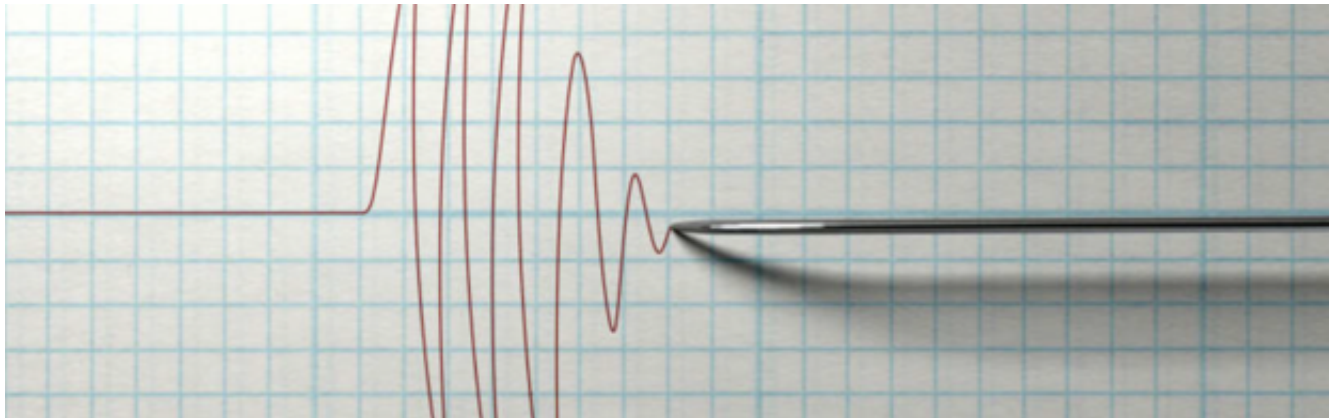


JANUARY 2022



## New Year, New Lies – How to Fight Back

Here's one prediction for 2022 that I can make with confidence but no joy: your social media feeds will continue to be polluted by misinformation, propaganda posing as fact, and bald-faced lies. Facebook, Twitter and other platforms have promised to crack down on bad actors, but tweaking algorithms and banning the Marjorie Taylor Greenes of the world will be little more than fingers in a rapidly crumbling dike.

If we want things to change, we have to follow Gandhi's advice and "be the change we want to see in the world." That process begins by educating ourselves on the causes and scope of the problems we face, and then developing tools to fight back – to expose false narratives and replace them with more compelling stories based in truth, backed by science, grounded in reality.

To help you get started, we offer three books, three websites, and an additional reading list as curriculum for your very own "Fighting Misinformation 101" course. Registration is free and the cost of skipping this class is high, so dig in. There *will* be a test. (*Scroll down to continue reading.*)

Upcoming online classes at The Goodman Center		
WORK ONLINE	GIVE PRESENTATIONS	PLAN CAMPAIGNS
<b>Unmuted:</b> What Works, What Doesn't, and How We Can All Do Better When Working Together Online	<b>Why Bad Presentations Happen to Good Causes</b>	<b>Strategic Communications: Cutting Through the Clutter</b>
January 12 11am - 12pm PT	January 18 & 20 11am - 12pm PT	January 26 & 28 11am - 12pm PT

## Readers Write: Another Tip for Dealing with Q&A

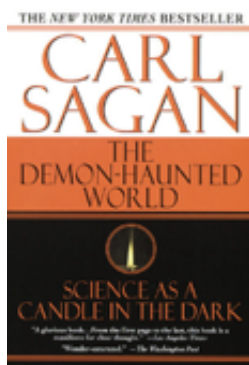
In our December 2021 issue (“A Good Time to Talk About Endings”), we offered this advice for presenters and trainers: “Even if you’ve taken questions earlier in the session, it’s always advisable to have one final Q&A segment to address any lingering concerns. But above all, *do not end your presentation with Q&A.*” The final words in any session should belong to you and must be carefully crafted to reinforce your most important points. They should *not* be an answer to some random question.



Michael Katz, Chief Penguin at [Blue Penguin Development](#) and a long-time reader of this newsletter agreed with this strategy but had a follow-up question: "If you deliberately end Q&A to leave time for a closing statement, how do you handle any attendees who may still have questions?" For those people, we always offer “After-Class Time,” an additional 10-15 minute segment *after* the stated end time of the session in which leftover questions can be addressed. We’ve been doing this in Goodman Center webinars for over ten years, and I can assure you from personal experience that participants are always grateful for the extra time.

