Myth or Science?
People are Good at Catching Liars at Work

This statement is essentially false. The core purpose of communication in the workplace may be to convey business-related information. However, we also communicate to manage the impressions others form of us. Some impression management is unintentional and harmless (for example, complimenting your boss on his clothing). However, sometimes people manage impressions through outright lies, such as making up excuses for missing work or failing to make a deadline.

One of the reasons people lie—in the workplace and elsewhere—is that it works. Although most of us think we're good at detecting a lie, research shows otherwise. A recent review of 247 studies revealed that people detect lies, on average, only 4.05 percent more accurately than chance. What's even more discouraging is that so-called experts— police officers, parole officers, detectives, judges, and psychologists— perform no better than other people. And detecting lying in one situation has no correlation to detecting lying in another. Another review found people's confidence in their judgments of whether someone was lying bore almost no relationship to their actual accuracy; we think we're a lot better at catching people lying than we really are. As the authors of this review conclude, "People are not good detectors of deception regardless of their age, sex, confidence, and experience."

One of the reasons people are so bad at detecting lying is that they over attend to cues such as eye movement, voice tone, and nervous movement and under attend to what is said. Verbal content matters more: truth-tellers are more likely to tell stories that contain significant detail (including irrelevant detail), less likely to tell them in a chronological sequence, and more likely to apply their own interpretations to events they report. They also are more likely to convey information that seems contrary to the stereotype of truth telling: they make corrections to their story ("She wore a blue dress, uh, no, sorry, black"), admit forgetfulness ("I think . . .", "I'm not sure . . ."), raise doubts about the truth of their own prior reports ("I know this sounds really strange. . . ."), and mention something unfavorable ("I know I shouldn't have been looking at his e-mail . . .").

The point? Don't believe everything you hear, and don't place too much weight on your ability to catch a liar based on your intuition. When someone makes a claim that it's reasonable to doubt, ask her or him to back it up with evidence, and pay more attention to what is communicated than how.

Sources: Based on C. F. Bond, Jr., and B. M. DePaulo, "Individual Differences in Judging Deception: Accuracy and Bias," Psychological Bulletin 134, no. 4 (2008), pp. 477–492; M. G. Aamodt and H. Custer, "Who Can Best Catch a Liar? A Meta-analysis of Individual Differences in Detecting Deception," The Forensic Examiner, Spring 2006, pp. 6–11; and A. Vrij, "Nonverbal Dominance Versus Verbal Accuracy in Lie Detection: A Plea to Change Police Practice," Criminal Justice and Behavior 35, no. 10 (2008), pp. 1323–1336.

Class Exercise

1. Demonstrating this could be touchy, so monitor students' discussion and reaction closely. The difference between what someone says and then does often generate strong feelings.
2. Begin by brainstorming with students an incident when they have experienced this dichotomy of communication and behavior. Some ideas:
   a. A public event covered in the news that the student(s) followed—a politician saying one thing and doing another
   b. Some campus news event involving students and/or administrators
   c. A personal relationship where one party made some verbal claim but then behaved in a different way
   d. An interaction with an authority figure—professor, boss, parent—where the authority figure made a verbal claim and then behaved in a contradictory way
3. Choose an event to discuss, or in the case of a personal event, one the student(s) is (are) comfortable discussing.
4. If the discussion is about a personal event, ask students not to use names, and clearly ask the students for permission to discuss the event in front of the class.
5. First, ask for a brief description of the verbal communication, then the behavior.
6. Discuss how the two elements contradicted; what were the signs?
7. Ask how this contradiction made them feel, how it affected (affects) the relationship with the other party.
8. Close with a discussion of how the situation could be rectified and why it is important for our verbal communication and behavior to match.

An Ethical Choice
Managing Your Tweeting and Twittering

Zachary Weiner, CEO of the Chicago-based ad agency Luxuryreach, has decidedly mixed feelings when he reads employees twittering and tweeting about topics such as how demanding a boss he is, how hung over they feel, and how "totally not into" a client they are. On one hand, he finds the messages engrossing. "I can't lie. It's entertaining," he says. On the other hand, he has to wince at some of the sensitive and potentially damaging information that's revealed.

