



# Golden Talk Series

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*Dishonesty at Work*

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## 1. Is dishonesty a common thing in workplace settings?



In professional settings, despite the high value placed on **integrity**, lying is unfortunately **not uncommon**. This could range from **minor distortions** to significant deceptions. Small lies might include exaggerating one's role in a successful project, while more significant lies could involve **falsifying financial records** or **misrepresenting** a product's features to clients. Even though dishonest behaviors may be prevalent in some workplaces, they are generally **frowned upon** in most organizations and can lead to serious professional **repercussions**.

## 2. Why do we lie, to begin with?

People usually have a **variety of motives** when they lie in the workplace. In many cases, lying is a **defensive tactic** to **cover up** a mistake so they don't get in trouble. Other times, it's about looking better than they are, like overstating their sales numbers or taking credit for someone else's work. Lying can also be a **convenient escape** from undesirable tasks or responsibilities, like faking an illness. It's often about wanting to look good, avoiding problems, or trying to get ahead.

### 3. Is lying inevitable?

Lying in the workplace can often appear to be unavoidable, especially in high-stress jobs where people are expected to **hit** ambitious **targets** or stand out. That's when they may **feel the urge to bend the truth**. It's also easy to **fall into** a 'everyone's doing it' mindset. But not everyone lies at work. There are plenty of professionals in different areas who **stick to the truth**, even when it's tough.

### 4. Why should dishonesty at work be a concern?



If widespread dishonesty **takes hold** in a workplace, trust rapidly **evaporates** (=vanishes). Reliability in colleagues' words becomes **questionable**, making it difficult to collaborate effectively. Key aspects like effective teamwork, **sound decision-making**, and the **business's overall reputation** are **jeopardized**. It's similar to building a house on unstable ground. Over time, this can lead to a **downward spiral**, including failure to meet deadlines, decreased work quality, and dissatisfied clients.

### 5. What do employees/employers commonly lie about?

1. **Embellishing qualifications on a resume:** This means adding false or exaggerated information to one's résumé. For instance, claiming to have a degree or skill that one



does not actually possess or **overstating** the level of involvement in a project to seem more capable or experienced.

2. **Over-reporting work hours:** It means claiming to have worked more hours than actually done, often to receive **higher pay** or to seem more dedicated. Some people might do this to compensate for financial needs, to **create an impression of** high workload or commitment, or to meet perceived expectations in workplaces where long hours are valued.
3. **Under-reporting work hours:** In situations where work hours are **self-reported**, such as in consulting or **remote work**, some may report fewer hours than actually worked. This can be done to **appear** more efficient or to **comply with** expected work norms.
4. **Overpromising in sales or client management:** Salespeople or client managers might make unrealistic promises about the capabilities or features of a product or service **to secure a deal**, knowing that these promises may not be entirely **deliverable**.

5. **Falsely attributing success or blame in team environments:** This could involve **taking credit** for a colleague's idea or contribution or, conversely, blaming a colleague for one's own mistakes or **shortcomings** in a project.



6. **Manipulating data or reports:** This may involve tweaking (=slightly changing) or making up data, numbers, or results to make them look better than they really are. People might do this **to present a more favorable outcome**, impress their bosses, or cover up issues.
7. **Feigning illness or personal circumstances:** A common form of dishonesty at work is when people lie about being ill or having personal troubles so they can skip work, avoid work responsibilities, get other people's sympathy, or have an excuse for not meeting deadlines or showing up to meetings.

8. **Misrepresenting time-off reasons:** This includes giving false reasons for requesting leave, such as claiming a **family emergency** when the **time-off** is used for **personal leisure** or other unrelated activities.
9. **Plagiarism and intellectual property theft:** Claiming someone else's work or ideas as one's own. This can occur in research, report writing, or creative projects, where an individual **takes credit for** work they did not originally create.
10. **Misleading work progress or status:** Providing **inaccurate updates on** the status of tasks or projects, such as reporting a project as on schedule when it's actually delayed. This is often done to avoid immediate pressure or **scrutiny**.

## 6. How do we cultivate a culture of workplace integrity and trust?

- ✓ Foster a supportive environment where mistakes can be **openly discussed** and learned from.
- ✓ Set clear expectations about integrity and consequences for dishonesty.
- ✓ Create a safe reporting system for unethical behavior.
- ✓ **Lead by example** – management should model the honesty and integrity they expect from others.
- ✓ Encourage open and honest communication.
- ✓ Provide regular training on ethical behavior and company values.
- ✓ Recognize and reward honesty and **transparency** in the workplace.
- ✓ **Promote work-life balance** to reduce stress that might lead to dishonest behavior.



## Glossary

**take credit:** to claim recognition or praise for something, often undeservedly.

**Example:** *She tried to take credit for the entire project's success, even though it was a team effort.*

**feign** /feɪn/ (**verb**): to pretend or fake a feeling, response, or action.

**Example:** *He feigned surprise when he already knew about the surprise party.*

**Synonyms:** fake (verb)

**Collocations:** *Feign ignorance*

- *Feign interest*
- *Feign surprise*
- *Feign illness*
- *Feign enthusiasm*
- *Feign concern*
- *Feign sleep*
- *Feign emotion*

**scrutiny:** *close examination or careful inspection*

**Example:** The financial records were under intense scrutiny to detect any irregularities.

**word family:** *scrutinize (verb)*

**Collocations:**

- Close scrutiny
- Under scrutiny
- Careful scrutiny
- Subject to scrutiny

**transparency:** the quality of being open, honest, and easily understood

**Example:** *The company's commitment to transparency was evident in their public disclosure of financial information.*

**Word family:** transparent (adj.)

**Collocations:** lack of transparency, ensure transparency, transparency policy, financial transparency

## Questions to think about

1. In your experience, how common is dishonesty in workplace settings?
2. Can you share an example of a minor distortion or significant deception you've witnessed at work?
3. What motivates people to lie in professional environments?
4. How do defensive tactics like covering up mistakes lead to dishonesty in the workplace?
5. Can lying be justified if it's to avoid trouble or enhance one's image at work?
6. What are the consequences of lying in a professional setting?
7. Do you believe that lying in the workplace is inevitable? Why or why not?
8. How does high-stress or competitive work environment contribute to dishonest behaviors?
9. How should a company recognize and reward honesty and transparency?
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