

A person wearing a dark, pinstriped suit jacket is shown from the waist up. Their hands are clasped behind their back, with the right hand resting on top of the left. The background is plain white.

**CREATING A HABIT OF
INTEGRITY IN A
CULTURE OF MISTRUST**

the **LAW** *of*
**SMALL
THINGS**

STUART H. BRODY

Praise for *The Law of Small Things*

“Stuart Brody’s *The Law of Small Things* is an engaging study in contradiction. It is easily readable and full of real-life examples of truthfulness and values-driven action—or the lack thereof—and it raises challenging questions that cause us to reconsider our daily and unthinking habits of self-justification and self-deception. It calls us to a higher standard of integrity and consistency in our values and actions while it reassures us that the pursuit of this standard is an ongoing process, a journey, rather than an unwavering status achieved and held without continual effort. On the one hand, the standard for integrity Brody proffers may make us uncomfortable as it strips away our usual self-protective illusions; however, he encourages and supports us with his clear-eyed and pragmatic insistence on the need for practice to move toward integrity rather than simply sorting the wheat from the chaff or the good from the bad for all time. This is a book that inspires, threatens, and enables in equal measure, and for those reasons, it is well worth reading.”

—**Mary C. Gentile, PhD, author of *Giving Voice to Values* and Professor of Practice, Darden School of Business, University of Virginia**

“The idea that integrity can be learned is provocative. We tend to think that it is something you either have or don’t. *The Law of Small Things* not only shows us that good behavior, or integrity, can be learned but gives us instruction on how to learn it. This book should be in the office of every elected official from city councils to the United States Senate. If we all practiced the lessons contained in this book, the political noise surrounding us would become a symphony of good manners, and we would all welcome a return to civility. This book is a step in that direction.”

—**Gene Terry, former Executive Director, Texas Association of Counties**

“*The Law of Small Things* offers an extremely sophisticated yet practical approach to repairing the tear in the social, ethical, and moral fabric of the United States and the world. The prophecy of Isaiah 5:20 says, ‘Woe unto them that call evil good, And good evil; That change darkness into light, And light into darkness; That change bitter into sweet, And sweet into bitter!’ A more contemporary translation might be, ‘You are headed for trouble! You say wrong is right, darkness is light, and bitter is sweet.’ Stuart discusses a doable,

one-step-at-a-time approach that makes every little action count. He shows us how to slowly but surely reclaim spiritual strength to repair our moral, ethical, spiritual connection to the cosmic truth of the great traditions anchored in the Torah's Ten Speakings, the Buddhist Eightfold Path, and the Hindu Yamas and Niyamas. The book's release is perfectly timed to meet society's current needs."

—**Rabbi Gabriel Cousens, MD, MD(H), DD**

"Mr. Brody finds in the 'practice of small things' a way to ingrain within ourselves the most important values: integrity, authenticity, and good conscience. Recommended reading for anyone who aspires to enter the arena of public life or for those who want to live with a good feeling about the everyday decisions they make."

—**Jonathan Rothschild, Mayor of Tucson**

"Stuart Brody defines integrity as the keeping of promises, clearly stated or implied. He then demonstrates how keeping our commitments is critical even in seemingly inconsequential situations with plenty of examples drawn from his political, personal, and consulting experience. Brody refuses to let readers off the hook, challenging us to keep our promises, both big and small."

—**Craig Johnson, author of *Meeting the Ethical Challenges of Leadership* and Professor Emeritus of Leadership Studies, George Fox University**

"This book is a must-read for anyone interested in personal transformation, corporate social responsibility, and national change. The reader is invited to become a soul-searching participant in an examination of his or her own moral choices, conveniences, and illusions. But Stu also poses a way through the thicket of self-interest to transform ourselves and our culture. Although most of the examples are drawn from the American experience, it is easy to see how they apply to all cultures. I intend to use it in my own courses in France."

—**Paul Clermont, Teacher of Ethics and Corporate Social Responsibility, ESCE International Business School, Lyon, France**

"It's been said that ethics is 'obedience to the unenforceable.' But in this book, Brody shows us that the world of integrity does not need so much to be enforced as enticed. We need to practice the behaviors he outlines and build the skills of integrity like any other core competency. This book offers us tools to help us navigate the gauntlet of ethical issues and discern what is right for the many unique situa-

tions in which we find ourselves. *The Law of Small Things* helps us accomplish that big task.”

—**Paul Campbell, Director, Public Sector Group, UnitedHealthcare, and Adjunct Professor, Kellogg School of Management, Northwestern University**

“Stu Brody’s many years in government service and politics have provided him significant insights into the nature of trust in government, or, as we more often experience it, the ‘breakdown of trust’ in government. Rather than simply condemning politicians, he has provided a more complex analysis of personal and public integrity and a long-term and practical approach to addressing it.”

