

Good Lies, Bad Lies?

By Shannon Warren, for *The Journal Record*, August 2017

Unless you're a spy (for the USA, of course), an undercover crime fighter or another profession involved in the saving of humanity, our society scorns lying.

However, if we truly value honesty, why do so many Americans tend to be duplicitous?

A University of Massachusetts report featured in the *New York Times* indicated that **60% of adults could not hold a 10-minute conversation without lying at least once**. Substantial research shows that we become progressively deceitful as we age. It seems to be a form of social adaptability – i.e., go along to get along.

The reasons for lying vary: many simply misinterpret the facts, might be forgetful or have an altruistic desire to spare others' feelings. Often, deception for personal gain is motivated by greed, but more frequently out of fear to protect one's self-esteem or avoid consequences of a mistake. Plus, human beings have a propensity to believe information that comfortably reinforces our own values and perspectives - making us eager to perpetuate bogus information.

Regardless of the rationale, even so-called white lies cause harm:

- *Fast Company's* Lydia Dishman reported that as many as **58% of employees call in sick so they can attend a sporting events**. She indicated the potential costs to organizations is about 8.7% of payroll annually.
- **Deceit affects our brain.** *National Geographic* cited a joint study between Kyoto University and Harvard that used fMRI to scan the amygdala, a region used in processing emotions. They discovered that desensitizing occurs in correlation with increased lying, i.e. our conscience gets lazy.
- **Compassionate, empathetic people have a propensity to lie for other's well-being**, according to research by the *Journal of Experimental Psychology*. Intentions may be good, but if a manager rewards poor performance through a misleading positive review, the employee won't improve, plus team morale and productivity will suffer.

Regardless of the reasons, dishonesty is contagious and promotes disruption, distrust and disengagement that can hurt the bottom line. A company's culture can be a powerful tool in curbing bad behavior. Leaders who encourage employees to be forthright about errors have a better chance of correcting problems quickly, leading to better overall performance.

Promoting honesty gives clarity on how to practice company values. Even so, the truth can hurt – especially egos. When delivering negative or contradictory feedback, remember the Golden Rule: honesty does not have to be brutal.