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# Truth & Deception Overview

Theology of Work Project

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## Truth & Deception Overview

*Note: "Overview" articles are full-length explorations of major topics in the theology of work. If you're interested in a specific aspect of the topic, the table of contents can help you jump there quickly. Most sections of overview articles are also on the website as brief resources in their own right.*

## INTRODUCTION

Virtually everyone knows that the people of God are supposed to tell the truth. Even though we recognize there are exceptions—protecting the innocent, guarding national security, and a few others—we remember how Jesus described himself as “the way and the truth and the life” (John 14:6), and we understand that truth is the way of life God calls us to.

But our commitment to truth is often stretched thin in the workplace. Sometimes it seems that it is impossible to succeed at work by telling only the truth. Sometimes it even seems that the workplace is a different realm from the world Jesus inhabited, and that truth is actually out of place at work. Consider the case of Philippe Kahn.

Philippe Kahn was the head of startup software company Borland International, and needed a break to launch his company. His software was field-tested and ready to market and distribute, and all he needed was an opportunity. But Kahn had no employees (beyond his assistant) and no money to mount an expensive advertising campaign. What he really needed was an ad in the niche magazine *Byte*. But the ad cost \$20,000 that he didn't have, and he had insufficient collateral for a loan that size. He needed 100% credit for the ad. The only way he knew to get credit like that was to attempt an elaborate bluff, to convince the sales person for *Byte* that his company was much more of a going concern than it actually was. So he rented office space for the day, hired temporary employees to answer non-existent phone calls, left a folder open that indicated that *Byte* was far down the list of potential advertisers, and told the salesperson that he didn't think *Byte* was the right forum to advertise his product. His intention, as he admitted in a later interview in *Inc.* magazine, was to make the salesperson believe that his company was strong enough to generate the sales from the ad to repay the loan.<sup>[1]</sup> And in fact, that is precisely what occurred. The ad sold roughly \$150,000 worth of software, *Byte* got paid, and Borland International was on its way. Clearly, everyone benefitted and no

one got hurt.

Kahn's strategy raises important questions about truth-telling and deception. It seems clear that Kahn's intention was to deceive the *Byte* salesperson. Many in the business community assess actions such as Kahn's as clever, and would blame the salesperson for not doing his homework on the company before extending the credit.<sup>[2]</sup> But this scenario strikes many others as unethical. This illustrates some of the nuances that must be explored in coming to a well-reasoned view of truth-telling and disclosure and its application to work.

In this article, we will first lay a Biblical foundation for truth-telling, establishing it as the *prima facie* norm for interactions between human beings. Then we will look at exceptions to this norm. We will emphasize why truth-telling is important, both for the believer and for the culture at large. Then we will apply the notion of truth-telling to the workplace and suggest that though truth-telling is a very strong norm, there are times when it is not necessarily required. We will address puffery, white lies, bluffing and occasions when the other party has no right to the truth. Although the vast majority of the believer's life is spent in pursuing truth, describing the exceptions takes many words, and much of the text of this article is spent in developing their proper limits. The balance of text in an article on truth and deception does not reflect the proper balance of truth and deception in a believer's life.

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## Truth-telling in the Bible

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### Truth-telling is the Norm in the Bible

As is apparent by simply listing key biblical passages that speak to this subject, honesty and telling the truth are highly valued by God and are considered an integral part of a life of integrity and faithfulness to him. The Mosaic law commands that God's people do not lie or deceive each other (Leviticus 19:11) or give false testimony about another (Exodus 20:16). The Psalmist describes the person whose walk is blameless and righteous as speaking the truth from the heart (Psalm 15:2). The New Testament echoes this when it connects honesty and truthfulness with the believer's new life in Christ (Colossians 3:9). One of the first manifestations of the believer putting off the old self and putting on the new self in Christ is a commitment to honesty (Ephesians 4:24-25).

The virtue of honesty is grounded ultimately in the character of God—that is, we are to be truthful because God is truthful. God never lies the Bible informs us (Titus 1:2), and both Jesus and the Holy Spirit are referred to as *the truth* (John 14:6, 16:13; 1 John 5:6). Similarly, God's word is called the truth (Psalm 119:142, John 17:17). Theologically, honesty is a virtue because, like all the virtues, it is rooted in God's nature. Truth-telling is a moral principle to be followed because God is truthful, and we are called to emulate his character.

God also commands *people* to tell the truth, most notably in the Ten Commandments, given in Exodus as “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” (Exodus 20:16) and restated in Leviticus 19:11 as “You shall not lie to one another.” Proverbs informs us that telling the truth leads to the best long-term outcomes for us: “Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue lasts only a moment” (Proverbs 12:19). In other words, truth-telling is the biblical norm under all three approaches to ethics, virtues, commands and consequences. (See the article *Ethics at Work* at [www.theologyofwork.org](http://www.theologyofwork.org) for more on biblical approaches to ethics in the context of work.)

No matter how we look at it, then, the biblical expectation is that we tell the truth. Above all, honesty is a virtue because, like all virtues, it is rooted in God’s nature. Truth-telling is a moral principle to be followed because God is truth, and we want to be in a close relationship with God. The only way to draw close to the truth is to be truthful. In other words, God’s Law is not only prescriptive—God tells us to tell the truth— it is also descriptive—God describes himself as truth. If God’s laws for us are considered descriptive of how we were created to be in relationship with him and with one another, then deception denies our very humanity, reduces us to less than who God created us to be, and damages ourselves and others. In short, the basic attitude of the human faith is “speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ” (Ephesians 4:15). “For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth” (2 Corinthians 13:8).

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## Exceptions to Truth-telling in the Bible

God holds truth and love together in a perfect marriage. When they are married, there is no conflict. When they are sundered, we face dilemmas; for example, when love requires deception (e.g., Corrie Ten Boom lying to the Nazis about hiding Jews in her house) or when truth causes harm (e.g., telling a child a truth he or she is not prepared to understand). This is not because there is something wrong with God, but because of the fallen nature of our world. Until God’s kingdom is fulfilled, those who would follow God will experience periodic conflicts as they try to love in truth and tell the truth in love.

In other words, the fact that truth-telling is a biblical principle does not necessarily mean that it is an absolute to be *always* followed in every circumstance. There are at least two occasions in the bible in which deception seems to be allowed, if not praised. For example, the midwives who were charged with caring for the infant Moses carried out an elaborate deception in order to safeguard the life and well-being of Moses, hiding his Hebrew origins and leading the Pharaoh to believe that he was actually one of his own sons (Exodus 2:1-10). In addition, Rahab deceived the soldiers of Jericho in order to safeguard the lives of the Israelite spies who came to serve as advance scouts of the promised land (Joshua 2:1-24). She actually ends up in God’s Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11 on account of her faith, exercised in protecting the lives of the spies (of which the deception was an integral part).

