

Devious Truths

By Shannon Warren

Submitted for the May 13, 2019 edition of The Journal Record

Have you ever been impacted by a devious truth that was actually designed to distract and misinform? Then, you've been the target of a distinct form of duplicity called paltering.

The first type of deceit is the deliberate, blatant falsehood. Then, there is lying by omission, e.g. passively failing to mention key facts. Finally, there is paltering, as described by *Workplace Psychology*. It involves the practice of placing nuggets of truth in statements for the sole purpose of creating a misleading or mistaken impression. It is often used in negotiations to manipulate others.

An example of paltering is President Clinton's use of a present-tense verb in his denial of an affair with a White House aide, e.g. "There *is* not a sexual relationship..." The statement was accurate because he was no longer involved with her, but it was purposely deceptive to thwart the investigation into his misconduct.

Everyone Lies

Several years of personal research was reconfirmed recently: Everyone lies, telling an average of one or two lies per day. Mostly, these are along the lines of false compliments or told to avoid hurt feelings. However, the growing acceptance of deceit is a muddy slope leading to bigger problems. For example, David DeSteno reported in an April *Harvard Business Review* that theft and fraud are reducing profits of U. S. businesses by \$50 billion annually. And, according to the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners, non-cash thefts in workplaces have increased over 10% from 2002 to 2018.

Combatting Deceit

How to stem the tide? Usually, targets of paltering never see it coming. But, if something doesn't ring true, simply ask specific questions. Drill down with the purpose of gaining a greater understanding, but don't treat the other person as if they are on trial. It's possible that your colleague just hasn't thought things through and these inquiries might help both of you discern the truth.

As a leader, create a culture that allows people do as author and successful entrepreneur Roy Spence suggests: "Fess up if you mess up." Many lies are told to avoid embarrassment, especially in competitive environments where one-upmanship is encouraged.

As William Faulkner put it, " Never be afraid to raise your voice for honesty and truth and compassion against injustice and lying and greed. If people all over the world...would do this, it would change the earth."

Let's make that change.

Shannon Warren is Founder of www.okethics.org