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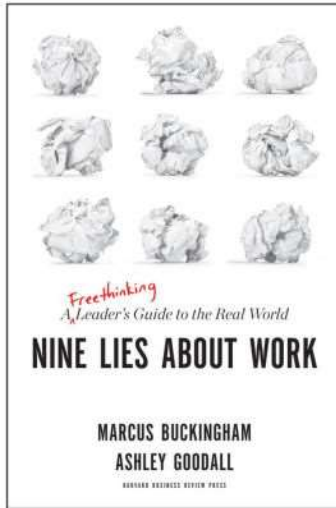*Certified Human Behavior Consultant*
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Nine Lies About Work
A Freethinking Leader's Guide to the Real World

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By: Marcus Buckingham
& Ashley Goodall

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Forget what you know about the world of work

You crave feedback. Your organization's culture is the key to its success. Strategic planning is essential. Your competencies should be measured and your weaknesses shored up. Leadership is a thing.

These may sound like basic truths of our work lives today. But actually, they're lies. As strengths guru and bestselling author Marcus Buckingham and Cisco Leadership and Team Intelligence head Ashley Goodall show in this provocative, inspiring book, there are some big lies--distortions, faulty assumptions, wrong thinking--that we encounter every time we show up for work. Nine lies, to be exact. They cause dysfunction and frustration, ultimately resulting in workplaces that are a pale shadow of what they could be.

But there are those who can get past the lies and discover what's real. These *freethinking leaders* recognize the power and beauty of our individual uniqueness. They know that emergent patterns are more valuable than received wisdom and that evidence is more powerful than dogma.

With engaging stories and incisive analysis, the authors reveal the essential truths that such freethinking leaders will recognize immediately: that it is the strength and cohesiveness of your team, not your company's culture, that matter most; that we should focus less on top-down planning and more on giving our people reliable, real-time intelligence; that rather than trying to align people's goals we should strive to align people's sense of purpose and meaning; that people don't want constant feedback, they want helpful attention.

This is the *real* world of work, as it is and as it should be. *Nine Lies About Work* reveals the few core truths that will help you show just how good you are to those who truly rely on you.

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My Synopsis:

A researched book that breaks down many of the theories and beliefs most businesses operate under as they relate to handling their people. I love the thinking behind this book and the simplistic way the authors share their ideas. One thing that kept coming to my mind as I was reading was, most people aren't willing to change things for the better because they're afraid of what they'll lose. Feel the fear but make the change anyway.

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A Freethinking Leader's Guide to the Real World

p. 1   **Introduction**

p. 2   The idea is this: the world of work today is overflowing with systems, processes, tools, and assumptions that are deeply flawed and that push directly against our ability to express what is unique about each of us in the work we do every day.

p. 3   ...whatever our current practices may be, they are no longer giving us much lift.

p. 5   *The freethinking leader*: A leader who embraces a world in which the weird uniqueness of each individual is seen not as a flaw to be ground down but as a mess worth engaging with, the raw material for all health, ethical, thriving organizations; a leader who rejects dogma and instead seeks out evidence; who values emergent patterns above received wisdom; who thrills to the power of teams; who puts faith in findings, not philosophy; and above all, a leader who knows that the only way to make the world better tomorrow is to have the courage and wit to face up to how it really is today.

p. 7   **Lie #1: People Care Which Company They Work For**

p. 11   ...it's a question of whether each team leader believes in the culture of the company – whether they get the culture or not. If they do, you're fortunate. If not, you're not.

p. 13   ...culture has come to be how we choose to explain success.

p. 14   When people ask you what it's "really like" to work at your company...you'll get down to the two-foot level of how work actually gets done.

p. 15   ...you'll know that this ground-level stuff is what'll decide how hard people will work once they've joined, and how long they'll stay.

p. 18   ...we wound up identifying just a few aspects of the employee experience that exist disproportionately on the highest-performing teams.

p. 18   1. I am really enthusiastic about the mission of my company. (We)

