VOL. 27 | NO. 3 | MAY/JUNE 2012 | FRAUD-MAGAZINE.COM

FRAUD® MAGAZINE

A PUBLICATION OF THE ASSOCIATION OF CERTIFIED FRAUD EXAMINERS

SPOTTING THOSE ELUSIVE LIARS

An interview with **PAMELA MEYER, CFE,** author of 'Liespotting' and keynoter at the *23rd Annual ACFE Fraud Conference & Exhibition*

IN THIS ISSUE

SPOTTING THOSE ELUSIVE LIARS

An interview with **Pamela Meyer, CFE**, author of 'Liespotting' and keynoter at the *23rd Annual ACFE Fraud Conference & Exhibition*

After an epiphany at her Harvard reunion, Pamela Meyer, CFE, embarked on a three-year research adventure to discover how and why people deceive. She shares much of what she learned so fraud examiners can become liespotters.

You're seated across from Stan in the interview room, and all you can think of are the immortal words of George Costanza: "Just remember, it's not a lie if you believe it." You think Stan is about to tell you some big fibs about his possible involvement in a company embezzlement, but how will you tell? Pamela Meyer can help.

Meyer, a CFE and author of the bestselling book, "Liespotting: Proven Techniques to Detect Deception," can give you a holistic approach that will indicate if Stan is a believable liar, unbelievably lying or both. She can show how to watch for his telltale facial expressions and body language. She can teach you 10 questions to get him to tell you anything you want. And she can show you methods to parse Stan's words. However, the methods she'll give you aren't parlor tricks. They're part of a scientifically grounded system for ferreting out deception.

Meyer says she accidentally walked into the world of deception detection five years ago when she attended her 20th year reunion at Harvard Business School.

"I took a workshop at this reunion with 350 of my classmates where a professor detailed his findings on how people behave when they are being deceptive," she says. "What they do with their posture, their purses, their backpacks, their language structure, their smiles. I witnessed something you rarely see. For 45 minutes, 350 high-level, busy people were riveted. No one was tapping at their Blackberries. No one was running to the hall to start a conference call.

"People, who thought they had seen it all, were learning something completely new and useful," Meyer says. "When I witnessed this unusual moment of executive silence, I knew I had happened onto something transformational."

She says she set out to immerse herself in learning techniques for spotting deception that intelligence, security, law enforcement and espionage agencies had developed and were using.

"While I was training, I also put a research team together. We surveyed most of the scientific studies on deception and threw out findings that could not be confirmed in more than one place," Meyer says. "It became obvious to me that lying and self-deception have been central to our literature since time immemorial and to psychiatry and psychoanalysis for a century

BY DICK CAROZZA
PHOTOS BY EDDIE ARROSSI

and a half now. There's a vast storehouse of knowledge on lying and deceit, but it had not been compiled in an easy-to-understand fashion. So I made it my charge to do so, and eventually wrote the book 'Liespotting.' " (Read an excerpt from the book on page 37. Also, see the ACFE Bookstore, http://tinyurl.com/7p8lgbq and www.Liespotting.com.)

Meyer also is founder and CEO of Simpatico Networks, a private-label social networking company that owns and operates online social networks. She holds a Master's of Business Administration from Harvard and a Master's of Arts in Public Policy from Claremont Graduate School.

She has spoken at the TED (Technology, Entertainment and Design) Global Conference in Edinburgh, U.K., and has written for Forbes.com, *Bloomberg Business Week*, *Portfolio*, The Huffington Post and *Wired*. She has been interviewed by CNN, ABC News, The Wall Street Journal and other media outlets. (See her TED talk at http://tinyurl.com/6ydlkfb.)

Meyer will be a keynote speaker at the *23rd Annual ACFE Fraud Conference & Exhibition*, June 17-22 at the Gaylord Palms Resort and Convention Center in Orlando, Fla.

She spoke to *Fraud Magazine* from her office in Washington, D.C.

FM: "Everyone lies," writes Dr. Joseph T. Wells, CFE, CPA, founder and Chairman of the ACFE, in his recent autobiography. In your book, "Liespotting," you seem to agree. What makes us lie?

PM: There is a short answer and a long answer to this question. The short answer is that we lie to provide a good impression. The long answer is much more complex:

There are nine strong motives for deception, classified as offensive or defensive. The four offensive ones:

- To obtain a reward that's not otherwise easily attainable.
- To gain advantage over another person or situation.
- To create a positive impression and win the admiration of others.
- To exercise powers over others by controlling information.

