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INTERNATIONAL NEGOTIATION ACADEMY

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LIARS AND THEIR PATH OF DESTRUCTION

When lying becomes 'normal' and truth 'abnormal'

- Has someone's lie ever hurt you?

Have you been lied to by a politician, a spouse, a child, an employee, a boss or a contractor?

How often do we read in newspaper that a politician claim: "I know nothing about it", only to later concoct a new lie: "My staff never told me about this."

So, when do people lie, how can we detect it and how do we cope with it, and or respond to it?

For a start, there are **different types** of liars: Once we have identified them, it could help us to know how to deal with them.

- **Compulsive Liars**

A compulsive liar is defined as someone who **lies out of habit**. They lie all the time.

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Lying is a normal reaction for them. Compulsive liars bend the truth about everything, large and small.

For a compulsive liar, telling the truth make them feel guilty while **lying feels right**. Compulsive liars often develop in early childhood, due to being placed in an environment where lying was necessary. They simply lie out of habit - an automatic response, which is hard to break, and one that does affect relationships, amongst many others.

So, you seldom see the lie; what you can rather detect, though, is **when they tell the truth!** Any sign of being uncomfortable could in some cases be a sign of the truth rather than a lie!

Lying can become addictive and hard to stop. Lying has a way to lead to more lies, especially if they are found out! For the compulsive liar, **lying feels safe** and this fuels the desire to lie even more.

Unfortunately, compulsive lying is hard for the person involved to detect and it hurts those who are around it. Compulsive lying, if not addressed, can easily ruin a **relationship**.

Compulsive lying can sometimes be dealt with through counselling or therapy. But, like any addictive behavior, getting someone to admit they have a problem with lying is the difficult part. That often requires life crises first.

- **Pathological Liars**

A deliberate liar knows he is lying. A pathological liar may not.

Pathological lying has been defined as "falsification entirely disproportionate to any identifiable end in view. "It may be extensive and very complicated, and may manifest over a period of years or even a lifetime". The individual may be aware they are lying, or **may believe they are telling the truth**, being unaware that they are relating fantasies. The stories told tend toward presenting the liar favourably. For example, the person might be presented as being fantastically brave and knowing many famous people.

There may be brain and memory defects as well as more serious psychological defects present, causing someone to really not being able to discern between the true and the untrue.

- **'White Lies'**

WE HAVE A NEW REDESIGNED WEBSITE!

**You can download the book:
Negotiation: The Genesis of
Management by Prof Manie
Spoelstra**

**Also: Three Negotiation
Simulation Case Books by
Manie Spoelstra and Anthony
Drew**

Go to: <http://www.negotiation-academy.com>

Often we tell lies which intend to help and not hurt. Sometimes it is done out of fear. These 'good' lies are told to defend or to avoid the consequences of telling the truth. They are often white lies that spare another's feelings, reflect a pro-social attitude, and make civilized human contact possible.

Some lies even have good intentions, e.g. **to protect someone** from bad news (infidelity, cancer).

- **Detecting a lie:**

It is sometimes immensely difficult to detect a lie. More so if you have no reason to suspect that a person is lying. We all know and have seen famous individuals testifying in court or responding to questions on TV broadcasts, only to find out later that **they lied openly and blatantly!**

Some investigators study various reactions of people suspecting of lying, such as:

- Lack of **logic** in time sequence, facts and names
- Sudden changes in head position
- Breathing changes
- **Voice** changes (pitch, stuttering)
- Repetition of words and phrases
- Too much info
- Touching or covering of mouth/nose
- Covering of vulnerable parts
- Taking less space
- Shuffling of feet
- Conflicting **body language**/emotion
- Difficulty speaking
- Staring without blinking
- Pointing too much

All researchers will still admit that it is still extremely difficult with our limited perceptual abilities.

It is complicated even more by the fact that the person could be someone who has no conscience. Pathological liars and psychopaths experience virtually no feelings of guilt, so that very few symptoms are displayed in emotions or body language.

- **Lie Detectors:**

How accurate are lie detectors (polygraphs) in pinpointing a lie from the truth?

The use of lie detectors have become quite common in criminal and other serious cases, yet has generated considerable **scientific and public controversy**. Most psychologists and other scientists agree that there is little basis for the validity of polygraph tests. Courts, including the United States Supreme Court have repeatedly rejected the use of polygraph evidence because of its inherent **unreliability**. *

Polygraph testing continues to be used, often to screen personnel, but sometimes to try to assess the veracity of suspects and witnesses, and in corporations. Polygraph tests are also sometimes used by individuals seeking to convince others of their innocence and, in a narrow range of circumstances, by private agencies and corporations.

- **How to Negotiate with liars:**

Like most serious negotiation cases, **preparation** is often a key to success or failure. So: Do all your homework and research into the other party's bona fides.

If there are reasons to doubt the data supplied, some of the following actions could be considered:

- Set up a pre-negotiation agreement requiring both parties to come clean. Moreover, one side's refusal to enter into a "good faith" agreement might be a good warning.
- Look for potential signs of deception.
- **Ask the same question in different ways.** Liars tend to dodge and weave their way around the truth assuming their statements will be misconstrued or not challenged.
- Ask the opponent to come clean.
- Ask questions to which you already know the answer.
- Take notes during negotiations.
- Get commitments in writing.
- Use **contingent agreements** where you have some provision in the contract that provides specific protection should the representation turn out to be false.
- Trust but verify.

Manie Spoelstra

* American Psychological Association; www.apa.org

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