2. At work, I clearly understand what is expected of me. (Me)

3. In my team, I am surrounded by people who share my values. (We)

4. I have the chance to use my strengths every day at work. (Me)

5. My teammates have my back. (We)

6. I know I will be recognized for excellent work. (Me)

7. I have great confidence in my company's future. (We)

8. In my work, I am always challenged to grow (Me)

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p. 20   These two categories of experience – *We* experiences and *Me* experiences – are the things we need at work in order to thrive.

p. 20   ...what distinguishes the best team leaders from the rest is their ability to meet these two categories of needs for the people on their teams.

p. 20   What we, as team members, want from you, our team leader, is firstly that you make us feel part of something bigger, that you show us how what we are doing together is important and meaningful and secondly, that you make us feel that you can see us, and connect to us, and care about us, and challenge us, in a way that recognizes who we are as individuals.

p. 22   ...within the same company: different team, different level of confidence in the future.

p. 22   ...when we zero in on the critical aspects of our experience at work, they vary more team-to-team than they do company-to-company.

p. 23   ...local experiences – how we interact with our immediate colleagues, our lunching-on-the-patio companies, and our huddling-in-the-corner partners – are significantly more important than company ones.

p. 24   When people choose not to work somewhere, the somewhere isn't a company, it's a team.

p. 24   The team is the sun, the moon, and the stars of your experience at work.

p. 24   We arrive at this conclusion: while people might care which company they join, they don't care which company they work for. The truth is that, once there, *people care which team they're on*.

p. 24   ...study of the nature of engagement at work...three highlights

       1. Virtually all work is in fact tea work

       2. We know that if you do happen to work on a team you are twice as likely to score high on the eight engagement items.

       3. ...those team members who said they trusted their team leader were *twelve* times more likely to be fully engaged at work.

p. 25   (if you're the team leader) ...what people care most about at work is within your control.

p. 25   Companies almost universally miss the importance of teams...

p. 25   ...our over emphasis on culture leads companies to remove responsibility from where it resides – with team leaders – and instead focus on generalities.

p. 25   ...when a CEO sets out to build a great company, all she can do – and it's a lot – is strive to build more and more teams like her company's best teams.

p. 28   ...so powerful is our need for story, our need for communal sense making of the world, that we imagine that our company and its culture can explain our experience of work.

p. 30   What's in plain sight, when we study excellence at work is the groups of people doing actual work together – what's in plain sight is teams.

p. 31   ...only on a team can we express our individuality at work and put it to highest use.

p. 31   Your role as team leader is the most important role in any company. And who your company chooses to make team leader is the most important decision it ever makes.

p. 33   **Lie #2: The Best Plan Wins**

p. 35   ...things rarely, if ever, turn out the way you hope they will.

p. 36   ...the more you sit in all these planning meetings, the more a feeling of futility creeps in.

p. 36   The defining characteristic of our reality today is its ephemerality – the speed of change.

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p. 37   They faced an enemy who was spontaneous, decentralized, and agile, made up of terrorist cells that could plan and execute attacks without recourse to a chain of command...

p. 37   Events and changes are happening faster than they ever have before, so dissecting a situation and turning it into a meticulously constructed plan is an exercise in engaging in a present that will soon be gone.

p. 37   We aren't planning for the future; we're planning for the near-term past.

p. 38   Your people want and need to engage with the world that they're really in, and to interact with the world as it really is.

p. 39   Plans scope the problem, not the solution.

p. 39   Many plans, particularly those created in large organizations, are overly generalized, quickly obsolete, and frustrating to those asked to execute them. It's far better to coordinate your team's efforts in real time, relying heavily on the internal, detailed intelligence of each unique team member.

p. 42   It wasn't, in any sense, a planning system, acting slowly on stale and summarized information. Instead, it acted fast on current, raw, and detailed information...it was an intelligence system.

p. 42   It's not true that the best plan wins. It is true that the best intelligence wins

p. 43   First, liberate as much information as you possibly can.

p. 43   If you think the information will help your people gain a better understanding of their real world in real time, share it.

p. 43   Second, watch carefully to see which data your people find useful.

p. 43   ...the biggest challenge with data today is making it accurate – sorting the signal from the noise.

p. 43   Third, trust your people to make sense of the data.

