

# Reducing Conflict 49 Little White Lies

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD



I suspect there is not a soul alive that has not told white lies at some point. Even though our parents taught us to tell the truth, sooner or later we have all violated the rule. If you have never told a lie, write to me and I will nominate you for sainthood. The thing about lies is that you can usually detect them by observing the person's body language.

## Lying to my manager

I recall one incident when my manager asked me if I had read a particular book. I said yes, but I really had not read it. I was pretty sure he saw through the fib. There must have been a dozen ways my body was saying “no” while my mouth was saying “yes.” What is fascinating is the huge array of body language that is going on all of the time. It never stops. Most of the body language we send out is unconscious so our lies are easy to detect.

## Watch the eyes

We see that kind of deception in children most easily. If you ask Johnny who tipped over the vase, he will shrug his shoulders indicating he does not know. If you ask “was it you,” he will say “no.” He is afraid he will be in trouble if he tells the truth. But all parents know to watch their eyes for the truth. The mother knows instantly that Johnny not only knows who broke the vase but that it was him. We teach our children that the bigger sin is to hide the truth than to break the vase, but only some of them learn the lesson.

## Politicians are experts at lying

It is sad that so many people in positions of authority never did learn that lesson. Time after time we catch them in half-truths or big lies. It is so common with politicians or celebrities that we end up wondering if we can trust any of them. I am sure some of them can be, but my first inclination is to not believe what any of them say. This is particularly true if they broke the vase. They might say it is a “no-spin zone,” but if you believe that I have a bridge I want to sell you.

What adults need to realize is what we try to teach our children. It is better to be honest and admit mistakes because all human beings are fallible. Lying about a misstep gives

us away because we cannot hide our subconscious body language. Next time you are tempted to tell a half-truth, remember that your credibility is on the line, and do not follow the example of many public figures who frequently embarrass themselves.

### **Admitting mistakes actually increases trust**

I discovered many years ago that admitting a mistake is a good way to build rather than destroy trust. People will take notice when you consciously blow yourself in when you might have escaped with a lie. Build a reputation for yourself as a straight shooter. It is worth the effort.

Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD, is a consultant, trainer, speaker, and author in the areas of leadership and trust. He is the author of: *Trust in Transition: Navigating Organizational Change*, *The Trust Factor: Advanced Leadership for Professionals*, *Understanding E-Body Language: Building Trust Online*, and *Leading with Trust is Like Sailing Downwind*. Bob has many years as a senior executive with a Fortune 500 Company and with non-profit organizations.