One classic example of this kind of exception to the general principle of truth-telling occurred during World War II in the well-publicized story of Corrie Ten Boom, later written in *The Hiding Place*. For some time, she and her sister hid Jews and enabled them to escape from the Nazis and certain trips to concentration camps. Repeatedly she was asked point-blank by the Gestapo if she was hiding Jews, and she routinely lied to the authorities in order to protect their lives.

This was a genuine moral conflict, one in which two or more moral values and virtues come into conflict, and the Ten Booms were in the difficult position of having to weight competing values. They correctly weighted the obligation to protect the lives of Jews more heavily than the obligation to tell the truth, especially to those who had no right to it.

These conflicts are not common, nor do they suggest that God's commands are intrinsically contradictory. Rather they reflect our fallen world in which these demands of morality work themselves out, sometimes in conflicting ways. In addition, God's commands are given through human concepts and language, and thus the way we comprehend God's commands is subject to the limitations of human conception. Human language is not capable of covering all situations without mutual contradiction,<sup>[3]</sup> so even things expressed as absolutes have exceptions. We should expect that at times we should have to weigh competing values and we should also expect that God would direct us in doing so. Thus, rather than saying that truth-telling is inviolable, it is more accurate to suggest that it is a general rule that admits periodic exceptions when in conflict with other important moral values.

In fact, even God is described as working in ways that border on deception in the fallen world. There are some examples, particularly in the Old Testament, where God uses deception, and they seem to be a puzzling contradiction to the notion that God does not lie (see for example, 1 Kings 22:23; Jeremiah 4:10, 20:7). But in all these cases, the people of Israel are firmly entrenched in idolatry and awaiting God's judgment in the coming exile. God has already made the truth clear to the people and they have rejected it and their judgment is forthcoming. It is clear that God is not deceiving the people as a means of instruction but as a means of judgment. When people reject truth, even God's character becomes a deception to them. However, in deceiving the self-deceived, God's actions do not contradict his character of truth.

A New Testament parallel occurs in Paul's teaching in 2 Thessalonians 2:11-12: "For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but delighted in wickedness." Here, Paul describes how at the end times the "man of lawlessness" sets himself up to be God. To counter this self-deception, God uses deception not to mislead the people, but to judge those who have abandoned the truth. Thus, when Paul speaks of the "God, who never lies" (Titus 1:2), he is stating the character of God, yet recognizing that in a fallen world, the deepest truth at times must be cloaked in deception for the sake of love. Corrie ten Boom is not a justifiable exception to the truthful character of God's image in humanity, but a fulfillment of a

deeper truth in love.

Viewing truth-telling as a *prima facie* moral principle also appeals to our common sense intuitions about certain professions that make regular use of deception. Take for example, intelligence gathering. There is little doubt that the intelligence apparatus of most countries uses deceit in order to gain critical intelligence information about one's enemies. In addition, undercover police work requires that officers disguise their identity and create entirely new personas in order to infiltrate organizations effectively. Few questions are raised about the necessary use of deception in these occupations.<sup>[4]</sup> And, of course, virtually no one questions the validity of bluffing in poker games or the use of elaborate faking in sports, because they are considered part of the game—acceptable within the rules of the game.

However, none of the above scenarios are entirely analogous to business and other arenas in which most work occurs. We will discuss later whether ends-justifies-the-means exceptions exist beyond national security and public safety. And situations in which truth is not expected, such as in poker, are very rare and can hardly serve as the norm for conduct in work.<sup>[5]</sup> This raises important questions about what criteria should guide us when it comes to truth-telling in our work.

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## Why Truth-telling is Important

Besides emulating the character of God, truth-telling is critical for a flourishing society. Therefore, except in rare circumstances, God mandates it. Though God's command would be a sufficient motivation, theologians and philosophers have identified other reasons as well.

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## Authentic Communication Requires Truth-telling

Truth-telling is essential for authentic communication to occur, and makes genuine interaction between people possible. That is, if truth were not expected, it would not be long before communication would entirely break down. Imagine what it would be like living in a society in which no one expected the truth. How could a person discern what is accurate and what is a falsehood? On what basis could a person make important decisions if there was no expectation of the truth? Life would be chaotic without the norm of honesty.

This is essentially the view of the philosopher Immanuel Kant, and the principle of universalizability of truth-telling (though he would not support the notion given here that there are exceptions to the universal norm). Kant argued that this principle was the test of a valid moral principle, and used truth-telling as one of his primary illustrations. He insisted that for a norm to be legitimate, it must be universalizable—applicable to everyone. One of his illustrations envisioned what might happen if no one accepted the norm in question. He correctly argued that without a universal norm of truth-telling, the

basis for communication would be in jeopardy, and a society in which this was not a norm would not be functional.[6] This is recognized by the fact that virtually every civilization has some kind of norm that promotes truth-telling and prohibits deception.[7]

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## Trust and Cooperation Require Truth-telling

Truth-telling builds trust and civil cooperation among human beings. Trust is critical for a prosperous society, and being a person of one's word establishes trust and trustworthiness.[8] The Mosaic Law underscored this in Deuteronomy 25:15, connecting honest dealings with Israel's prosperity in the land. "You shall have only a full and honest weight; you shall have only a full and honest measure, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you" (also see Leviticus 19:36). Similarly Proverbs brings out the connection between trustworthiness and social harmony. Proverbs 3:29 emphasizes that trust among neighbors is what enables them to live in peace, not fearing harm from one's neighbor. Further, Proverbs emphasize that trustworthiness brings healing to both relationships and communities (Prov. 13:17, 25:13). Adam Smith was very clear that honest dealings and trustworthiness were critical for a properly functioning market system. Cultures that are given to corruption are often in the most impoverished parts of the world, since it is more difficult and risky to do business in cultures in which the level of trust is low. Similarly, companies in which there is a culture of distrust typically have higher costs of doing business, since they require costly regimens of oversight. They also have intangible costs, as employees tend to be more reluctant to "go the extra mile" for their employer and tend to be less eager to embrace change and less committed to their work.

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## Human Dignity Requires Truth-telling

Truth-telling treats people with dignity. To tell someone the truth is a measure of respect that is missing when someone is lied to.

The Scriptures illustrate this with the Genesis account of Jacob and his service to Laban (Genesis 29-30). Jacob works seven years for the right to marry Rachel and after the years of service are complete, Laban deceives Jacob and substitutes his less desirable daughter Leah as Jacob's bride. Jacob is justifiably outraged at being deceived and treated with such disrespect (Gen. 29:25). Jacob returns the disrespect to Laban in Genesis 30 when he deceives Laban with respect to the flocks that Jacob is tending for Laban, separating out the stronger flocks for himself and leaving the weaker ones for Laban (Gen. 30:42).