p. 45   His (McCrystal's) system embodied these few truths: that information grows stale fast, and must therefore be shared fast; that the best way to enable coordinated action on the ground is to coordinate not actions themselves, but rather the information the ground needs right now; that the best judges of what information is and isn't valuable are the end users of that information...

p. 47   ...one of the most important insights shared by the best team leaders: frequency trumps quality.

p. 47   A team with low check-in frequency is a team with low intelligence.

p. 48   ...by pinpointing the weekly check-in on the single most powerful ritual of the world's best team leaders, we can now know the exact span of control that's right for every single team leader: it's the number of people that *you*, and only you, can check in with every week.

p. 48   Your span of control *is* your span of attention.

p. 49   ...the weekly check-in is the anchor ritual...you'll need to ensure that your leaders know that this check-in is the *most important part* of leading.

p. 49   You can't watch someone's back if you don't know where his or her back is.

p. 50   Trust can never emerge from secrecy. Frequency creates safety.

p. 50   ...it is far more powerful for a leader to free the most information and the most decision-making power than it is for that leader to craft the perfect plan.

p. 51   **Lie #3: The Best Companies Cascade Goals**

p. 55   ...no research exists showing that goals set for you from above stimulate you to greater productivity.

p. 56   Sales goals actually degrade the performance of top salespeople – they function as a ceiling on performance, not a catalyst for more of it.

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p. 56   ...pressure to achieve company-imposed goals is coercion, and coercion is a cousin to fear.

p. 57   Sales goals are for performance prediction, not performance creation.

p. 58   All goals, at least in the real world, function in this same way. You are either done, or you are not done; goal attainment is binary.

p. 59   ...while it's not unreasonable to hope that the work you do matches up to what your team leader wants you to do, setting goals that are a subset of his goals, or reviewing your goals against his, is actually a pretty strange way of going about this.

p. 61   To her (your boss) this form filling is the worst kind of administrivia-masquerading-as-management...

p. 61   In the real world, there is work – stuff that you have to get done. In theory world, there are goals.

p. 62   (Goals) are your best mechanism for taking what's inside of you and bringing it out where you and others can see it, and where you and they can benefit from it. Your goals define the dent you want to make in the world.

p. 62   If a goal is going to be useful, if it is going to help you contribute more, then the *only* criterium is that you must set it for yourself, voluntarily.

p. 62   The best companies don't cascade goals; the best companies cascade meaning.

p. 63   ...while a team left to its own devices can take care of many of its own needs, it apparently can't create a sense of the broader mission and confidence in the future from out of thin air.

p. 64   It is shared meaning that creates alignment, and this alignment is *emergent*, not coerced.

p. 64   What we face is a deficit of meaning, of a clear and detailed understanding of the purpose of our work, and of the values we should honor in deciding how to get it done. Our people don't need to be told what to do; they want to be told why.

p. 67   If you want people to connect with other people then you have to be curious about what each person is interested in and passionate about, and then find ways to surface and celebrate those passions.

p. 69   At its founding (Chick-fil-A) Cathy decided that the mission of his company was less to sell chicken then it was to build leaders in local communities.

p. 71   ...if you want to create alignment in your team, or your company, then you can learn from the way in which each of them deliberately, relentlessly, precisely, and pervasively cascaded meaning.

p. 71   ...the three levers they used to such great effect:
         1. Expressed values: what you write on the walls
         2. Rituals
         3. Stories

p. 71   Don't *tell* them what you value, *show* them. What do you actually want them to see and to bump into at work?

p. 72   ...no one, not even the boss, knows the brain of the customer better than the customer.

p. 73   Stories make sense of the world: they are meaning, made human.

p. 74   As a leader, you are trying to unlock the judgment, the choices, the insight, and the creativity of your people.

p. 74   We should let our people know what's going on in the world, and which hill they're trying to take, and then we should trust them to figure out how to make a contribution.

p. 76   Goals set by others imprison us. In creating his own, Ethan had found freedom.

p. 77   **Lie #4: The Best People Are Well Rounded**

p. 79   Messi has taken his natural left-footedness and cultivated it to such an extent that instead of being a limitation, it bestows on him and consistent, dramatic, and unfair advantage.

p. 81   A *strength*...is an activity that makes you feel strong.

