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## Should You Ever Lie at Work?

10 fibs we all tell and how to stop

By Rachel Zupek, CareerBuilder.com writer



After reading the title of this article, your first thought was hopefully, "No, I shouldn't lie at work." Upon further reading, however, you'll realize that try as you might; everyone lies in the workplace.

Remember when you told your boss you liked his tie, which was obviously hideous? Or when you told your co-worker you were working late, when you really just didn't want to ride the train with her? Both are lies.

Clearly, these minor fibs aren't hurting anyone, but they aren't helping, either. So why lie in the first place?

"While some people actually intend to be deceptive, many lies [are told with the] intention to do well or to avoid rocking the boat," says Marsha Egan, president of The Egan Group, a professional coaching firm. "Others occur when people try to avoid the boss noticing a mistake in performance, or covering for some other behavior that could hurt their career. Many workers have the mistaken impression that a small white lie can't hurt."

They're wrong.

Timothy Keiningham and Lerzan Aksoy, co-authors of "Why Loyalty Matters," say although it's tempting to lie, even just a little, you run the risk of losing peoples' trust, or even your job.

"It's easy to say, 'Everyone else is doing it, so I'll do it, too.' It's much harder to take an ethical stand and insist on honesty. Lying, however, is almost never in anyone's interest and should be avoided," Keiningham and Aksoy say.

### To lie or not to lie

The occasional white lie is usually harmless, but most experts say it's easier to be honest from the get-go.

B.J. Gallagher, a [workplace consultant](#) and author of "It's Never Too Late to be What You Might Have Been," says almost everyone lies at work at one time or another, usually in situations where they fear consequences for telling the truth.

"Is this lying OK? It depends on the context. In general, honesty is the best policy. If you tell the truth you don't have to worry about being caught in a lie, you won't have to tell more lies to cover up the first one and you won't have to carry the burden of deception," Gallagher says.

### 10 common fibs

Here are 10 little white lies that we often tell in the workplace, why we tell them and what we should say instead.

#### Lie No.1: I'd be happy to

**Truth:** *This is the last thing I want to do.*

**Say this instead:** "Tell your boss that you would be happy to help him/her with the task, but you need to find out more about what the task entails. At this point, share your concern," Keiningham and Aksoy say. If you need more time, ask for an extended deadline; if you need resources, figure out what you need and be prepared to ask if it would be possible to acquire these.

#### Lie No. 2: My alarm didn't go off

**Truth:** *I was out late last night and didn't actually hear my alarm go off.*

**Say this instead:** "Lies about tardiness only work once or twice. If you repeatedly use the alarm clock excuse, or the traffic excuse, then your boss and others will catch on and you'll lose credibility -- or worse," Gallagher says. "If you are generally a punctual person and happen be late once in awhile, it's best to fess up, apologize and promise not to do it again. I'm so sorry. I didn't allow enough time to get here this morning. I apologize. I'll make sure I allow plenty of time from here on out."

#### Lie No.3: I don't have any questions

**Truth:** *I totally don't understand what I'm doing, but don't want to look stupid.*

**Say this instead:** "When you are totally confused about something, saying that you have no questions will not gain you points with the boss," Egan says. "Most times, the boss can see right through this. Be honest and admit that you may be confused, and that you will get your questions together, or spend some time reading the material so that you can answer your own questions."

#### Lie No.4: Everything is under control

**Truth:** *Everything is not under control.*

**Say this instead:** "An alternative to this might be: 'We seem to have hit a rough patch -- can I get your advice?'" Gallagher suggests. "If you can enlist your boss's help in solving whatever problem you're having, you can actually strengthen your relationship with him or her. Sometimes, admitting weakness and asking for help is actually a sign of maturity and strength."

**Lie No.5: I just got your voice mail**

**Truth:** *I got your voice mail a week ago; I've just been avoiding getting back to you.*

**Say this instead:** "Many voice mail and e-mail systems have the capability of disclosing when items are heard or viewed, therefore this behavior is risky," Egan warns. It is much better to not say when you received it, but just, "I am responding to your voice mail," or "I received your voice mail Friday and am just now able to respond to it," she says.

**Lie No.6: Let's get together soon!**

**Truth:** *I have no intention of getting together with you ... ever.*

**Say this instead:** "Why people say [this] to someone they never really intend to meet or who they don't like is beyond me. Not only do they set off false hope, but by not meeting with the person, they have not delivered on a promise," Egan says. "Say, 'I'm glad we had a chance to meet,' or 'thanks for your views on this subject.'"

**Lie No.7: I was thinking the exact same thing**

**Truth:** *I was thinking something totally different, but I want to seem agreeable.*

**Say this instead:** "What makes breakthroughs and change happen is creativity in thinking and helping others see a viable different perspective," Keiningham and Aksoy say. "If you have a valid reason for disagreeing, then collect the evidence and make your point heard. Sure this is a risk, but as the saying goes, nothing ventured, nothing gained."

**Lie No.8: Oh yeah, I've done that before**

**Truth:** *I have no idea what this project is, or how to do it.*

**Say this instead:** "Can you honestly learn the skills to complete the task in time for the deadline? If so, then go ahead and acquire the skills or ask someone for help to get the job done," Keiningham and Aksoy say. "If there is no way to learn everything you need in a reasonable timeframe, then you need to be honest and either ask for an extension or transfer the task onto someone else."

**Lie No.9: I'm sick**

**Truth:** *I need a day off.*

**Say this instead:** "There are two primary reasons that employees abuse sick time and lie to avoid work: They have a lousy relationship with their immediate boss, or their work is repetitive, boring, unchallenging and mind-numbing," Gallagher says. "If employees are calling in sick when they're well, the boss needs to take responsibility and do something to address the real reason that employees are lying." If you want a day off, request one.

**Lie No.10: This will only take a minute**

**Truth:** *This will take forever.*

**Say this instead:** "While it may be wishful thinking on the boss's or co-worker's part, discussions rarely take only a minute. Make a truthful assessment of about how much time you think the discussion will take," Egan says. "It is better to say, 'I'd like to discuss ABC -- I think it should take only about 10 to 15 minutes; can we set a time to discuss this?'"

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