## New Year, New Lies – How to Fight Back (continued)

There is no shortage of excellent books about this age of Too Much *Misinformation*, so please consider the recommendations that follow only as a starting point:



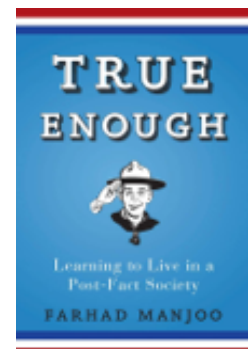
[\*\*The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark\*\*](#), by Carl Sagan & Ann Druyan (Random House © 1995)

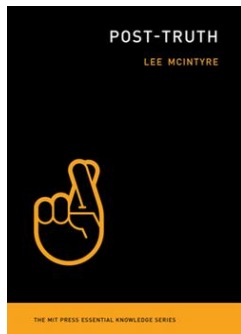
To begin to understand why human beings are so vulnerable to myths, conspiracy theories, and outright lies, start here. Published in 1995 – well before smart phones, social media and Fox News even existed – *The Demon-Haunted World* is a passionate defense of science in general and the scientific method in particular. Covering a wide swath of history from 17th century witch trials all the way to (then) contemporary claims of alien abductions, Sagan and Druyan make the case that accepting fact-free explanations and ignoring contradictory scientific evidence is *not* new behavior. Smash cut to America 2022, a nation

awash in Big Liars, global warming deniers, and anti-vaxxers, and you’ll find that Sagan & Druyan’s book feels even more relevant 27 years after its original publication.

[\*\*True Enough: Learning to Live in a Post-Fact Society\*\*](#), by Farhad Manjoo (John Wiley & Sons © 2008)

Stephen Colbert mined the concept of “truthiness” – the idea that if something *feels* true, that’s good enough – for satire, but Farhad Manjoo is more interested in how it has dangerously impacted politics, business, and culture in general. Manjoo builds on the arguments begun by Sagan and Druyan in *The Demon-Haunted World* and brings them into the 2000s by focusing on 9/11 conspiracy theories and the 2004 “swift-boating” of John Kerry. He maintains that human proclivities towards selective perception and confirmation bias, compounded by social media feeding us only the facts we want to see, have effectively divided Americans into more than just separate ideological camps. We are actually living in separate realities.





## Post-Truth, by Lee McIntyre (MIT Press © 2018)

Lee McIntyre, a Research Fellow at the Center for Philosophy and History of Science at Boston University, covers similar territory to *True Enough*, but he adds an interesting philosophical analysis that deepens our understanding of how we got here. In Chapter 6, “Did Postmodernism Lead to Post-Truth?”, McIntyre defines postmodernism this way: “The first thesis of postmodernism [is that] there is no objective truth. Any profession of truth is nothing more than a reflection of the political ideology of the person who is making it.” With this definition in hand, McIntyre draws a straight line from postmodern philosophers such

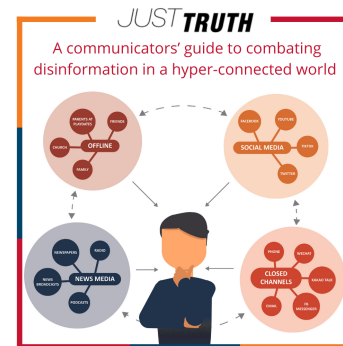
as Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault to modern day pathological liars such as Donald Trump and Kellyanne Conway and ultimately concludes “postmodernism is the godfather of post-truth.”

And if you want to check out additional titles in this growing field of literature, take a look at [“Ten Good Books About Bad Information.”](#)

We also recommend visiting the following websites to find tools for battling misinformation and, happily, some comic relief as well.

## Just Truth: A communicator’s guide to combating disinformation in a hyper-connected world.

Whether to preserve corporate interests, hoard political power, or maintain white supremacist and patriarchal systems, false narratives have been disseminated for decades (or even longer) in the U.S., and it’s only getting worse as we enter 2022. Convinced that fighting disinformation is a teachable skill that public interest organizations need to develop, Spitfire Strategies recently launched “Just Truth.” Through this free online guide, Spitfire is collecting and sharing existing research on disinformation techniques and campaigns to help progressive nonprofits battle them more effectively in their communication efforts.



## Bad News

While fake news is a serious problem, teaching people how to recognize it doesn’t have to be quite so serious – or so says Jon Roozenbeek, co-creator of the online game “Bad News.” The conceit of this game is that it teaches players how to be a purveyor of fake news. As you play, you earn badges for developing six sinister skills: impersonating other tweeters (especially anyone more famous or credible than you), touting conspiracy theories, antagonizing highly polarized groups,

discrediting sources (particularly anyone who dares to criticize you), trolling, and using emotional content. The real purpose of the game, however, is not to educate a new legion of online scammers, but instead to, as Roozenbeek puts it, “create what you might call a general ‘vaccine’ against fake news, rather than trying to counter each specific conspiracy or falsehood.” Does this particular “vaccine” work? Play the game and see for yourself!

## Birds Aren't Real

While Jon Roozenbeek is battling the onslaught of fake news with a game, Peter McIndoe is going one step further. The 23-year-old from Memphis is trying to beat the fakers at their own game by spreading the most outrageous lie he can think of: *birds aren't real*. They are drones built by the government to spy on us and carry out other nefarious tasks. The avian awareness campaign which McIndoe began as a lark (sorry, couldn't resist) in 2017, has developed a life of its own, spawning chapters across the country, spreading its message on billboards and t-shirts, and generating tons of free media coverage. "It's a safe space for people to come together and process the conspiracy takeover of America," McIndoe told *The New York Times* last December. "It's a way to laugh at the madness rather than be overcome by it."



## About Us

*free-range thinking* is written by Andy Goodman and edited by Kirsten Farrell. To read back issues, download free publications, and to learn more about our work, please visit [www.thegoodmancenter.com](http://www.thegoodmancenter.com).

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