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## **Honesty**

*By Brooke Loening*

“I have to be honest with you...” How many times have you heard that as a preface to some dialogue you are about to have with someone? What exactly does that mean? Is this a special occasion when you are finally about to hear something which you can count on to be true?

Most people confront situations in which they feel that the truth will not work best for themselves or for others. When I coach groups on the subject of honesty, my goal is simply to raise their awareness on the issue. This way the next time they are about to use dishonesty, big or small, they are aware of what they are doing, why they are doing it, and that they can choose honesty as an alternative. It is no longer a preprogrammed way to handle the situation.

Many times, lying is used as a way to manipulate someone else’s experience in order to improve your own. In this column, I would like to discuss how our constant need for approval is sometimes so strong that we are willing to lie in order to secure it. Our need for approval is simply our desire to have other people like us and approve of us. Dishonesty to gain approval may fall into the “white lie” category because people often justify it as being for the good of all those involved.

“I would love to, but I can’t work at the book sale because my in-laws will be in town, and I can’t get away.” Your in-laws actually live in Ohio and have no plans to visit right now. In this case, you are feeling that the truth, “I don’t want to because I am wiped out and want to relax this weekend”, will make you look selfish in the other person’s eyes. You are protecting a self-image. The problem is, with this lie in play, your life is now more complicated because you have fabricated a story which requires maintenance! You need to remember that you have your in-laws in town and need to cover your tracks until the weekend is over. There is also the possibility that you will get caught in your white lie.

How many times have you lied because you thought the truth might hurt someone’s feelings? “You don’t look fat in that dress”. Yes they do, especially in the rear-end area. You may not tell the truth here because of a fear of hurting her feelings. But, you need to ask yourself if you really fear the effect that her reaction will have on you! If you hurt her feelings, are you more afraid of the emotions of guilt and awkwardness that you might have? Are you afraid that she will be angry with you or distance herself from you in the future?

The consequences? You may have spared her feelings (or your feelings about her feelings) but now she thinks that the dress looks good on her and maybe that will not work to her advantage as she chooses her wardrobe in the future. In addition, you may be

the only person she asks, and she may need direct honesty from you. Her future actions may be based on your feedback. So you must ask yourself if you are really doing her a favor by being dishonest about your impressions of her appearance. If you were to speak the truth, what might happen? She might be very disappointed and even hurt to hear that feedback, but will you lose her approval? Likely not. In fact your approval rating may just go up after the initial sting of your feedback has worn off. She will be clear that you are willing to speak the truth even at the risk of hurting her feelings, and she will know that the truth is what she can count on from you in the future.

What are the advantages to telling the truth? The truth requires no special maintenance to keep it going. The truth does not need special memory recall, it just is. There is only one truth for you in every situation, therefore it is easy to identify. The truth is often much more useful to others than a lie, and therefore they can make better, more effective decisions.

Every time you are dishonest, you are creating a story, which needs to be monitored, and many times backed up with more dishonesty, which in turn may require even more dishonesty. This can result in a lot of work and a huge expenditure of energy. In addition you may be depriving someone else of important information that they may need in order to take the best actions for themselves.

A word of advice on telling the truth: the truth is powerful and can be a great gift to someone else, but it can land hard. The delivery of the truth is a key factor in how it is received. It is important to be very mindful to try to build the other person up before you drop a brick on them. It helps if you do it in the kindest way possible if feelings will be involved. Also, choose your words carefully and think about navigating for a soft landing. “The book sale is one of the best run events in this town, but I am just spread too thin and need to decompress this weekend.” “You look so great in those other dresses, but this one does not complement your figure the same way.” Trust even though the truth can be more uncomfortable and difficult to tell, that it will work out the best for you and everyone else much better in the long run.

It is always easier to make changes when we try a new strategy and experience the results for ourselves. Try an experiment this week (now that your awareness about honesty is heightened), and prioritize the truth in front of your own need for approval. Take situations when you are about to lie, and simply tell the truth, trusting that it will work better for everyone in the long run. Notice the results, and judge them for yourself.

*Brooke Loening is a life coach in Sharon who works with individuals, and runs weekly coaching groups on achieving growth in career, health and relationships. For more information and previous columns visit [theloeningplan.com](http://theloeningplan.com). Columns can also be found at [tcextra.com](http://tcextra.com)*