Similarly in 2 Kings 12, when it came to the money for the repair of the temple, there were certain workmen who were so trustworthy that the overseers of the repairs did not need an accounting of the money they spent for the repairs. Because they were honest, they were treated with dignity and trust

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by the king and by the priests in charge of temple repair (also 2 Kings 22:7). This is also borne out by the proverb that warns a person, “Well meant are the wounds a friend inflicts, but profuse are the kisses of an enemy” (Proverbs 27:6). The enemy who multiplies kisses is the one who showers a person with false flattery, deceiving the person into the illusion of friendship and trust, when in reality, he is the enemy. Here, deception treats the person being deceived as a pawn to be manipulated for the deceiver’s own selfish purposes, not as someone with dignity who is deserving of respect. Disrespect also comes through in, “A lying tongue hates its victims; and a flattering mouth works ruin” (Prov. 26:28; also Prov. 26:18-19, 24, 26).

The right of a person to make his or her own autonomous decisions is based on having accurate information, so much so that people often and understandably feel violated and disrespected when they are deceived. A person’s autonomy is weakened when they are deceived. This is evident in the example of Jacob and Laban. Jacob’s autonomy to marry the woman of his choice was completely undermined by Laban’s deception, since Jacob would never have married Leah if left entirely to his own choice (Genesis 29:17-20). It is further evident in Jacob’s reciprocal deception of Laban, since Laban would not have managed the flocks to his obvious financial disadvantage had he not been deceived so effectively by Jacob (Gen. 30:42-43).

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## Truth-telling in the Workplace

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### Financial Statements Must Tell the Truth

A prime example of the role of truth-telling in the workplace is the preparation of financial statements by businesses, governments, churches, non-profit organizations, and individuals. All of these entities are required under certain conditions to prepare financial statements for the purpose of giving others an accurate depiction of their financial condition.

Often this requires disclosing information that is not favorable, including reduced profitability, diminished cash reserves, controversial levels of executive compensation, spiraling debt obligations and the like. Although organizations and individuals might prefer to hide such information, they have a legal and moral obligation to provide accurate information.

Most financial statements are crafted according to rules governing how to define, calculate, estimate and verify various aspects of the statements. Following these rules helps make financial statements accurate and comparable across different entities. But rules alone are not enough. Entities must make judgments about factors such as the likelihood of a contract being completed on time, the lifetime of equipment, the future interest rates, a wide variety of future risks, and a host of others. Leaders are often tempted to adjust their judgments about these factors in a way that paints the entity in the most



favorable light—rather than giving the most accurate picture of its true financial position. In fact, some leaders may even believe they have a duty to “manage earnings”—to make profits appear stable from quarter to quarter—by making pessimistic adjustments during prosperous times and switching to optimistic adjustments during lean years.

The Bible, social expectations and laws and regulations in free and open countries prohibit such manipulations. The only acceptable criterion for financial statements is whether they “present fairly, in all material respects, an entity’s financial position, results of operations, and cash flows in conformity with generally accepted accounting principles.”<sup>[9]</sup> That is, they must convey the truth. It is not enough that they follow the rules, or that they refrain from containing false statements. They have a higher duty, which is to convey an accurate picture of the true situation. This is the standard by which all of our statements should be judged. Do they give the listener or reader an accurate picture of the situation? If not, they are not telling the truth.

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## There May be Exceptions to Truth-telling in the Workplace

Though it is clear that the default position is to tell the truth, even in Scripture, that is not considered a total absolute—there are some exceptions to the general principle. Of course, what the law allows for does not determine the standard for truth-telling. Another way to say this is that the law is the moral minimum, the moral floor, not the ceiling. What a person can get away with and yet not violate the law is not the standard.

Here are some of the categories of acceptable exceptions to the norm of truth-telling.

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### Puffery/exaggeration

Much of contemporary advertising falls into the category of what may be referred to as “harmless puffery.” This may apply both to the text of an advertisement as well as to the image created and associated with a company’s product. For example, the TCBY Yogurt chain calls itself “The Country’s Best Yogurt.” However, there is likely widespread disagreement about whether their product is really the country’s best yogurt. As far as is known, the company has not taken surveys to accumulate evidence to back up their claim, nor do they provide any substantiation to what is basically a matter of opinion and an immeasurable claim. This is no doubt an exaggeration, an example of puffery that few people take seriously as a demonstrable claim. Yet most people would not regard the company’s name as a lie. The reasonable consumer takes the claim for what it is—public relations fluff.

To hold advertising to strict truth-telling standards that would put puffery off the table would reduce advertising to mere statements of verifiable facts and would cause most advertising to lose its appeal.

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“The city’s best pizza” is understood to be a slogan, not a fact. To a large degree, *any* statement of unverifiable opinion could be considered a violation of truth-telling, unless perhaps it includes an explicit statement of “It is my opinion that...” Yet we can usually tell when someone is expressing an opinion, and we recognize that advertising is generally a mercenary kind of opinion, not a claim of objective truth. We don’t need to be told, “The city’s best pizza—in the opinion of the owner.” Opinions are valuable to society—even when they are wrong—and advertising has value too, even if it amounts to harmless puffery. Do we really want a world where sports fans chant, “We’re number 14, or at best 13,” or where lovers croon, “I love you with 93% of my heart?”

But take the example of a car dealership that advertises, “Credit problems? No application refused.” Most people would not take an ad like this literally because we recognize it as commercial puffery. We wouldn’t really believe that a person with very poor credit, or who has just filed for bankruptcy, would actually be granted credit. Because we take it with a grain of salt, we might think the ad is unlikely to harm anyone. Yet because it makes a specific claim—“no application refused”—it does have more potential to mislead than a vague opinion statement does. Unless the advertising conveys to the average person the actual reality of the situation, the ad should explain what it really means. In this case, the company should include a disclaimer that makes it clear that all credit applications are subject to review. Or, to minimize the possibility of being misunderstood, they should delete the portion of the ad that claims, “no application refused.” The difference here is that the claim is not merely an opinion, but a claim to be a fact, “No application refused.” If it is not a fact, it is an unacceptable violation of truth-telling.

Advertisers may also make implicit claims, not by the direct text of their ads, but by the images that are associated with their products. Men’s shaving products are often accompanied by beautiful women being attracted to the men who have just finished using a company’s razors, shaving cream or after shave lotions. The suggestion is that if you use this product, you will be surrounded by beautiful women who find you irresistible. Or at least that you’ll feel more like an attractive man. Or it may be that the ad simply uses the beautiful woman to grab your attention, and you know perfectly well that using it won’t make you more attractive.

Regardless of the psychological workings of the ad, most reasonable consumers see through this puffery and don’t expect an entirely accurate portrayal of the appeal of the product. In fact, most people, when they think about it rationally, recognize that their hygiene products have little to do with their sexual attractiveness. Yet the image associated with such products remains a popular one for advertisers, which is the reason that this form of puffery continues. It is hard to work up too much outrage at this type of puffery, to the degree it doesn’t really *mislead* anyone. (Whether this type of advertising reinforces harmful gender stereotypes, demeans women or men, or promotes unhealthy body images is a worthy question, although one beyond the scope of this discussion.)

