

# When an Employee Has Trouble Telling the Truth



*Take these 6 steps to help an employee address lying in the workplace*

Question: Your employee is a hard worker and performs his job adequately; however, he doesn't always tell the truth. Not only does he exaggerate stories about his personal life, but you have also noted that he fibs about his work performance. Sometimes he will announce that he has completed a task when he has not, and attempt to finish it at a later date. Though he is generally well-liked, his tendency to lie is both frustrating and worrisome. How do you deal with such an employee?

## **Possible Reasons Behind the Lies**

Whether in our personal lives or in the workplace, most of us have encountered people who like to exaggerate or tell small little lies. Often these seemingly harmless fibs can be signs of greater personal problems. Some of the underlying reasons include:

- 1) Personality disorders, including narcissism and borderline personality;
- 2) Mental health problems such as anxiety and bi-polar disorder;
- 3) Exaggeration or fabrication of wild events, with the intent to impress others or cover past mistakes;
- 4) Coping mechanisms for individuals with low self-esteem and low confidence;
- 5) Under developed emotional intelligence; or,
- 6) Immaturity.

Still, employees with one or two of these traits can still make valuable contributions to the workplace. It is important to understand why an employee engages in certain behaviours so you can take steps to address and correct the problem.

## **Taking Steps to Address the Exaggerating and Lying Employee**

If an employee's behaviour in the workplace is cause for concern, you must address it immediately. Sometimes these storytellers simply are unaware of how much story telling they engage in, or they may believe their stories are harmless. Help them understand how their fibs cause problems in the workplace and how fanciful

storytelling may affect their work in the future. Be sure approach this situation from a place of compassion and a desire to help.

### **Consider these steps**

- 1) Have an informal chat. Ask the employee how things are going. Do not treat this conversation as a confrontation or formal disciplinary step. Try first to understand and help the employee gain perspective. Mention that you have some questions about information you have heard. Offer an example of an inconsistent or exaggerated story and observe the employee's reaction.
- 2) Listen. Take time to listen first. Silence is often a good way to get a talker to talk.
- 3) Gently Probe. Elicit information from the employee concerning the reasons for his or her behavior and attempt to identify a potential cause using the six causes outlined above. For example, ask your employee what he feels or thinks about when he relates one of his stories. Find out if your employee is having trouble at home or in the workplace.
- 4) Explain the implications or results of the behaviour. Without judgment or condemnation, explain how even small lies or exaggerations can damage someone's reputation and lead to confusion among co-workers. Discuss expectations in the workplace, including honesty and accuracy, to help build and maintain working relationships.
- 5) Express your concern. Mention that you are concerned about the effect that these stories, exaggerations and small lies will have on the workplace and your employee's job performance. Ask how the employee feels about the situation.
- 6) Suggest ways to move forward. Make sure your employee understands the reasons for your concern. Ask him how you can work together to change this behaviour. If he accepts your help, take steps to work with your employee over the next few weeks by informally monitoring his behaviour and offering constructive feedback.

You may not be able to control what a born storyteller shares during their personal time, but you can and should make sure that their behaviour does not adversely affect their work performance. If you believe that an employee's persistent lies or exaggerations are indicative of an acute personality or mental health disorder, you should arrange to have the situation formally managed. Sometimes simply helping an employee see their behaviour from a different perspective can promote change and positive growth.