—**Jeffrey M. Wice, Fellow, Rockefeller Institute of Government**

“What you have in your hands is not simply a book but a door to a fulfilled, rewarding, and perhaps unimagined life. *The Law of Small Things* invites you to make a journey, as an observer of your actions in the world, a journey that allows you to write your story consciously and mindfully and to achieve incredible results in all areas of your life.”

—**Soraia El Kutby, CEO, Human Change, Mexico City, Mexico, and author of *Customer Experience***

“Right action is the foundation of credibility in all human relationships, including business and politics. But doing the right thing often eludes us, despite our best intentions. Brody’s *The Law of Small Things* so well illustrates that faithfulness to integrity in ‘small things’ is the cornerstone of the practice of integrity and the ultimate ethical best practice. One only has to look at the news headlines every day for corroborating evidence.”

—**Alan Richter, PhD, President, QED Consulting, coauthor of the *Global Ethics & Integrity Benchmarks*, and co-editor of *An Inquiry into the Existence of Global Values***

“Stuart Brody’s *The Law of Small Things* is an innovation in the teaching of ethics. He shows us what we have lost by our unconscious and self-interested practices and what we stand to gain by a revived and renewed understanding of the meaning of integrity and the purpose of practicing it: nothing less than the revival of faith in ourselves and our government.”

—**Neil Vance, DPA, Kanbay Chair in Ethical Governance, University of Arizona**

“Reading Stu Brody’s *The Law of Small Things* is like taking a journey with a wise friend who guides us through a conversation about the everyday ethical issues we all face but often give little thought to. In this larger meaning, integrity is not merely about living a moral life personally; it is about creating an ethical climate that shapes the setting in which we live and act collectively. This insight into the meaning of integrity gives a larger resonance to our small acts. Stu Brody offers a practical meditation for discerning this wisdom, and he does so with exceptional intelligence, humanity, and humility.”

—**E. Thomas Moran, PhD, Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus
and Founding Director, Institute for Ethics in Public Life, State
University of New York at Plattsburgh**

“Stuart Brody in *The Law of Small Things* pulls the curtain back to reveal our capacity for self-delusion. This is not necessarily news, but it is exceptionally timely during this period of political turbulence. Yet as Brody reminds us, the problem doesn’t begin with national crises. It begins in small day-to-day decisions and concessions to convenience that we are all subject to. *The Law of Small Things* is a book for all of us to read and digest. The integrity of our social lives is at stake.”

—**Richard H. Robbins, author of *Global Problems and the Culture
of Capitalism***

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Stuart H. Brody



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a BK Life book

The Law of Small Things

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Dedicated to the memory of
Sen. Philip J. Rock of Illinois

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FOREWORD



In the first week of February 2014, the Adirondack Mountains in northern New York were struck by a cold snap, harsh even by North Country standards. There was also a kind of chill in local political circles because the incumbent congressman had suddenly and unexpectedly stepped down.

As I walked up the path to Stu Brody's house to ask for his counsel in weighing a possible run, I knew I'd be talking to the right person—he was a connoisseur of ethical dilemmas. I had spent a career in documentary journalism focused on public policy but had also been an investor in a business that had paid taxes late and been cited for health code violations. I was worried that these records would mar a campaign I'd hoped to run on transparency and good citizenship.

But just before I opened the door, I paused. Stu had himself run for that seat five years earlier and had invested enormous emotional energy in the attempt. If he hadn't already seen me through the door, I might have run back to the car. How could I so callously ask for his judgment and support without truly weighing how he might feel about someone with much less political experience making a run at the seat he'd dreamed about?

Of course Stu's welcome was as warm as his hearth. As we sat in front of his stone fireplace discussing the pros and cons of entering the race, he calmly conveyed the need to speak truthfully to voters, even about my lapses. Truth was what people desired more than perfection. It was clear that Stu had already moved on from

his ambitions in Congressional politics to something arguably much greater—a campaign to reinvigorate the role of integrity in public life. That mission has found both practical and elegant expression in this book.

The Law of Small Things is hard to characterize. It is both a how-to guide and a spiritual meditation. But it is its striking use of narrative that makes it so memorable and effective. Some of the illustrative anecdotes read like great dinner conversation, some read like Zen parables. Some trigger “a-ha” moments. Almost all provoke deep, sometimes uncomfortable, identification.

Perhaps because the author’s struggles to refine his own moral code are so palpable, the lessons feel neither cloying nor judgmental. And while the observation that “No one ‘has’ integrity, and no one is perfect in practicing it” is both comforting and daunting, behind it is a kind of cheerleading for each of us that elects to follow this path. If not religious per se, *The Law of Small Things* does promise a kind of inner fulfillment.