Of course, when advertisers make measurable claims, they are presenting themselves as telling the truth, fulfilling the moral demands of truth-telling, as well as the laws requiring truth in advertising, apply. For example, when toothpaste manufacturers make the claim that “4 out of 5 dentists surveyed recommend Crest,” that must be verified by the surveys themselves.

Truth is also expected when verifiable claims are made outside of an advertising context. Exaggerating non-advertising claims is usually intended to be misleading, to present the person or situation as better than he/she/it actually is. If the truth were plainly told, it would clearly not leave as positive an impression as the exaggeration. For example, embellishing your work experience or educational background on a resume is unethical, since the recipient of the resume expects the truth and makes decisions based on receiving the truth in those documents. Saying, “I’m the best person for this job,” is allowable because everyone understands it’s not based on an objective assessment of all candidates. Saying, “I graduated from Oxford,” when you did not, is not allowable.

Even when giving opinions that cannot be verified, you should still be wary of exaggerating, since the person who requests your opinion may be depending on an accurate assessment. If you are asked your opinion about a former student or co-worker, for example, any specific claims you make are expected to be true. Even a statement as vague as “one of my best students” should only be made if the student was indeed better than most other students.

Of course, hyperbole (the use of exaggerated emphasis to make a true point) is a common figure of speech employed in contemporary language. It is also used in the Bible, particularly the poetic sections. Psalm 6:6 reads, “Every night, I *flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping*” as a hyperbolic way of saying, “I am in deep sorrow.” We don’t expect the Psalmist’s couch to actually be saturated or the bed to float away. Jesus’ statements, “If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off . . . If your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off . . . And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out” (Mark 9:43, 45, 47) are often regarded as hyperbole. We would be horrified if someone amputated their foot in the hope it would prevent him or her from robbing banks again. But hyperbole is not expected in situations where someone is soliciting your opinion and, if it is offered, it is normally followed with an explanation that more clearly specifies one’s actual opinion.

One example where this is difficult to sort out is when it comes to letters of recommendation. This is particularly troublesome when it comes to recommending employees whom you have terminated and who, without your endorsement, will have trouble securing other work. One of the common solutions to this, often recommended by a company’s lawyers, is to say nothing, except to confirm that the person in question worked at your company during the stated period. But this can be very problematic in the case of a dangerous ex-employee, since it does not protect future employers from potential harm through incompetence, lack of character, or violent personality. Yet most companies do not want to risk being sued for slander. In court, the truth is an absolute defense, but most companies will want to avoid

litigation in the first place.

When recommendations are given, it is not uncommon for them to be exaggerated, building up the person being recommended to be better or more qualified than he or she actually is. This is also the case when recommendations are given for employees who are going back to school to further their education. This common practice of exaggeration in references causes problems, because the recipient of the reference expects a forthright evaluation of the person so that it can be determined whether or not the person is a good fit for a particular position or organization. A poor fit serves neither the employee nor the organization well.

The commonplace nature of these exaggerations is why there is cynicism about recommendations and references, with some actually discounting them and questioning their overall value. This is a difficult area, since prudence under the law may prohibit material disclosure about a candidate for a position. Though you would not be violating the obligation to tell the truth, it's not helpful at all for the person requesting the recommendation. To be fair, if you adopt this policy, it should apply to all requests for recommendations, since it would not be right for your non-disclosure to be interpreted as disapproval of the candidate. This would even be the case if someone asked you for more clarification "off the record."

We may be tempted to engage in such exaggeration on our own behalf. We may want to say or imply something like, "I've been in the kind of situation you're talking about many times, and here's what I've found is the best way to handle it," when in fact we have only faced the situation once or only heard about how others faced the situation. If, in fact, we have high confidence about what to do in such a situation, we may feel justified in portraying ourselves so confidently. But the claim to have done something we have not is, in fact, a lie told in a situation where the truth is expected. Rather than exaggerating how often you've encountered a specific scenario, simply tell the person how you would handle it. You can say that you've seen it (if you have) and spell out how you would deal with such a situation.

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## White lies

"White lies" are lies that are meant to smooth discourse or deflect minor conflict, supposedly without doing harm to anyone. For example, if you are late to a meeting, it is often tempting to manufacture a face-saving excuse, such as "Traffic was bad today," or "I got a last minute call that I had to take." Or take this very common scenario. You don't want to talk to someone, so you ask a colleague to tell the person that you're out of the office or in a meeting. Other kinds of white lies include statements like, "Let me introduce my dear friend" (of a colleague you don't like very much), "I see you are a wise person" (to a customer who is obviously a fool), "I'll call you" (when you have no intention of calling).

While it is difficult to take a strong stand against white lies, since they seem so harmless, there is usually a way to manage these cases without lying and still stay out of awkward situations. If you are late to a meeting you can simply admit that “I’m sorry I got hung up,” and let it go at that. The people with whom you are meeting don’t need to know what hung you up, and the ambiguity is better than a white lie, though both seem relatively harmless. Similarly, when you want to be unavailable, simply have the person representing you say you are unavailable. The person asking generally doesn’t need to know the precise reason you are not available to talk to them, and you are under no obligation to give full disclosure of the reasons. Or if you are dealing directly with the person, you can simply say, “I can’t talk about this now, but would be glad to get back to you later on that.” Again, you are under no obligation for full disclosure. Leaving some ambiguity is not necessarily the same thing as deception and less than full disclosure is not necessarily lying.

Some situations in which we are tempted to tell white lies are actually scenarios in which we ought to be truthful. Take, for example, when someone asks for your evaluation of a presentation made at the company. It would be easy and very efficient to say, “It was great, I liked it,” and leave it at that. But that may be missing an opportunity to give helpful, constructive feedback if, in reality, the presentation wasn’t good. You can praise the parts that were genuinely praiseworthy, but also point out the areas that are shortcomings so that the person can improve for the next presentation.

Likewise, we may try to convince ourselves that some types of deceit are acceptable because they are relatively minor. This includes misleading your employer about how you use your time or padding your expense account. We may be especially susceptible to this kind of deceit if we can convince ourselves that it’s common practice. Or we may try to justify deceit as compensation for a perceived injustice against us. “I deserve a bigger share of the tips, but I’m getting cheated out of it because I’m not sleeping with the boss, like Pat is, so I’ll make up for it by skimming a little out of the cash drawer.” These have clearly moved beyond anything like a white lie or harmless puffery. They are deceptions against unsuspecting counterparties, having no other object than personal gain we know we could not achieve if the other party were not deceived. These have no place in Christian ethics.