Given the nature of social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook, it's a concern most employers share. They don't want to suppress or control what many employees believe is free and personal expression. But managers whose job is to look out for the welfare of their organization worry about embarrassing posts, secrets lost to rivals, and loss of goodwill. "You can talk yourself into all sorts of doomsday scenarios," says Intel Chief Information Officer Diane Bryant.

Some of the damage is real. Cisco lawyer Richard Frankel authored a blog in which he mouthed off about a lawsuit in which Cisco was a defendant. After a $15,000 bounty was put up to determine the blogger's identity, Frankel went public, generating another lawsuit against the company and himself.

To balance your desire to network and express yourself with your ethical responsibility to your company, follow the following rules established by IBM:
1.   Be personally responsible for any content you publish. Don't write anything you wouldn't be comfortable having your employer read.
2.   Keep in mind that what you publish could be public for a long time.
3.   If you're writing about your company, be transparent about your role in the organization.
4.   Get approval from the organization before posting private or internal conversations.
5.   Be up-front about correcting errors and updating previous posts.

Sources: Based on M. Conlin and M. MacMillan, "Managing the Tweets," Business Week (June 1, 2009), pp. 20–21; H. Green and R. D. Hof, "Six Million Users: Nothing to Twitter At," Business Week (March 16, 2009), pp. 51–52; and A. Hawkins, "Shut Up, Already," Forbes (April 7, 2008), p. 44.

Class Exercise

1.   Assign students to groups of three to five.
2.   Have the groups read the text and view the video at http://www.switched.com/2009/09/17/employee-takes-to-youtube-after-being-fired-for-tweets/
3.   Ask the students to take a position on the incident by discussing it among themselves.
4.   Have the groups debate each other for those who adopted a different position.
5.   What is the outcome of student opinions about personal twittering?

International OB
Lost in Translation?

Many U.S. companies have overseas parents, including DaimlerChrysler, Bertelsmann, Diageo, and the Anglo-Dutch company Unilever. Many others have an overseas presence—for example, Ford has manufacturing plants in Belgium, Germany, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. To complicate matters, mergers and acquisitions mean companies are often owned by multiple overseas parents, creating an even greater strain on communication. Although English is the dominant language at many multinational companies, failing to speak a host country's language can make it tougher for managers to do their jobs well. Online communications are even more fraught with potential for misunderstanding because they lack visual and vocal cues that would indicate the sender's emotional meaning. Such communication problems make it tougher to conduct business effectively and may result in lost opportunities.

To avoid such problems, many companies require their managers to learn the local language and customs. German-based Siemens requires its managers to learn their host country's language. Ernst Behrens, head of China operations, learned to speak Mandarin fluently. Robert Kimmett, a former board member, believes learning a host country's language gives managers "a better grasp of what is going on inside a company . . . not just the facts and figures but also texture and nuance."

However, learning a foreign language can be difficult. Asian languages are particularly challenging for North Americans. To compensate, U.S. managers sometimes rely solely on body language and facial expressions to communicate. But cultural differences in these nonverbal forms of communication may result in serious misunderstandings. Managers with individualist orientations should be careful about being too direct when communicating with collectivists and work to develop trust. Collectivist managers should be prepared to make more linear, cause-and-effect arguments when communicating with individualists and recognize that direct communication from individualists is not necessarily conveying disapproval or anger.

Sources: Based on K. Kanhold, D. Bilefsky, M. Karnitschnig, and G. Parker, "Lost in Translation? Managers at Multinationals May Miss the Job's Nuances if They Speak Only English," Wall Street Journal, May 18, 2004, p. B1; Y. Fujimoto, N.Bahfen, J. Fermelise, and C. E. J. Härtel, "The Global Village: Online Cross-Cultural Communication and HRM," Cross Cultural Management 14, no. 1 (2007), pp. 7–22; H. Ren, and B. Gray, "Repairing Relationship Conflict: How Violation Types and Culture Influence the Effectiveness of Restoration Rituals," Academy of Management Review 34, no. 1 (2009), pp. 105–126.

