

In a 'post-truth' era, what separates the trusted from the tarnished? I've been researching speed in business over the last two years, talking to senior leaders of organisations about how they deal with the rapid pace of a changing world. In this context, themes of truth, trust and transparency were revealed as the accelerators of business success, with three approaches leading the resistance to the 'war on truth'.

We operate in a transparent world.

An organisation can no longer hide what the company culture is like – opacity is not an option. Advertising and consumer-focused messages that are contradicted by leadership behaviour and the experience of employees are toxic for business success. The emergence of powerful truth-portals such as Glassdoor and the ubiquity of social media mean that what companies do needs to be consistent with what they say. The increasing power of consumers and the role of Twitter as an immediate megaphone mean that business leaders need to be both responsive and responsible. Brands need to be built from the inside out. Look inside your organisation at your purpose, values and employee brand. Your messaging has to be relevant, credible and, above all, true.

Fast feedback is a speed tool – and it has to be honest.

In an environment where there's a need for speed, building in fast-feedback loops (employee, consumer or customer insight and feedback) to everything you do helps move you in the right direction more quickly. Agile businesses co-create, collaborate, test earlier and iterate quicker because they seek out the real truth behind customer/client behaviour. Sam Altman, the chair of Y Combinator

TIME FOR TRUTH

Greater candour and transparency can only lead to a more fulfilled workforce, says **Sophie Devonshire**

(the VC accelerator behind Airbnb and other successes), points out that "more painkillers are sold than vitamins". If you can find the pain point for your audience, that truth will help you meet their needs.



Create a culture of candour around you.

"Lack of candour basically blocks smart ideas, fast action and good people contributing all the stuff they've got. It's a killer. When you've got candour – and you'll never completely get it, mind you – everything just operates faster and better." 20 years after Jack Welch left GE (having made it the world's most valuable firm), his words still ring true. Increasingly leaders we work with are working hard to encourage a culture of candour. Candour improves the quality of work. Candour encourages ideas to develop. Candour helps things stay fresh and not fester. Airbnb introduced 'elephants, dead fish and vomit' as a way to get things out in the open. Co-founder Joe Gebbia explains it as this: "Elephants are the big things in the room that nobody is talking about, dead fish are things that happened a few years ago that people can't get over, and vomit is that sometimes people just need to get something off their mind and you need someone to just sit there and listen."

But few of us want to be one of those obnoxious people who are just rude and unhelpful. Candour should be a building tool. Read up on Kim Scott, the former Google employee who advocates 'radical candour' – a constructive approach to helping people improve.

Truth makes brands stronger and communication simpler – and candour makes the pace of development faster and easier. Mark Twain allegedly said: "If you tell the truth, you don't have to remember anything." In a busy, fast-paced, fast-moving world, taking the easy option for our overworked brains seems smart to me (and that's no lie...). ■

Sophie Devonshire is the author of *Superfast: Lead at Speed* (£20, John Murray Press) and CEO of The Caffeine Partnership, a strategic consultancy that helps senior leaders accelerate business growth

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of UK workers say they are more productive than their boss



1 in 5

workers admit to having eaten someone else's lunch out of the office fridge



two

hours each day are spent 'unproductively' by UK workers

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