-being, stifling their preventative motivation, and inhibiting their empathy for others. For some time now, management scholars have reminded us of these dysfunctions and the tribulations they bring (Ghoshal, 2005; Leavitt, 1989; Swanson, 2004), and faculty need to finally confront their prognostications.

Faculty owe students a truth that has nothing to do with ideology, for whether one is conservative or liberal, theological or atheistic, the facts do not change. Students deserve a truth without the biased perceptions that the self-interest of stakeholders may bring, for the truth educators should give them is based on one stake: life itself. It is to life that educators have unmet responsibilities and to whom they must answer for the consequences that their unintended deception causes. Unless faculty help our students understand the truth and the viable alternatives that truth brings, students, and all those who they impact, are imprisoned to live in the muck of erroneous thinking and the consequences of dysfunctional outcomes, never considering the more desirable terrains that are possible. While professors may not know what those terrains may be, they must empower students to embrace the creative path that finds them, transforms our world, and sets our business institutions on a course that offers something better than what we have seen.

Providing misinformation in the classroom will not achieve that.

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