Class Exercise

1. Ask students to read http://www.sideroad.com/Business_Communication/business-communication-nonverbal.html
2. Have the students think about nonverbal cues they use consistently, both gestures and gesticulations.
3. Divide the class into teams of two.
4. One student should try to use the gestures or gesticulations to communicate to the other.

5. The target student should write down his or her interpretations of the gestures.
6. Compare to see how much understanding is transmitted.
7. Ask the students to discuss the problem with this exercise in nonverbal communication and how it might expand if between people for two international cultures.

Point/CounterPoint
Keep It Secret

Point

We're better off keeping more things to ourselves. Workplace gossip is out of control, and very often, we can't trust people with secrets. Tell a friend never, ever to tell something to someone else, and you've aroused in them an irresistible desire to share the "juicy news" with others. A good rule of thumb is that if you're sure a confidante has told no one else, that probably means he or she has told only three other people. You might think this is a paranoid reaction, but research suggests that so-called confidantes rarely keep secrets, even when they swear they will.

Keeping our own secrets is normal, and most children learn to do it at any early age. People survive by protecting themselves, and when someone is keeping a secret, he usually has a good reason for doing so.

Even when we feel like confiding in someone else, it's prudent to keep confidential information to ourselves. Research shows that few of us are able to keep secrets and that if we fear certain negative consequences of telling our secrets (for example, our confidante will think less of us or will tell others), those fears not only don't keep us from blabbing, they are often justified.

It's even more important to keep organizational secrets. Organizations are rumor mills, and we can permanently damage our careers and the organizations for which we work by disclosing confidential information. Improper disclosure of organizational proprietary information is a huge cost and concern for organizations. A recent poll of managers revealed that 84 percent of employees think it's very common for employees to engage in office gossip, while 63 percent of managers think it has a negative effect on the workplace.

CounterPoint

The problem with keeping secrets is that they're expensive to maintain

One social psychologist found that when people are instructed not to disclose certain information, it becomes more distracting and difficult for them to do so. In fact, the more people are instructed to keep something to themselves, the more they see the secret in everything they do. "We don't realize that in keeping it secret we've created an obsession in a jar," he says. So keeping things hidden takes a toll on our psyche—it (usually unnecessarily) adds to the mental burdens we carry with us.

Another psychologist has found that these costs are real. This researcher found that young people who experienced a traumatic experience often had more health problems later in life. As he researched the topic further, he found out why. Generally, these people conceal the event from others. He even did an experiment that showed that when people who have experienced traumatic events shared them, they later had fewer health problems than people who hadn't shared them. There isn't one identifiable reason why sharing these traumatic events seems to help people, but the result has been found

repeatedly.

There's another positive effect of gossip: The threat of it helps people behave. One study revealed that in a "dictator game," concern about gossip led individuals to share resources more equally. So for our own well being and that of others, we're better off sharing than keeping secrets.

Sources: Based on A. van Iterson and S. R. Clegg, "The Politics of Gossip and Denial in Interorganizational Relations," Human Relations 61, no. 8 (2008), pp. 1117–1137; "Top Managers Don't Appreciate Office Gossip," USA Today (December 24, 2008), p. B1; E. Jaffe, "The Science Behind Secrets," APS Observer, July 2006, pp. 20–22; and J. Piazza and J. M. Bering, "Concerns about Reputation via Gossip Promote Generous Allocations in an Economic Game," Evolution and Human Behavior 29, no. 3 (2008), pp. 172–178.

Class Exercise

1. *Inc. Magazine* has dozens of articles on Open Book Management. Visit www.inc.com and use their search feature on "Open-Book Management." This could be a lab activity or you can make copies of several articles to distribute to the class.
2. Separate the students into small groups and ask them to do the following:
   a. Once they have read the article, determine the method used by management to communicate the open-book philosophy or process used. (If there is not one in the article, ask the students to develop one.)
   b. What results were achieved as described in the article? What elements of the communication process helped or hindered these results?
   c. What negatives occurred (if any) or what negatives might happen in the future and how might they be prevented?
   d. How did the results compare with the organizations mentioned in the Point/CounterPoint case?
   e. What conclusions can the students make concerning open-book management after looking at these companies?