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p. 81   ...this combination of three distinct feelings – positive anticipation beforehand, flow during, and fulfillment afterwards – that makes a certain activity a strength.

p. 81   A strength is far more *appetite* than ability, and indeed it is the appetite ingredient that feeds the desire to keep working on it and that, in the end, produces the skill improvement necessary for excellent performance.

p. 82   You will never feel proud of your work if you find no joy within it. Your best work is always joyful work.
                                                                                            – Stevie Wonder

p. 83   ...irrespective of industry and irrespective of nationality...the single most powerful predictor of a team's productivity is each team member's sense that, "I have the chance to use my strengths every day at work."

p. 83   ...on the best teams, the team leader is able not only to identify the strengths of each person but also to tweak roles and responsibilities so that team members, individually, feel that their work calls upon them to exercise their strengths on a daily basis.

p. 90   ...the research into high performance in any profession or endeavor reveals that *excellence is idiosyncratic*.

p. 90   In the real world each high performer is unique and distinct and excels precisely because that person has understood his or her uniqueness and cultivated it intelligently.

p. 91   In the real world each of us learns to make the most of what we have.

p. 93   ...those who excelled did *not* share all the same abilities, but instead displayed unique combinations of different abilities, strongly.

p. 94   The best people are not well-rounded, finding fulfillment in their uniform ability. Quite the opposite, in fact – *the best people are spiky*.

p. 95   The creeping suspicion, on the part of more and more leaders, that the models offer none of the things they promise, is an inconvenience to be minimized.

p. 96   ...large success is the aggregation of small successes...

p. 97   ...a strength is ...where performance is most *impactful* and *increasing*.

p. 98   How do the best team leaders in the real world go about building great teams?
         1. Get into the outcomes business
         2. Define the adjustable seat
         3. Use team technology

p. 98   As a team leader, you are in the outcomes business.

p. 98   ...leaders *can't* be in the control business and *must* be in the intelligence, meaning, and empowerment business – the outcomes business.

p. 99   The outcome of teaching is helping a student learn.

p. 100   Define the outcomes you want from your team and its members, and then look for each person's strength signs to figure out how each person can reach those outcomes most efficiently, most amazingly, most creatively, and most joyfully.

p. 101   (the adjustable seat) ...entails adjusting the outcomes you're asking individual team members to deliver to better match their idiosyncratic talents.

p. 102   ...the real world has devised a supremely effective technology for integrating people's wonderfully imperfect capabilities in the service of a given objective...it's called a team.

p. 102   Diversity isn't an impediment to building a great team – rather, it's the fundamental ingredient without which a great team cannot exist.

p. 103   ...the more different we are from one another, the more we need one another.

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p. 103 Well-roundedness is a misguided and futile objective when it comes to individual people; but when it comes to teams, it's an absolute necessity.

p. 105 **Lie #5: People Need Feedback**

p. 110 This tendency of ours to skew our explanations of others' behavior (particularly negative behavior) toward stories about who they are is called the Fundamental Attribution Error.

p. 111 While our stories of others center on *who they are*...when it comes to our self-attributions, we skew the other way, and over ascribe our behavior to the external situation around us...to *what's happening to us*.

p. 111 One of the inconvenient truths about humans is that we have poor theories of others...

p. 114 What we want from social media is not really feedback. It's attention...

p. 115 ...the far best predictor of heart disease, depression, and suicide is loneliness – if you deprive us of the attention of others, we wither.

p. 116 The truth, then, is that people need attention – and when you give it to us in a safe and nonjudgmental environment, we will come and stay and play and work.

p. 117 Positive attention, in other words, is thirty times more powerful than negative attention in creating high performance on a team.

p. 117 People don't need feedback. They need attention, and moreover, attention to what they do best.

p. 118 ...increasing performance and creating growth are the same thing. A focus on strengths increases performance.

p. 118 ...in the real world, each person's strengths are in fact her areas of greatest opportunity for learning and growth.