Now the defensive ones:

- To avoid being punished or to avoid embarrassment.
- To protect another person from being punished.
- To protect yourself from the threat of physical or emotional harm.
- To get out of an awkward social situation.
- To maintain privacy.

FM: What is your definition of a lie? In what ways do lies differ?

PM: I assume your question excludes any forecast made with absolute certainty by a meteorologist or an economist?

Ok, seriously: A lie is any statement, silence, nod, wink, gesture, physical or facial movement, configuration or action meant to deceive its recipient. That includes incomplete statements that are only partially true and gestures that are deliberately misleading, intentionally ambiguous or subtly misleading.

Modern-day social scientists, in an attempt to disengage from the moral ambiguity and emotional weight that can surround deception, have established four defining criteria for a lie.

1. A lie must include a false statement or appearance.
2. A lie must have a recipient; otherwise it is self-deception.
3. A lie requires the intent to deceive; otherwise, it's an honest mistake.
4. A lie requires a context of truth.

In sum, the scientific definition of a lie is: a message knowingly transmitted to another person with the intent to foster false beliefs or conclusions and without prior notification of purpose.

FM: You write that, "Lies … appear to be essential, if sometimes unwelcome, components of human interaction." Can you elucidate on that?

PM: Researchers have long known that the more intelligent the species, the more deceptive it is; deception is part of being human, and it is an essential component of a functioning advanced society. In the words of Clare Booth Luce, "Lying increases the creative faculties, expands the ego, and lessens the frictions of social contacts." Lying is woven approvingly into the fabric of our social, political, diplomatic and business lives. As she observes, lying provides a social lubricant to ease conflict and friction among people — and prevents us from suffering an unbearable world of absolute truthfulness.

FM: Please explain how becoming a trained liespotter — a human lie detector — will actually "free us from paranoia," as you write.

PM: Being named fire chief doesn't turn you into a pyromaniac. It merely teaches you how to handle their nefarious work, spot one and sometimes even stop one and put the miscreant out of business.

In life it's good to have a healthy skepticism to leaven your optimism. Trained liespotters are optimistic and positive about human nature and that emerges from confidence that they can protect themselves and their enterprises from victimization, deceit, lying and fraud.

The big bonus with liespotting is that it enhances your chances for living a fulfilling and happy life, rather than one of misery and regret. On the personal level, liespotting offers huge benefits. You can improve your family and personal life by becoming better able to select and align yourself with trustworthy spouses, lovers and partners.

As readers of *Fraud Magazine* know, intuitively — being able to spot lies and deceit, fraud and scams — any kind of gamesmanship at your own expense actually makes you less, not more, paranoid. You become more secure in your dealings with others.

> "Learning the art of liespotting is just like taking piano, violin or clarinet lessons. You may not become a great musician, but you'll surely gain a much deeper understanding of, and appreciation for, music."

You trust your instincts and judgment much more than you ever did.

FM: You've quoted repeated studies that have shown that the average adult can distinguish truth from falsehood only 54 percent of the time; you've written that a chimpanzee has virtually the same success rate. What's the reason for our sorry lie-detection skills?

PM: This is a very important question. There are three reasons:

Reason one: evolution. We're in the midst of a long-running "arms race," in which our ability to detect deception must keep up with our skill at deceiving. Think about our ancestors for a moment. Cavemen developed clever ruses to obtain food, to deceive predators and, of course, to reproduce. As the awareness of these deceptions increased, our ancestors innovated — mastering ever-more sophisticated forms of trickery and manipulation. Primates continue to deceive for sex, with varying degrees of success. Witness Anthony Weiner or Eliot Spitzer.

The arms race continues today. Even as we wisen up to junk email and online scams, spammers stay a step ahead by using new tricks to get us to open their emails, disguising them as letters from banks or online greeting cards.

Reason two: truth bias. We're so poor at detecting lies because we expect a certain level of honesty from other people. Most people answer questions honestly: What time is it? How much do I owe you? Where did you put that project folder? We're conditioned to believe people – unless you're asking a teenager, "How much did you have to drink tonight?"

Research also suggests that Americans are especially predisposed to a "truth bias" when dealing with other Americans. In general, they presume good faith on the part of others, and they believe that people are innocent until proven guilty. When someone answers the phone and says, "I was just going to call you. You read my mind," many of us give the benefit of doubt, even if we're not entirely convinced.

