

# NEGOTIATION STRATEGIES

July '09

## THE "CONFRONTING DISHONESTY" CONUNDRUM



■ Raphael E. Lapin

**W**hen confronted with apparent dishonesty in the workplace, we feel betrayed, angry, anxious and disappointed. We are also confused as to whether we should confront it or ignore it, or how to confront it if we need to. If we ignore it, we are at risk of allowing it to continue, and if we confront it we risk the relationship – hence the conundrum or the "Dishonesty Dilemma". A dilemma by definition does not allow for elimination of risks and dangers, and the best we can do is to mitigate the risks while curtailing potential damage and harm. Although there is not one answer for all situations, in this column we offer guidelines to apply and a thought process to work through to ensure an effective and constructive response.

### Giving the Benefit of the Doubt

When you think you may have been deceived, it is important to resist the initial urge to immediately react. Take the time to consider whether this was informed and intentional and carefully decide what action to pursue. When you are not absolutely certain that the other person is intentionally lying and there is no evidence of a prior pattern, you should not accuse them as they are certain to deny the allegation and will become highly defensive. This will obstruct any further productive dialogue. Let's say that you gave someone an assignment to be completed by a certain date. You are aware that it was completed three days after the agreed upon date. When discussing this in their performance review they insist that it was done on time. Consider whether there may have been a misunderstanding or faulty communication. Is it pos-

sible that they accidentally recorded the wrong completion date in their calendar or understood "completion" differently? Maybe they just simply did not remember accurately. In this kind of situation, it is better to give them the benefit of the doubt. However, be vigilant for any pattern in the future. If there is a pattern of apparent dishonesty, you will need to confront them.

### Confronting Dishonesty

If there is a definite pattern of dishonesty or the occurrence is acute enough, and you need to continue the relationship, you will need to confront it. However, even in this instance, do not explicitly accuse them of lying as this will cause defensiveness and obstruct further productive dialogue. Rather, let them know that you are aware of their dishonesty, while at the same time allowing them to save face. For example after telling them what led you to conclude that they were being less than honest with you, you could say: "I am disappointed with this interaction and I feel misled at best and deceived at worst. I am somewhat uneasy about working with you at this point and would like to hear more about your perspective on this. I would also be interested in some ideas about how we might overcome the feelings of uneasiness so that we can continue a successful working relationship?"

This response confronts the dishonesty in a way that is strong enough to address the problem, while at the same time allowing them to save face and negotiate a way of rebuilding the trust and relationship moving forward. It will also discourage them from being dishonest with you in the future.

### Disengaging

In working with someone who has demonstrated a pattern of being deliberately dishonest and is not someone with whom you necessarily *must* have a relationship, you

always have the option of disengaging and walking away. This option may also be appropriate in the event that confronting them has proven unsuccessful. Before doing so, carefully weigh the costs, benefits and practicality of disengaging with them as opposed to confronting them. Once you decide to disengage it is a good idea to let them know that you intend to disengage and why. As an example, after clearly explaining instances of how they deceived you, you might say: "Having felt misled and deceived on several occasions in working with you, I would feel more comfortable if we did not work together. I hope you can respect my feelings". This lets them know in simple and unambiguous terms about where you stand with them.

In dealing with sensitive issues such as dishonesty in the workplace, it is perhaps useful to borrow a process for decision-making that we use in the aviation world. The acronym for this process interestingly enough is **DECIDE**:

**If we ignore dishonesty we are at risk of allowing it to continue, and if we confront it we risk the relationship – hence the conundrum**

**D**etect that there is an issue that needs to be addressed;

**E**stimate the need to react to the issue;

**C**hoose a desirable outcome;

**I**dentify the action that should be taken;

**D**o the necessary action; and

**E**valuate the results.

Integrating this process into our workplace will ensure that our actions and reactions are well thought out, planned, deliberate, purposeful and constructive at all times.

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