p. 120 Brain growth is like new buds on an existing branch, rather than new branches. – neuroscientist Joseph LeDoux

p. 120 Negative feedback doesn't enable learning. It systematically inhibits it and is, neurologically speaking, how to create impairment.

p. 121 ...positive, future-focused attention gives your brain access to more regions of itself and thus sets you up for greater learning.

p. 121 If you want your people to learn more, pay attention to what's working for them right now, and then build on that.

p. 122 The difficulty for you here is that people aren't processes, nor are they machines – what works for processes and machines doesn't work for men and women.

p. 124 ...praise leads to performance more than praise reflects performance.

p. 125 For a team member, nothing is more believable, and thus more powerful, than your sharing what you saw from her and how it made you feel.

p. 126 If you see somebody doing something that really works, stopping them and replaying it to them isn't only a high-priority interrupt, it is arguably your highest-priority interrupt.

p. 127 ...the advice given to you by a leader who is not you will not necessarily work for you.

p. 128 ...an "insight" is brain food...the brain is built such that a new insight – "a feeling of knowing generated from within", to use their phrasing – feels good.

p. 133 **Lie #6: People Can Reliably Rate Other People**

p. 139 Over the last forty years, we have tested and retested people's ability to rate others, and the inescapable conclusion is that human beings cannot reliably rate other human beings.

p. 141 ...her ratings pattern travels with her, regardless of who she's rating, so her ratings reveal more about her than they do about her team members.

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p. 142   ...about 60 percent of the variability in ratings can be chalked up to the raters' differing responses to a rating scale.

P 143   The people you work with simply don't interact with you enough to be able to pinpoint the extent to which you process, say, influencing skills, or political savvy, or strategic thinking, or frankly any abstract attribute.

p. 145   ...well-informed crowds are wise, and very often wiser than a small, privileged, expert elite. But the critical qualifier in that sentence is well-informed.

p. 146   ...the truth about data is that noise plus signal plus signal plus signal still equals noise, because the tiniest amount of bad data contaminates all the good data.

p. 149   ...garbage data in, garbage discoveries out...

p. 153   ...for most work, we have no way of knowing what drives performance, because we have no reliable way of measuring performance.

p. 154   ...although we are not reliable raters of others, *people can reliably rate their own experience*.

p. 156   ...we need to stop asking about others, and instead ask about ourselves.

p. 163   **Lie #7: People have Potential**

p. 165   You might start to ask yourself whether current performance is the same as future potential or merely a clue to it, or whether, alarmingly, the two are not related at all.

p. 165   ...being asked to weigh her potential requires you to project out into a world you know much less about.

p. 169   High potential is the corporate equivalent of Willy Wonka's Golden Ticket: you take it with you wherever you go, and it grants you powers and access denied to the rest of us.

p. 170   ...we know a) that the ability to learn exists in us all, b) that it shows up differently in each of us, and c) that while we can all get better at anything, none of us will ever be able to rewire our brains to excel at everything.

p. 171   This notion that some people have lots of potential, while others don't, leads us to miss the gloriously weird possibilities lying hidden in each and every team member...

p. 172   ...if Elon Musk wasn't a high potential, then it's time to admit that the concept serves no purpose.

p. 175   Only certain people have "*potential*"; everyone has momentum.

p. 176   Where potential is assumed to be a fixed, inherent quality – she's a hi-po or a lo-po – momentum is, by definition, always in a state of change.

p. 176   Potential is a one-sided evaluation. Momentum is an ongoing conversation.

p. 177   Our people tools and processes can never compensate for bad team leaders.

p. 178   ...any large-scale system can never hope to replicate the very particular and specific attention that a team leader can offer.

p. 181 **Lie #8: Work-Life Balance Matters Most**

p. 182   ...if we've learned anything about what we want from our world of work, it's that we crave work with meaning and purpose.

p. 193   ...the term we use for the money we earn in this transaction (of work) is *compensation*, the same word we use for what we get when we're injured or wronged in the eyes of the law.

p. 187   ...because life is about trade-offs and this one is yours.

p. 187   In the end, balance is an unachievable good anyway, because it asks us to aim for momentary stasis in a world that is every changing.

p. 188   Neither you nor your life are in balance, nor will you ever be.

p. 193   ...more than striving for balance between work and life – love-in-work matters most.