A truth bias is in fact necessary for progress and civilization. Higher levels of honesty are part of the more successful societies. Nonetheless, a truth bias gets in the way of our ability to detect deception.

Reason three: learning curve challenge. We're so bad at spotting liars because most of us never move up the learning curve. If we miss most lies, if we don't know how to spot deception when it occurs — except the most glaring kinds — how can we ever learn to spot liars? It's not like tennis where you get immediate

TRUTH BIAS:

> "All men profess honesty as long as they can. To believe all men honest would be folly. To believe none so is something worse."
>
> — John Quincy Adams

feedback. If you serve the ball out of the court, you can adjust your serve immediately. With deception we usually find out we were deceived much later, so we don't get instant feedback and the learning curve is much harder to climb.

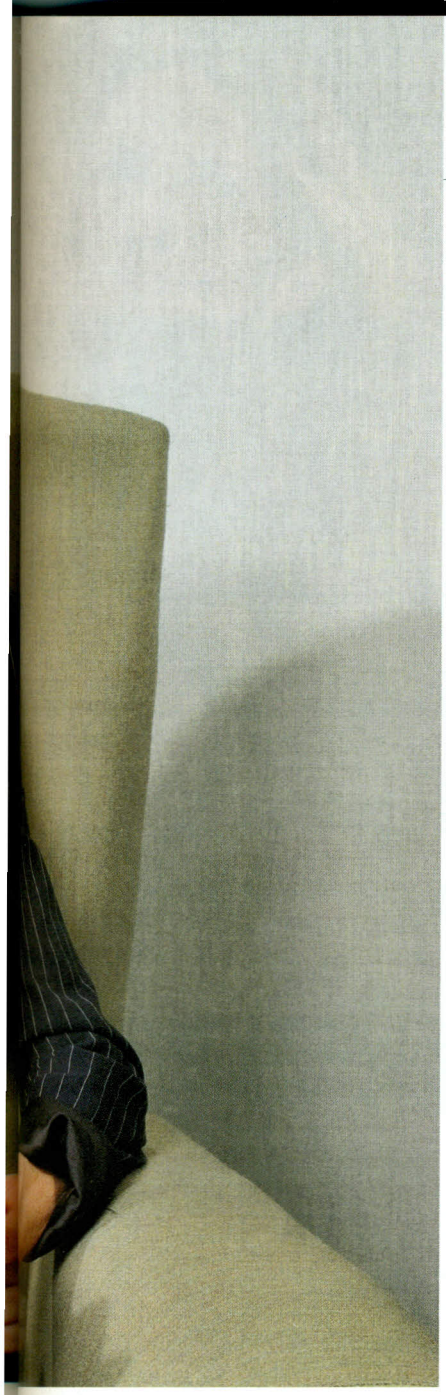
What brought the success of the Madoff fraud, one of the largest and most audacious in history? Self-deception. Investors were blinded from seeing obvious indications of deception by a combination of greed and vanity. They wanted returns no one else had, and they considered themselves among "a chosen few" who were anointed to profit from Bernie Madoff's genius. This "truth bias," this failure to have moved up the Liespotting truth curve, left many penniless.

FM: You write that it's not enough to recognize lies; it's the complex truth we're after. This is especially true for fraud examiners who are looking for the motivations for those lies. How do we get beyond just spotting lies?

PM: Fraud examiners go beyond spotting lies every day. Their jobs depend on getting to the truth. I think one way to stay focused on the truth is to remember that facts matter. We often get caught up in personalities, power, he-said/she-said volleys. At the end of the day what will matter is the set of facts that the fraud examiner uncovers so it's important to stay slightly psychologically distant from your subjects when taking on an investigation as a method for staying focused on fact finding, which ultimately leads to the truth. The most-important fact may be hiding in the least-exciting place associated with the least-charismatic person one is investigating. It takes a certain mental discipline to stay focused on those facts and not get taken in by larger-than-life personalities.

FM: You studied with Erika Rosenberg, a research partner of Paul Ekman, a pioneer into facial micro-expressions. You cite research that shows, when used correctly, the interpretation of micro-expressions can provide us with an almost 95 percent accuracy rate in lie detection. What are micro-expressions, and what are some basic ways fraud examiners can use them to detect deception?