But this book is not emerging in a vacuum and, while there may be a private dimension to the study of personal integrity, it is the societal call to arms that most stuck me. Rarely in our republic’s history have we been made so keenly aware that our democracy depends on a moral foundation. Our separated powers may be designed to check each other, but as Stu’s book reminds us so poignantly, each depends on the exercise of individual integrity.

Neither Stu nor I got the chance to serve in Congress. But just as his path in politics was one that I chose to follow, his path out of politics has also provided a model, one in which we’ve each had to ask ourselves, What are the core principles that led us to an interest in politics in the first place? In Stu’s case, I have

Foreword

no doubt what those are, as they are so richly and welcomingly presented in these pages.

—Aaron Woolf

Aaron Woolf is a Peabody Award–winning documentary journalist whose best-known work, King Corn, exposed the environmental and public health consequences of federal agricultural subsidies. Other work has focused on human trafficking, transportation infrastructure, women in the media, and green energy. He was the 2014 Democratic nominee for Congress in New York’s 21st Congressional district.

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P R E F A C E



This book raises questions about how reliably we act with integrity—not because we are not good people or because we don’t want to “do the right thing,” but because a multitude of distortions—what I call illusions of moral competence—undermine our intention. To identify these illusions and act with integrity more reliably, we require special tools of discernment. This book will propose them.

This book refutes the usual definitions of integrity. It does not treat integrity as something you just do, as in a Nike commercial, a quality that you just “have” or a skill that cannot be learned and practiced. Conforming to these breezy characterizations, people often equate *instinct* for “the right thing” with *knowing* “the right thing” and take their integrity for granted: Do you know anyone who doesn’t think they “have” integrity?

When we take integrity for granted, a false confidence distorts our decision-making. We stride confidently in the moral direction we deem obvious, like a hiker in dense woods following the compass needle he thinks points true north, but unaware that a compass needle does not point true north. It points to the center of the earth’s magnetic field: magnetic north. Without knowing the difference between true north and magnetic north, and how to compensate for it, a hiker will not reach his destination. Without knowing the difference between instinct, impulse or intuition, and discernment, neither will we.

So what is our destination? What is the value of integrity in our lives? Integrity is valuable because it reflects authenticity about

who we are, not as the culture defines us, or ensnares us, but as we know ourselves to be, or aspire to be. Integrity reflects thoughtful and comprehensive understanding of our role in the world.

If integrity is not that—an understanding of our truest nature as human beings participating in and contributing to our relationships—then it is no more than a collection of techniques to avoid embarrassment, a way of dabbling in the moral realm without commitment and therefore without authenticity. This explains why for many of us, relationships seem utilitarian, our workplaces are venues for pursuing gain without accountability, and our nation's politics remain dysfunctional.

This book will identify breaches of trust in the corridors of power and systemic injustices within our culture. These have come in to sharp relief in our polarized political landscape. But there is a wider point to be made, one that has compelled me to write this book after many years in public roles: how, as individuals and as a nation, we can embrace truthfulness as a resource to live authentically, in both small and big ways, and how the big breaches of integrity we see all around us—and which we tend to blame on others—can be addressed by the practice of integrity in our lives, one small step at a time. I believe this is a pressing challenge to anyone troubled by, and seeking to ameliorate, the raucous political climate of our time.

Trust is the foundation that supports the big changes we seek in our relationships and in our institutions. This book will demonstrate how to practice truthfulness in order to build trust and to create a habit of integrity that can transform our lives and our nation. Like any journey, it begins with a first step, a small step. So let us begin, first with an exercise to orient ourselves to the world of small things.

YOUR IQ (INTEGRITY QUOTIENT)
A QUIZ

Directions:

- There are only two choices you can make in each question.
- Assume that all the information you need to answer the question is included in the question.
- Check the box marked “This is okay to do. This is **NOT** a breach of integrity” if the scenario described is NOT a breach of integrity.
- Check the box marked “This is not okay. This **IS** a breach of integrity” if the scenario described IS a breach of integrity.
- Once you’ve completed the quiz, add up your totals.

1. You make a lunch date, then, getting a better offer, you cancel with the first person, telling a white lie about the reason for canceling.

This is okay to do. This is not okay to do.
This is **NOT** a breach of integrity. This **IS** a breach of integrity.

2. When you fall behind on your calls or emails, you generally do not make the effort to let the people trying to reach you know that you are delayed in responding and will get back to them as soon as you can.

This is okay to do. This is not okay to do.
This is **NOT** a breach of integrity. This **IS** a breach of integrity.

3. Once in a while—not all the time, but sometimes just between friends—you find yourself exaggerating events in your life: only slightly, only occasionally, and with no intent to deceive.

This is okay to do. This is not okay to do.
This is **NOT** a breach of integrity. This **IS** a breach of integrity.

4. Your best friend, a partner in a prosperous banking firm, comes to town a few times a year. He insists on taking you out to dinner on his company’s