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## Bluffing

One of the most common violations of truth-telling in the work world is bluffing or what some call, “mutual deceptions.”<sup>[10]</sup> Bluffing may be legitimate when all the parties understand that the truth is not necessarily expected, and the bluffing is considered part of the negotiation. It’s somewhat akin to a dance that’s expected where both parties know the music and the steps. Routine examples of bluffing that are generally considered legitimate include faking in sports, deception in poker, negotiating prices while shopping in many parts of the non-western world, and not-guilty pleas in trials. The bluff that Philippe Kahn put over on the salesperson from *Byte* magazine is another example. What makes

bluffing seem acceptable is the assumption that everyone knows that bluffing may occur—that is, everyone knows the rules of the game. This is clearly the case in the above examples (though not as clear in the Kahn case), and it is difficult to claim that someone has been unjustifiably deceived in those cases.

Perhaps the classic defense of bluffing in business comes from Albert Carr, writing in the *Harvard Business Review* in 1968. Carr claimed that business is analogous to poker, and since everyone knows the rules of the game, bluffing is not deception and is therefore an acceptable practice. This is a part of what is often referred to as a *caveat emptor* ("let the buyer beware") morality that is quite consistent with Carr's view of truth-telling. Carr further argued that bluffing is a necessary component of shrewd and effective business practice. Speaking of business people he said,

In their office lives they cease to be private citizens; they become game players who must be guided by a somewhat different set of ethical standards.... Poker's brand of ethics is different from the ethical ideals of civilized human relationships. The game calls for distrust of the other fellow. It ignores the claim of friendship. Cunning deception by concealment of one's strength and intentions, not kindness and open-heartedness, are vital in poker. No one thinks any the worse of poker on that account. And no one should think any the worse of the game of business because its standards of right and wrong differ from the prevailing traditions of morality in our society.<sup>[11]</sup>

Carr argues for a radical dual morality, in which the moral standards of private life cannot be applicable to business and still be competitive. Carr concludes that truth-telling must be abandoned as an ethical value in the workplace and be replaced by the bluffing and deception characterized by poker. In this Carr is at odds with economists such as Milton Friedman, who argued that business activities must conform "to the basic rules of the society, both those embodied in law and those embodied in ethical custom."<sup>[12]</sup>

From a biblical perspective, Carr's vision of business morality as strictly dichotomized from the morality of private life cannot be considered legitimate business ethics. The Bible does not accept the division of life into separate moral spheres, some of which permit taking advantage of other people through unexpected deception. As suggested earlier in this paper, the poker analogy does not apply to business, since business is clearly not a game: not all participants are at the table by choice (and are not free to leave at their choice) and not everyone is aware of the rules of the game. This last element is especially important since the line between bluffing someone who knows what is happening and taking advantage of someone who does not, is not always clear.

### Looking Out for the Other Side in Negotiations

*Jack van Hartesvelt is vice president of a real estate development trust fund and former vice president of Westin Hotels. In both positions he has been responsible for negotiating multi-hundred million dollar deals. But he decided he wanted more transparency in the process of negotiations. He tells what happened the first time he tried it:*

I have been involved in many contract negotiations. I am not a lawyer, but I am with them all the time, in this constructive confrontation. Here's the way it typically works. If I want to get a 3 percent fee, I would tell the other side that I absolutely must have 4 percent, recognizing that they are going to have to drag me down to 3 percent to feel like they "won." The whole negotiation is based on a lie.

This had been wearing on me for a long time and, in 1992, I decided I didn't want to do negotiations the standard way anymore. Part of this came from a bad experience I had had, where I really took advantage of someone—completely legally. But I didn't like the result. The second part came from my faith—there was this dissonance between what I believed in that part of my life, and what I did in the rest of my life.... Click [here](#) to continue reading.

However, this is not necessarily to suggest that all bluffing is wrong. Nor does it imply that bluffing and negotiation are necessarily the same thing, since in negotiations the goal is a good and honest agreement on a fair price with mutual benefit. However, the reality is that bluffing is frequently a part of negotiations. There are some scenarios where it is clear that everyone does know the rules, such as negotiations for commercial real estate sales, or settlement agreements in lawsuits. In such situations, both parties expect a process of negotiation that progressively moves towards a final agreement. But progressive negotiation should not involve outright lying to the other parties in the process. Rather, it simply means not laying all your cards on the table at the beginning. For example, a lawyer representing his or her client in a settlement conference may have authority to settle the case for \$100,000. Truth-telling does not require disclosing so initially, and the lawyer may legitimately make a first offer of \$75,000. This gets more complicated if the lawyer is explicitly asked whether this is the highest amount he or she is authorized to offer. Rather than lying and saying "yes," the lawyer can simply assert this is what is being offered at this time. Negotiations do not have to involve actually deceiving the other parties, even if they know the dance. But neither does truth-telling have to mean full disclosure up front, thereby losing any negotiating leverage.

An important limitation of bluffing in any situation is that material disclosure is required; that is, disclosure of factual information essential to understanding the transaction. For example, if I were selling my car and the transmission was about to fail, it would not be legitimate for me to mislead the buyer into thinking the transmission is in good shape. If I am unwilling or unable to disclose the car's true condition, then at least I am bound to state that I am selling it "as is." In fact, in many jurisdictions, sellers can be sued for fraud for failing to make material disclosures (this is particularly true in home sales).

In many negotiating scenarios, participants bluff by making up unverifiable pseudo-facts, such as, “I don’t know if I can get this past my boss,” or “This is my best and final offer,” or “I have x number of others interested in the deal.” Is making up false “facts” within the rules of the game that everyone understands? In some cases, it may be. “This is my final offer,” given at the beginning of a negotiation, would not be taken seriously by an experienced negotiator on the other side. Or if one party says, “I have five other people interested in this deal,” that claim would be discounted by others around the table. Nonetheless, these are questionable practices because making apparently factual statements may be regarded by the other parties as going beyond the rules of bluffing. We may not be able to say categorically that Christians should not engage in this particular kind of bluffing. But we would strongly encourage believers to ask, “Does this process honor God and respect the counterparty?”

At some point, all negotiations need to be anchored in the rules of normal reality, where factual statements are expected to be true. If you try to sell land you don’t own, for example, no one will regard that as a legitimate bluff. The best approach may be to regard bluffing as similar to advertising. Exaggerating (or understating) the parties’ attitudes about the price, terms, or other aspects understood to be a negotiating tactic is not deceitful. But making false statements of fact is deceitful. It is also unlikely to be believed except by the most credulous counterparties, meaning those most likely not to understand the rules of the game that make bluffing legitimate in the first place. Instead of making up false facts, why not make true statements about the counterparty’s lack of knowledge. Instead of saying, “I have three other buyers ready to make an offer, so consider yourself lucky to be offered this price,” how about saying, “For all you know, I could have three other buyers ready to make an offer, so do you really want to press your luck on this price?”

