

What you should know about telling lies?

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Lying in the office is a pandemic," Lynn Taylor, a national workplace expert and the author of "Tame Your Terrible Office Tyrant: How to Manage Childish Boss Behavior and Thrive in Your Job, told Business Insider. "Especially if you consider the amount of tiny white lies circulating in the daily course of business." How often do people lie at work? According to a University of Massachusetts study conducted by psychologist Robert Feldman, most of us lie two to three times *every 10 minutes*.

Reasons why employees lie

We bend the truth to make life easier. More often than not, we rationalize them as protecting others, thinking it will keep the peace or it is something everyone does. Workplace environmental factors can increase the chances that your co-workers will lie. Some of these factors are unrealistic expectations, intense competition, and tough consequences for not delivering. If several employees are in a competition for limited payoffs, lying and cheating are likely outcomes. Poorly designed incentive schemes lead to lying. Individuals also lie for less dire reasons. Some individuals find it quite difficult to be honest because they fear criticism, they are prone to embarrassment, or they have a strong need to fit in. More often than not co-workers tell lies for humane reasons. For example, in order to spare your feelings, a co-worker may tell you that you are doing a good job even when you are not.

How do you know when employees are lying to you?

Research has consistently shown that people's ability to detect lies is no more accurate than chance, or flipping a coin. (Personality and Social Psychology Review, 2006). Rather than looking at people for visual cues such as a lack of eye contact or fidgeting psychologists are developing strategies that interviewers can use to discover signs of lying. Research shows that revealing evidence of criminal acts to suspects increases the accuracy of detecting lies above chance levels (Journal of Investigative Psychology and Offender Profiling, 2011).

Another way of discovering a liar is to increase the cognitive load by, for example, asking them to relate their stories in reverse order. Employees who tell the truth rely on their memories to tell their story backward, often adding more details, but liars tend to struggle. Research shows that employees who tell lies also often provide fewer details about time, location and things they heard. They also tell their story more slowly, with more hesitations (Law and Human Behaviour, 2008).

You can also increase the cognitive load for liars by encouraging them to say more details about their

story. More often than not, liars have a prepared story to tell and little to say when asked to add more details. They are reluctant to add more details for fear they will mess up and are caught. It is also noteworthy that liars are less likely to complement and elaborate on each other's responses. Truth tellers are more interactive as they try to reconstruct a shared event from their heads.

Lying affects your brain

We think of lying as something we do to others, but in fact, lying also does something to us. A team of researchers at University College London and Duke University set out to find out what exactly goes on in the brain when we tell a lie. In particular, they wanted to know whether the brain becomes desensitized to dishonesty over time, making it easier to tell a lie when we do so repeatedly. The researchers first had to prove that dishonesty increases over time. Therefore, they devised a task in which study participants could lie in order to receive money. At first, participants lied only a little. However, over the course of the study, their estimates became higher and higher. By the end of the study, the magnitude of lies were nearly twice as high as when they began.

The next step was to understand what happened in the brain that caused dishonesty to increase. The researchers performed the same experiment while observing participants' brain activity using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI). Early on, they saw a great deal of activity in regions of the brain associated with emotions—the amygdala in particular. This observation suggests that participants initially felt very bad about the lies they told. However, over time, as participants lied repeatedly, these areas of the brain showed less and less activity.

Just like when we encounter other unpleasant stimuli—like loud noises or frightening images, for example—the brain has the ability to adapt and make the stimuli less intense. Unfortunately, in this case, adaptation makes it easier to do a bad thing. When lying no longer stirs up negative feelings, we are able to increase the magnitude of our lies. Then the additional, larger lies further deaden our sensitivity to the act of lying, and the slippery slope continues.

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