The Search for Truth, by Gerald Trites

What is true? What is false? What is reality? Living in an age when truth is under attack, and being bombarded with falsehoods and distortions, makes it difficult to distinguish between truth and falsehoods.

Our extensive reliance on social media, which is often distinct from truth and reality, as well as current trends in the political arena, have contributed to this confusion. In the absence of clarity, people often tend to create their own version of reality.

In addition to social media, technology provides some other means of creating our own reality. Eric Cohen offers a thoughtful and insightful article in the current issue of ThinkTWENTY20 magazine on the effects of virtual reality, where people can literally create their own versions of reality, through sites such as Second Life or tools like VR headsets.

The profession of accounting is faced with particular challenges in this distorted world. The job of accountants is to seek out the truth, whether that be the financial position of companies or the true nature of their business activities. They are expected to seek out the truth and convey that truth to the outside world. Often, this involves speaking truth to power.

Indeed CPAs are well trained for this task, whether it be through their training in assurance or their integrity in applying the accounting and assurance standards, rules and legislation. Their critical thinking skills and integrity are central to their role in society, and even more important in these times.

The distortion of truth and falsehood is, indeed, our new reality. To remain relevant in this new reality means the accounting profession needs to bear in mind its tremendous responsibility to seek out and convey the truth. To do this, the standards setting process and the assurance process must remain independent from the forces of alternative realities. And the education system must retain high standards of ethics and integrity.

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