To be clear, having reservations about bluffing does not mean that a company or an individual cannot put its best foot forward. This is why people dress up for interviews and presentations, and why a company’s offices are attractive places to work and visit. But it is important that what represents us in the best light is our actual selves or products, not a fictional person or product. In the scenario with Philippe Kahn and *Byte* magazine, Kahn deliberately misrepresented his company to the sales person who didn’t know he was being bluffed. This case illustrates the danger of bluffing. Even if it’s conceded that bluffing can be acceptable when it’s clear that everyone knows the rules, the temptation to take advantage of someone who may not be clear on the rules is overwhelming, and often is the reason for the bluff in the first place. As Alexander Hill puts it, “The concept of mutual deceit. . . should be utilized only in carefully prescribed situations. . . where everyone clearly understands the rules and innocent outsiders cannot be negatively affected. Such sanitary procedures are nearly impossible to implement in the marketplace.”<sup>[13]</sup>

In this light, the case of Philippe Kahn and Borland looks like an illegitimate deception. The fact that the ploy was successful does not make it right, any more than running a red light is okay if you don’t happen to get hit by a car in the intersection. If Borland had gone out of business and stiffed *Byte*



\$20,000, it would be clearer that the deception was illegitimate.

In fact, Kahn's deception was very similar to the kinds of deception perpetrated in the recent global economic meltdown triggered by the collapse of the collateralized mortgage obligation market. Lenders made risky loans to home buyers without demonstrated ability to pay back the loans. Lenders then sold the loans to investors who were misled about the degree of risk involved. If housing prices had happened to continue rising—similar to the way Borland happened to sell a lot of software—then when borrowers defaulted, the lenders could have foreclosed and sold the houses at a high enough price to repay the loan, and the investors might never have known how much risk they had been exposed to. But the fact that the opposite happened—housing prices declined, the loans went bad, and the economy was thrown into a global recession—shows that just because a deception sometimes benefits from good luck, it is not true that everyone benefited and no one got hurt. Deceiving another person or party is a hurt all on its own.

In fact, it is often difficult to tell where bluffing ends and illicit deception begins. Imagine misleading a co-worker into thinking you will endorse her bid for a promotion, then painting her in a bad light in front of the boss so that you can get the promotion yourself. This is clearly a violation of truth-telling, a blatant abuse of the co-worker, and a dishonor to Christ. Yet you can almost convince yourself it is merely a form of bluffing. One of the problems about bluffing is that it opens the door to abuses while maintaining a veneer of legitimacy. We would do well to limit bluffing only to circumstances in which we are certain all parties understand that bluffing is occurring and what the rules and limits are. To repeat Alexander Hill's warning, most people seldom or never encounter such situations in their work.

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## When Someone Has No Right to the Truth

Another category of possible exceptions to the norm of truth-telling is when the person asking the questions has no right to the truth. For example, if a gun-wielding criminal comes into a convenience store for the purpose of robbing it, the employees are under no obligation to tell the truth about where the money is. Most people would accept that lying to the robber is justifiable. In fact, in some cases, explaining to the person that he has no right to the truth would be tantamount to giving him the information he is seeking. In those cases, it may be acceptable to deceive the person to the minimum degree necessary to prevent him from learning what he has no right to know.

Similarly, if you are in a position of keeping confidentiality, people who ask you to breach that duty have no right to the information they are seeking from you. However, in the case of confidentiality, the duty not to disclose information does not make lying justifiable. For example, if you work in the human resources office of your company and you have information about upcoming layoffs that you are to keep confidential and someone asks you for a "heads up" about their job security, you have a duty to

maintain confidentiality.

It would be wrong to divulge the information, but it would be equally wrong to lie. The proper response is to point out that if you had any information about the topic, you would be unable to disclose it. This is the case even though the person may appeal to your friendship and may indicate that the reason they need this information is because of a pending purchase of a home or some other financial commitment they are making. In these cases, you must maintain confidentiality as a part of your loyalty to your company, telling the person that you can't answer questions like those and you don't appreciate being put in such a compromising position, one that could cost you your job if you disclosed that information.

The difference between the robbery example and the confidentiality example is that the human resources officer has another option besides outright lying. A store clerk cannot tell the robber, "If I knew where the money is, I couldn't disclose that information to you"—at least not if the clerk hopes to survive the robbery attempt! But the human resources officer does have that option. This would also be the case if a customer inquired about your profit margin on the price of the product you're negotiating. You don't need to lie, but you can make the point that it is confidential information that you're not authorized to disclose. This emphasizes the fact that the customer does not have the right to that information. The customer does have the right not to be lied to by you, however.

The situation is more ambiguous when the deception merely protects you from the consequences of your own actions. For example, your employer generally doesn't have a right to know what you do when you are off the job. What if you choose to do something that would make you unpopular with your boss or co-workers or reveal deeply personal information? If someone mentions she saw you at a casino last weekend, would it be okay to lie in order to deny it? What about a civil rights march? A church service? A workshop for survivors of domestic violence? It is difficult to find a general rule in scripture or elsewhere for this kind of situation. Instead we can note that growing spiritual maturity tends to go hand-in-hand with greater ability to disclose truth in situations that seem to threaten personal difficulty. A new Christian might find it too difficult to admit to being at a church service if he fears it would diminish his co-workers' esteem for him. More mature Christians might be willing to take the risk and might be capable of turning the situation into a positive experience for themselves and their co-workers. Yet even the most spiritually mature who convert to Christianity in a country where such a conversion is illegal might properly decide to deceive others to keep it hidden, at least until the time and place of God's choosing. Dietrich Bonhoeffer advised his friends to give the Nazi salute ("Heil Hitler") in order to hide their opposition to Hitler. [\[14\]](#) Here again, notice that in order to find a clear example, we have resorted to a situation far beyond what most Christians face at work. For most Christians at most times in most places, growing in Christ means growing more willing to disclose ourselves openly and without deception.

## Deception to obtain information you have a right to know

There are situations in which deception is necessary to obtain information an organization has a right to know. This essentially takes an exception noted earlier, deception for national intelligence purposes and applies it to other workplaces. For example, imagine your job is to serve court orders to people who wish to avoid appearing in court. If you start by disclosing who you are and why you are attempting to contact them, they will probably never admit who they are. Yet your job is vital to the function of the system of laws.

Or consider the practice of mystery shopping. As a means of quality assessment, many retail, medical, hospitality and other customer service companies use mystery shoppers to visit their locations, pretend to be customers, and report on their experience. The information may be essential to assuring that customers are experiencing what the brand promises.<sup>[15]</sup> In order to make sure they are being treated like ordinary customers, mystery shoppers must conceal the truth that they are reporting to the company on their experience. Mystery shoppers—at least in these situations—are trying to obtain information their organizations do have a right to know, but could not obtain without deception.