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p. 195   I want to do with you what Spring does with the cherry trees. – Pablo Neruda

p. 197   You can, and should, weave love into your work, no matter what role you're in.

p. 199   ...when you can deliberately weave your red threads (love) through the fabric of your work you'll feel stronger, perform better, and bounce back faster.

p. 199   "Performance" is what you have done well or poorly, and your team leader can be the judge of that. Team leaders and colleagues, however, can't judge what strengthens or weakens you.

p. 200   The world won't do your weaving for you – it doesn't care about your red threads.

p. 202   What we all wrestle with every day in the real world is not so much *work* and *life* as it is *love* and *loathe*.

p. 204   ...technical mastery absent love always equals burnout. Burnout isn't the absence of balance but the absence of love.

p. 205   The power of human nature is that each human's nature is unique. This is a feature, not a bug.

p. 207   **Lie #9: Leadership is a Thing**

p. 208   ...Leadership is enduringly fascinating to us and that we believe it to be critically important at work.

p. 209   This know-it-when-we-see-it vagueness explains, I part, why we can talk about leadership so much without usefully advancing our understanding of it or getting much better at it.

p. 212   If leading were easy, there would be more good leaders.

p. 214   ...the things that supposedly make up leadership neither add to our understanding of it nor help us be better at it.

p. 214   The only determinant of whether anyone is leading is whether anyone else is following.

p. 215   The idea of leadership is missing the idea of followers.

p. 215   ...we follow leaders who connect us to a mission we believe in, who clarify what's expected of us, who surround us with people who define excellence the way we do, who value us for our strengths, who show us that our teammates will always be there for us, who diligently replay our winning plays, ,who challenge us to keep getting better, and who give u confidence in the future.

p. 216   This is not a list of qualities in a leader, but rather a set of feelings in a follower

p. 216   Leadership isn't a thing, because it cannot be measured reliably. Followership is a thing, because it can.

p. 218   ...the best people aren't well-rounded, but are instead *spiky*...

p. 218   The past is what it is, the present is where we stand, yet the future is a scarily certain place.

p. 219   ...followers want instead an increasingly vivid picture of the future, not another reminder of its inherent uncertainty.

p. 219   When we find something, anything, however slight, that lessens our uncertainty, we cling on for dear life.

p. 219   The art of following is a barter – we entrust some part of our future to a leader *only* when we get something in return. That "something in return" is confidence.

p. 220   Each truly effective leader cultivates his or her mastery in a way that communicates to us something certain and vivid.

p. 223   We encounter leaders, in life, emotionally. In our leadership training, the first thing we do – in our attempt to understand leadership – is to wring the emotional life out of the thing.

p. 223   Stop with the one-size-fits-all.

p. 224   We need to get to know real leaders in the real world, and we need to come to know them as followers ourselves. Then we can start learning.

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p. 230   We follow a leader because he is deep in something, and he knows what that something is. His knowledge of it, and the evidence of his knowledge of it, gives us both certainty in the present and confidence in the future.

p. 234   Leading and following are not abstractions. They are human interactions; human relationships.

p. 234   ...the currency of all human relationships – the currency of emotional bonds, of trust, and of love.

p. 235   TRUTH #1   People care which team they're on
(Because that's where work actually happens.)

TRUTH #2   The best intelligence wins
(Because the world moves too fast for plans.)

TRUTH #3   The best companies cascade meaning
(Because people want to know what they all share.)

TRUTH #4   The best people are spiky
(Because uniqueness is a feature, not a bug.)

TRUTH #5   People need attention
(Because we all want to be seen for who we are at our best.)

TRUTH #6   People can reliably rate their own experience
(Because that's all we have.)

TRUTH #7   People have momentum
(Because we all move through the world differently.)

TRUTH #8   Love-in-work matters most
(Because that's what work is really for.)

TRUTH #9   We follow spikes
(Because spikes bring us certainty.)