

Truisms: Truths or Lies?

By Ching-Ying Chiu

We hear truisms everywhere. You might hear your teacher say “practice makes perfect” when you get a bad score on a test or “an apple a day keeps the doctor away” from your parents when you were younger and refused to eat apples. However, while these statements may appear to be self-evident, many are either outdated or just simply not true. Here are five common truisms that are actually false:

1. Practice makes perfect

Ah, yes. It’s the one that we’ve all heard of before. *Practice makes perfect*. This proverb comes from the Latin phrase “uses promptos facit” and its present form traces back to the 1550s–1560s. Although this phrase first appeared in the U.S. in the *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, which was published in the 1850s, it was popularized by Malcolm Gladwell’s 2008 bestseller, *Outliers*, in which he states that the key to mastering any skill is to practice it for at least 10,000 hours. But the fact is, many people who are considered the best in their fields did not practice their skill for 10,000 hours, and many who have practiced that long have not been able to achieve that high of a success. Why? Well, other factors such as natural talent, general intelligence, and luck all play an important role in determining one’s success. Nevertheless, that does not mean that practice is useless. After all, practice can still lead to progress, just not perfection.

2. Life begins at 40

This statement comes from Walter B. Pitkin's 1932 book *Life Begins at Forty*. At the time, American life expectancy at birth was climbing fast, from age 40 fifty years before to age 60. Thus, the book implied that one could look forward to many years of fulfilling and happy existence after age 40 given that they maintained a positive attitude. Nowadays, many use this phrase to say that when one reaches the age of 40, life becomes better. But is that really the case? The thing is, life can "start" at any age depending upon your experiences. You might think that you're living the best of life when you're 18 and in college, or when you're 30 and get promoted to a managerial position, or at another age when your life improves as a result of your active pursuits for experiences you realized were worthwhile. Therefore, while the phrase "life begins at 40" may have applied to most people at the time, Pitkin's book was published, does it apply to most people now? Maybe not.

3. Money doesn't buy happiness

This truism is one that some people live by while others ignore. It means that true happiness comes from within, rather than from possessions that can be bought. However, a new study from University of Pennsylvania's The Wharton School suggests otherwise. In this study, researchers had 33,391 people (ages 18 to 65) check in on their emotions throughout the day using a smartphone app. The study's seven years of data suggests that as an individual's income rises, they become happier. This is because their potential to make their life genuinely better increases, as well as their sense of control over life. The key difference between this study and the famous 2010 study that showed that money doesn't buy happiness is that instead of asking people to think about how they felt across various moments in the past, it asks people about

their feelings *during* the moments of life, thus making the data more reliable. So don't be fooled anymore, because money *does* buy happiness.

4. Cheaters never prosper

Those who gain an advantage by cheating will eventually have to face the consequences of their actions. You might have heard your parents say this when you were younger to inspire you to work harder. But unfortunately, cheaters *do* tend to prosper. In fact, a 2013 study published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* revealed that as long as no one gets hurt, cheating in studies does lead to positive effects. Just think about yourself. When your friends cheated, did they get a good score? Probably yes. Then were they ever caught by the teacher? Maybe not. This is the problem with modern society, the rewards for cheating are high but the odds of getting caught are low. Even if a cheater is caught, many punishments they receive are relatively light. Of course, I'm not telling you to cheat or anything. There are many other reasons not to. But just remember, not everything that goes around comes around.

5. An apple a day keeps the doctor away

If you're eating apples every day because of this statement, then I'm sorry to inform you...you've been tricked. This truism comes from the Welsh saying "Eat an apple on going to bed, and you'll keep the doctor from earning his bread," first recorded in 1866. During that time, apple referred to fruit in general and not *just* apples. So essentially, the phrase means that eating fruit daily can promote good health. Some have even extended the meaning of apples to refer to healthy foods in general. Therefore, rather than saying that this truism is wrong, it is more accurate to say that

it is often misunderstood. So next time you're at the supermarket, don't be afraid to choose a banana, or an orange, or perhaps even a carrot, because all of those are considered to be a part of a healthy diet.

You likely found some of these "truisms" surprising, but remember— not everything is what it seems. So, the next time you hear a truism, take a moment to think about it.

Is this "truism" a truth or a lie?