

# Detecting

# BS

misinformation

mislead  
deceive  
ambiguous  
fraudulent  
creative  
unethical  
cheater  
duped  
rumor  
deception  
fake  
hoax  
disinformation  
breachery  
fraud  
lie  
warning  
breason  
dishonest  
information  
perceive  
advertising  
catch  
being  
bias  
advertisements  
recognize  
concepts  
dispute  
technology  
John V. Petrocelli



## SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY PROFESSOR SHARES NEED FOR CRITICAL THINKING HABITS IN BOOK

by Renee Roberson

As a journalist, I'm a skeptical person by nature. I feel like I have a good "BS meter" for the most part, so when I received an e-mail from John V. Petrocelli sharing the news of his book, "The Life-Changing Science of Detecting Bullshit," I wanted to learn more.

Petrocelli, a Lake Norman resident, knows the world is full of BS. A Wake Forest University professor, he holds a doctorate in social psychology and has made a career in academia out of studying human behavior. After presenting a TEDx talk titled "Why BS is More Dangerous Than a Lie" at the University of Nevada a few years ago, he realized he could use his research and interest in the topic of BS to educate the masses in book form. "The Life Changing Science of Detecting Bullshit" was released by St. Martin's Press last year.

I was interested to learn how Petrocelli defines BS in our society.

"BS is what emerges when we communicate something with little to no regard to truth, genuine evidence or established knowledge," he says. "The act of BS can involve a very broad array of rhetorical strategies that can help us sound like we know what we're talking about. Or to explain something, and those obligations far exceed our actual knowledge. That can occur for a multitude of reasons. We fill the silence with our random thoughts sometimes."

Petrocelli says he first became interested in this field of study about 10 years ago. He was running studies and couldn't find any published information to build upon. "There was one philo-

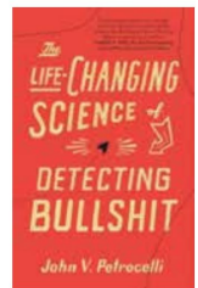
sophy paper written by a Princeton professor named Harry Frankfurt in 1986," he says. "It was called "On Bullshit." Petrocelli says that paper sat for about 10 years before someone published it into a short book format."

We all know BS is a part of everyday life. We see it in the sales industry, in casual banter with acquaintances, in political commentary. But what Petrocelli points out in his book is that we need to recognize how dangerous BS can also be—it's how people like Bernie Madoff successfully swindled billions of dollars from financial experts in his Ponzi scheme and how Mao Zedong caused the deaths of 36 million people from starvation.

"The amount of effort needed to produce BS is so much less than the energy to debunk it," says Petrocelli. "That's part of the problem. People are not willing to do that. They make decisions by the seat of their pants. Systemic information collecting takes too long."

In the book, he seeks to expose red-flag warning signs of BS, enabling readers to use critical thinking tactics against those motivated by profit.

Personally, I can't think of a more appropriate time in our world for such a book. ■

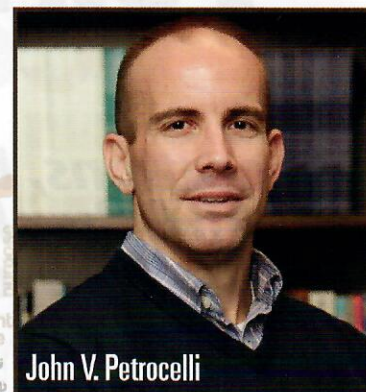


# Detecting

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ignorance spreading  
**deceive**  
 ambiguous  
 fraudulently creative  
 unlawful  
 cheater duped  
 mislead  
 business misleading  
**deception**  
**fake**  
 disregard flaw  
**hoax**  
 inform opinion  
 purposeful myths  
 recognizing  
 false  
**fraud**  
 warning treason  
 dishonest information perceive advertisement recognize  
 advertising catch faking fraudulence discover concept  
 web insincere scam internet dispute  
 bias  
 dishonesty  
 advertisement recognize concept  
 internet dispute  
 warning treason  
 dishonest information perceive advertisement recognize  
 advertising catch faking fraudulence discover concept  
 web insincere scam internet dispute  
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 dishonesty  
 advertisement recognize concept  
 internet dispute



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