Just as it may be legitimate to use deceit to protect information that someone else does not have a right to know, it may also be legitimate to use deception to obtain information you do have a right to know. The same approach can be taken to learn about competitors' customer service, prices, etc., by sending a "competitive mystery shopper" into their locations. This is on shakier ethical ground. As long as the competitive mystery shopper simply observes publicly-visible prices, interactions, environments and the like, no deception is involved. But if competitive mystery shoppers are asked who they are or what they are doing, it would be unethical for them to give deceptive answers. Even worse would be calling competitors, misleading them about your identity, and asking questions they would not respond to if they had not been deceived.<sup>[16]</sup>

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## Information you have no right to know

Until now we have been discussing deception to obtain information you have a right to know. This is different from corporate espionage, which means using deception or other means to gain information that you do **not** have a right to know. The information is typically about the target company's products, strategies, finances, people or research and development. This is both unethical and illegal. Because the entity conducting the espionage has no right to know the information, it certainly has no right to use deceit to obtain it. For example, some companies attempt to gain inside information on competitors by having employees represent themselves as graduate students working on a thesis. They may say or imply that the information will be disguised or aggregated. Obviously, this is illegitimate. This fits the general model of corporate spying, using fraudulent means to gain access to information to which the

competing company has no right.

A sidelight to corporate espionage is a situation in which you may un-deceitfully obtain information to which you have no right. For example, you are a sales representative staying overnight in a hotel in your prospect's city. You discover that a sales representative of a competitor stayed in the same hotel room the night before and left a copy of the competitor's bid in the drawer. All you have to do is leaf through the bid and you will learn the competitor's prices, terms, and recommended products. From this you will gain a decisive competitive advantage. You have no right to the information, and in fact (in most cases) the bid will be clearly marked "confidential." Yet you have not deceived anyone to obtain the information. Should you consider it a lucky break, or the due consequences of the competitor's blunder in leaving a bid in a hotel room?

Because the principle we have been following is the one of "right to know," the only consistent answer is that you must not leaf through the bid or otherwise allow yourself or your company to learn its contents. Most reputable companies have a policy against using—or even becoming aware of, if possible—competitors' confidential information. Managers and executives—if they are ethical—will enforce these policies and rigorously prevent the use of information to which the company has no right.

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## Social implications of protecting information others have no right to know

These discussions about the legitimacy of some deception when another party has no right to know may seem like a litany of excuses for questionable conduct. On a personal level, this may often be the case. But on a societal level, if there is no mechanism to protect people and organizations from having to reveal things others have no right to know, society may be harmed. Consider the following case reported to the Theology of Work Project:

I worked for a major pharmaceutical company, teaching a course intended to help managers and professionals investigate product quality complaints. So, if a product was discovered to have been manufactured and released although failing in fact to meet quality standards, there would be an investigation to uncover what had happened to cause that incident. In the course of doing the investigation, it is the professional thing to develop a list of possible causes which are then tested and eliminated by logic and further testing to determine which best fits the actual effect that has been reported. This is entirely comparable to the process a doctor goes through in diagnosing a mysterious set of symptoms; it would be malpractice to jump to premature conclusions without eliminating other reasonable and possible causes.

The company's legal division, however, advised managers never to keep a record of

having gone through such a list of possible causes, since those records would be subject to subpoena. If someone suing the company for another reason were to gain access to a document with a long list of possible causes of product defects, it could give the false impression that the company knows of many flaws in its processes, but is doing nothing to correct them.[17]

In this situation, the pharmaceutical company has internal information used to improve quality control. The company believes—justifiably, perhaps—that if this information is revealed to plaintiffs in lawsuits who have no right to know, it is likely to be misunderstood and used to harm the company. Because the company lacks confidence that what it regards as its right to privacy will be respected by the judicial system, it changes its process to prevent recording information that is needed to improve quality control. As a result, the public is harmed because the quality of drugs is not as high as it might be otherwise. You don't have to agree with the pharmaceutical company's opinion about exactly who has the right to know what to see that getting the balance right is a question that has important social consequences. The right to privacy, including the right to use deception to conceal information from those who have no right to know it, is too complex to be handled by a blanket prohibition of deception. In a fallen world, at least, truth and deception are actually complex issues, even in the light of biblical principles.

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## Conclusions About Truth & Deception

Though the majority of the discussion in this paper has been on the exceptions to the norm of truth-telling, this should not be interpreted to mean that truth-telling is not the moral norm. The basic biblical perspective on honesty and deception is to tell the truth and let the consequences fall where they may. The ambiguities enter in when it comes to the exceptions to the norm. The exceptions occur when there is no expectation of the truth (as in puffery and poker), when (in the rare cases) it is clear that everyone knows the rules (as in bluffing), when someone has no right to the information (as in protecting confidential information) and when truth-telling conflicts with other important moral values (as with Corrie Ten Boom and the Nazis). Exceptions to the norm are just that—exceptions that are unusual occurrences. They do not set the pattern for the application of truth-telling in the marketplace.

Best-selling author James Stewart, in his recently released book, *Tangled Webs: How False Statements Are Undermining America*, [18] has argued for the restoration of truth-telling as an important moral value in society. His point—that honesty is crucial for social cohesion—applies to the marketplace as much as to any element of society. He chronicles the damage done by deception, which, in the case of many of its victims, is ruined lives and financial disaster.

Truth-telling is a critical moral value for a Christian worldview as well, because Christian identity is in

Jesus—the way, *the truth* and the life. Christians may practice clear exceptions to truth-telling in the ways we have outlined, and at times it may even be our duty to do so. But let us hope that our love of the truth leads us to reduce the territory of exceptions, rather than expand it. People motivated by self-gain will prefer to exploit the advantage they can gain by exaggerating, bluffing, or misleading when the other party expects the truth. People motivated by the coming of the kingdom of God on earth will prefer to serve others by speaking the truth, even when it is not expected. Our favorite question will not be “Is this justifiable,” but “Is this how things will be done when God’s kingdom comes?”

## Key Biblical Texts on Truth & Deception

Verses	Theme
<b>Gen. 3:13</b> The serpent tricked me.	Deception/Deceit/Deceive
<b>Gen. 29:25</b> Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?	Deception/Deceit/Deceive
<b>Gen. 31:20, 26</b> Jacob deceived Laban . . . “You have deceived me.”	Deception/Deceit/Deceive
<b>Lev. 19:11</b> You shall not deal falsely; and you shall not lie to one another.	Deception/Deceit/Deceive
<b>Job 11:11</b> Surely he recognizes deceivers. . . (NIV)	Deception/Deceit/Deceive
<b>Psalms 32:2</b> Happy are those to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit is no deceit.	Deception/Deceit/Deceive
<b>Psalms 101:7</b> No one who practices deceit shall dwell in my house.	Deception/Deceit/Deceive