PM: Around the globe, the questions of why and how human beings deceive each other has drawn interest from all branches of science: biologists, psychologists, anthropologists, linguists, neuroscientists. One of the most applicable areas of research is the study of facial micro-expressions, the subtle twists of the lips, flinches in the cheek and eyebrow movements that signal our true emotions. Used correctly, the interpretation of micro-expressions can provide us with an almost 95 percent accuracy rate of lie detection especially when boosted by an understanding of how we construct our sentences, how we use our bodies and how we maneuver objects around us — bags, chairs, cell phones — when we're not telling the truth. Fraud examiners can use training in detecting facial micro-expressions to help them understand their subject's emotional state. Paul Ekman and his team identified thousands of muscular combinations — too complicated for a busy fraud examiner to contend with— but expressions of



disgust, contempt, sadness, for example, are worth learning to identify because they can greatly inform an investigation.

FM: Can you talk some about fake and real smiles?

PM: Ha ha! I can tell you that a fake smile is a common form of deception. When I speak at the *Annual Conference* in Orlando I will be teaching the audience to spot a fake smile, so I will save this one for later.

FM: Entities, of course, should conduct job screening on their prospective hires. However, companies often unwittingly hire fraudsters. What are a few ways employers can winnow out deceptive applicants during interviews?

PM: Here are three tips for an interviewer:

1. Ask your prospect to tell the story of their employment history backwards or in non-chronological order. Liars tend to rehearse stories in chronological order and will trip up when asked to recount in a way they are not prepared for.
2. If you suspect your prospect is not being honest about a particular entry on their résumé, ask your prospect "What is the pettiest thing that bothered you about company x?" Asking in this way will give your prospect permission to tell you something that is usually not petty and it signals that you will not be judgmental.
3. Ask at the end of the interview, "Is there anything else you want to tell me?" and then sit back and listen, without rushing to the conclusion of the interview.

FM: You say that most people are significantly more likely to lie to coworkers than to strangers. What are some reasons for that?

PM: The author of the study, Jennifer Argo, reports that the finding is tied to our need to protect our "public and private selves." We have long-term relationships with our co-workers while our relationships with strangers are fleeting.

FM: You write that successful business leaders might be more inclined to lie because they so often tie their self worth to the external trappings of their jobs. Can you elaborate on that?

PM: We all know powerful people for whom enough is never enough. They are externally focused and never satisfied. Lying can work — for a time. Until it doesn't. Take Jeff Papows, CEO of Lotus Corporation, who resigned after The Wall Street Journal exposed lies on his résumé. He'd been a lieutenant air traffic controller in the Marines, not the captain and jet fighter pilot that his résumé said. He'd earned a master's from Pepperdine University, not the Ph.D. his resume showed, and he was not an orphan though that is what he told people to enlarge their high regard for what he had accomplished.

Service in the military is honorable; a master's degree is a genuine achievement. People can easily respect the accomplishments of, and have compassion for, people who have parents. But, somehow, Papows' own life wasn't enough for him even though it may have been sufficient for others. You don't have to be a psychologist to understand that for certain people the insatiable desire for external approval leads to deceptive and potentially fraudulent behavior.

FM: You write that liars tend to rehearse their words but not their gestures. What are a few body-language gestures fraud examiners should look for?

PM: Liars might slump, look down, shift their blink rate, move objects unconsciously away from a path to an exit, and issue a "weak denial" in a very soft voice. These are red flags only. We are all human beings who can exhibit deceptive gestures throughout the day. When you see clusters of indicators of deception, it's a red flag — a signal to ask a hard question, not to accuse your subject of lying.

FM: You seem to take a holistic approach by considering all factors when evaluating a subject. Can you elaborate on that?

PM: Sigmund Freud, wrong about much, but so incisively correct about many other things, wrote forcefully how the price of facing reality is "ordinary misery." The courage to face reality is not one that comes naturally to many people; lying is a common — even understandable — adaptation to the difficulties of life. A good lie detector approaches the job with this kind of compassion from the start.

FM: What should we look for when an interview subject recounts the details of an event?

PM: We remember things in the order of their emotional prominence — not in chronological order. So take note when someone tells you a story: If it's in perfect chronological order it is more likely to be rehearsed or deceptive. If it's not, then take note of the events that are described and the order in which they are described. Liars tend to tell their stories with the main event pushed to the end, more hesitations than usual and with an inappropriate amount of detail in all the wrong places.

FM: We can't go into great detail, but could you give a brief overview of your BASIC interview method?