<b>Psalm 120:2</b> Deliver me, O Lord, from lying lips, from a deceitful tongue.	Deception/Deceit/Deceive
<b>Prov. 14:5</b> A faithful witness does not lie, but a false witness breathes out lies.	Deception/Deceit/Deceive
<b>Isa. 53:9</b> Although he had done no violence, and there was there any deceit in his mouth.	Deception/Deceit/Deceive
<b>Mark 7:21-22</b> For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit. . .	Deception/Deceit/Deceive
<b>Rom. 1:29</b> They were filled with every kind of wickedness. . . full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness. . .	Deception/Deceit/Deceive
<b>Rom. 16:18</b> For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the simple-minded.	Deception/Deceit/Deceive
<b>1 Peter 2:1</b> Rid yourselves, therefore, of all malice, and all guile.	Deception/Deceit/Deceive
<b>Gen. 42:16</b> . . .in order that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you.	Truth/Truthful
<b>Psalm 15:1-3</b> O Lord, who may abide in your tent? Who may dwell on your holy hill? Those who walk blamelessly, and do what is right, and speak the truth from their heart; who do not slander with their tongue, and do no evil to their friends, nor take up a reproach against their neighbors.	Truth/Truthful

<b>Prov. 12:17</b> Whoever speaks the truth gives honest evidence, but a false witness speaks deceitfully.	Truth/Truthful
<b>Prov. 12:19</b> Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue lasts only a moment.	Truth/Truthful
<b>Prov. 14:25</b> A truthful witness saves lives, but one who utters lies is a betrayer.	Truth/Truthful
<b>Prov. 22:21</b> . . .to show you what is right and true, so that you may give a true answer.	Truth/Truthful
<b>John 14:6</b> I am the way, and the truth, and the life.	Truth/Truthful
<b>John 16:13</b> When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.	Truth/Truthful
<b>John 17:17</b> Your word is truth.	Truth/Truthful
<b>1 John 5:6</b> And the Spirit is the one that testifies, for the Spirit is the truth.	Truth/Truthful
<b>Ex. 20:16/Deut. 5:20</b> You shall not bear false testimony against your neighbor.	Falsehood
<b>Psalms 52:3</b> You love lying more than speaking the truth.	Falsehood
<b>Prov. 30:8</b> Remove far from me falsehood and lying.	Falsehood



<b>Eph. 4:25</b> So then, putting off falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors.	Falsehood
<b>Job 27:4</b> My lips will not speak falsehood, and my tongue will not utter deceit.	Lie/Lying
<b>Psalms 10:7</b> Their mouths are filled with cursing and deceit and oppression; under their tongues are mischief and iniquity.	Lie/Lying
<b>Col. 3:9</b> Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off your old self with its practices.	Lie/Lying
<b>Titus 1:2</b> . . . God, who never lies . . .	Lie/Lying
<b>Prov. 20:17</b> Bread gained by deceit is sweet, but afterward the mouth will be full of gravel.	Fraud
<b>Gen. 30:33</b> My honesty will answer for me later, when you come to look into my wages with you.	Honest/Honesty
<b>Lev. 19:36</b> You shall have honest scales, honest weights, an honest ephah and an honest hin: I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt (see also Deut. 25:15, Prov. 16:11).	Honest/Honesty
<b>2 Kings 12:15</b> They did not ask an accounting from those into whose hand they delivered the money to pay out to the workers, for they dealt honestly.	Honest/Honesty
<b>Prov. 16:13</b> Righteous lips are the delight of a king.	Honest/Honesty

<b>Prov. 24:26</b> One who gives an honest answer gives a kiss on the lips.	Honest/Honesty
<b>Matthew 5:37</b> Let your word be 'Yes, Yes' or 'No, No'; anything more than this comes from the evil one.	Honest/Honesty

## ENDNOTES

- [1] Robert A. Mamis, "Managing by Necessity," Inc. (March 1, 1989).
- [2] For a classic argument that truth-telling in business is something like a poker game, see Albert Z. Carr, "Is Business Bluffing Ethical?" *Harvard Business Review* 46 (January-February 1968), 143-53.
- [3] The famous Incompleteness Theorem of Kurt Godel ("Über formal unentscheidbare Sätze der Principia Mathematica und verwandter Systeme I," *Monatshefte für Mathematik und Physik* 38: 173-98, 1931) strictly speaking applies only to the impossibility of devising a language of mathematics that is capable of proving all true mathematical statements without also "proving" some false statements. The language of mathematics is specifically developed to be *more* consistent than ordinary language. If all mathematical systems must lead to inconsistencies it is widely accepted that *all* systems of rules and logic described in human languages must also include inconsistencies. This is a fundamental limitation imposed by trying to describe reality in symbolic terms, or in other words, in human language.
- [4] For further discussion of these exceptions and the justification for them, see Sissela Bok, *Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life* (New York: Vintage, 1989), 90-106. See also Norman L. Geisler, *Christian Ethics: Options and Alternatives* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2001), 113-32, summarized also in Scott B. Rae, *Moral Choices: An Introduction to Ethics*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 49-51.
- [5] One exception to this is the work of Carr, "Is Business Bluffing Ethical?" His views will be discussed later in this paper.
- [6] Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, tr. James W. Ellington, (Indianapolis:

Hackett Publishing, 1993, original, 1785), 30-36. See also, Kant's essay, "On a Supposed Right to Tell Lies from Altruistic Motives," *ibid*.

- [7] See C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1943). See especially the appendix for a listing of the virtues in common to most of the world's major civilizations. There are rare exceptions to this—a few cultures hold treachery and deceit as virtues. See for example, Don Richardson, *Peace Child: An Unforgettable Story of Primitive Jungle Treachery*, 4th edition (Ventura, California: Regal, 2005).
- [8] For more on this, see Francis Fukuyama, *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity* (New York: Free Press, 1995).
- [9] AU Section 411.01, Public Company Accounting Oversight Board, accessed on October 1, 2012 at <http://pcaobus.org/Standards/Auditing/Pages/AU411.aspx>.
- [10] This equivalent comes from Alexander Hill, *Just Business: Christian Ethics for the Marketplace*, 2nd edition, (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008), 139-43.
- [11] Albert Carr, "Is Business Bluffing Ethical?" cited in Scott B. Rae and Kenman L. Wong, *Beyond Integrity: A Judeo-Christian Approach to Business Ethics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 26.
- [12] Milton Friedman, "The Social Responsibility of Business is to Increase its Profits," *The New York Times Magazine*, September 13, 1970.
- [13] Alexander Hill, *Just Business*, 143.
- [14] Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (HarperCollins, 1977), 585.
- [15] Mystery Shoppers Providers Association, [www.mysteryshop.org/your-business](http://www.mysteryshop.org/your-business), accessed March 20, 2013.
- [16] ValueNotes blog, [blog.valuenotes.biz/ethics-of-mystery-shopping/](http://blog.valuenotes.biz/ethics-of-mystery-shopping/), accessed March 20, 2013.
- [17] Name withheld at request of source. Noted during a discussion of an early draft of this article at Biola University, Los Angeles, August 23, 2011.
- [18] James B. Stewart, *Tangled Webs: How False Statements are Undermining America: From Martha Stewart to Bernie Madoff* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011).