PM: First off, it's an acronym for:

- Baseline behavior.
- Ask open-ended questions.
- Study the deceptive clusters.
- Intuit the gaps in answers.
- Confirm conclusions.

BASIC is not an interrogation technique. It's a conversation guide to help you draw a person out and read his behavior.

For instance, baseline behavior concentrates on the subject's laugh, voice, posture, gestures and reactions. When you become accomplished at this interview methodology you learn to amalgamate and overlap all five components of the technique and integrate them into a revelatory medley that will point you toward the truth.

FM: Can you share a bit about using liespotting techniques to not only detect fraudsters but about "building a sustainable infrastructure of trust for the long haul," that you write about? How do fraud examiners build solid "brain trusts" around them?

PM: Andrew Jackson had his kitchen cabinet, as did John Kennedy and Ronald Reagan. Ben Franklin had his Leather Apron Club. Andrew Carnegie had his Big 6 mastermind group, Jesus had his disciples, and King Arthur had his knights of the round table. Recently, many CEOs have started to publicly refer to their "inner circles" or their "personal boards of directors." Trust, of course, is always the cornerstone of these exclusive relationships; it therefore seems only natural that a trained liespotter should have a "brain trust."

> "ACFE members are keenly aware of these challenges and are unique in their passion for truth. That's what I love about the organization."

A brain trust is a small, select group of people you choose for their ability to offer ongoing wisdom, expertise and support as you progress toward your personal and professional goals. Besides offering you a regular, trustworthy channel for advice, your brain trust accelerates your learning curve, giving you the benefit of experience while freeing you from having to make every mistake yourself in order to learn from it.

Keep in mind that the members of your brain trust are more than confidantes. Like personal trainers, they should be willing to push you to go beyond your comfort zone, to think bigger and more creatively than you would have on your own. Not only will its members help you develop new plans of action you might not have thought of yourself, they will give you incentive and inspiration to follow through and accomplish what you set out to do. I provide a framework for developing your brain trust, and some easy steps to take, in my book.

FM: Why did you originally pursue the CFE credential?

PM: I believe that fraud is so rampant around the world, that it is undermining our institutions. One way to make a significant difference is to take fraud on directly, so I pursued the credential to learn more, to develop practical investigation skills and to do my part in making the world a better place.

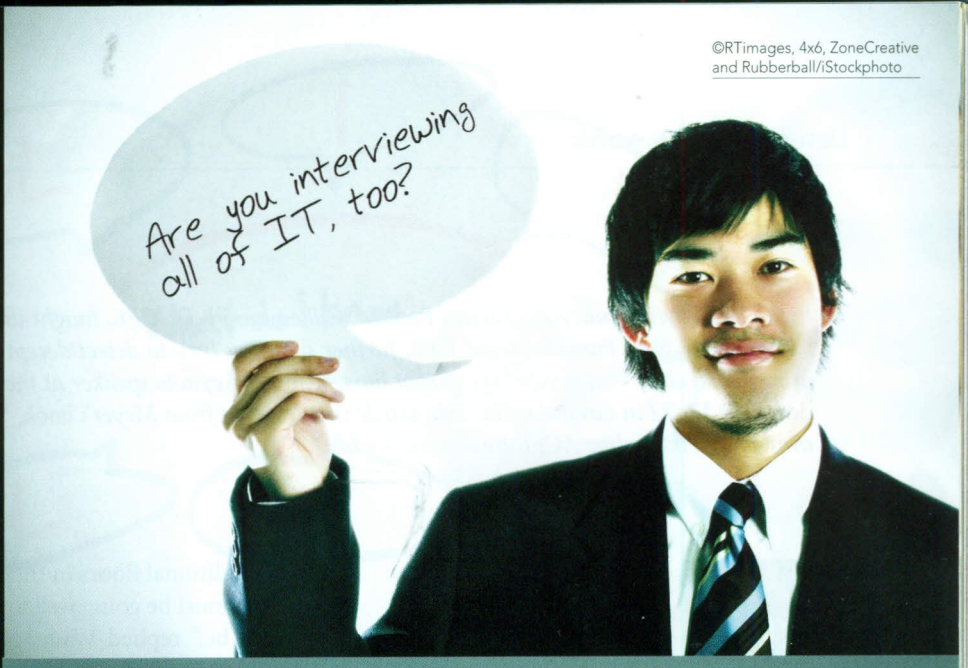
FM: What have you gleaned from the ACFE and our members?

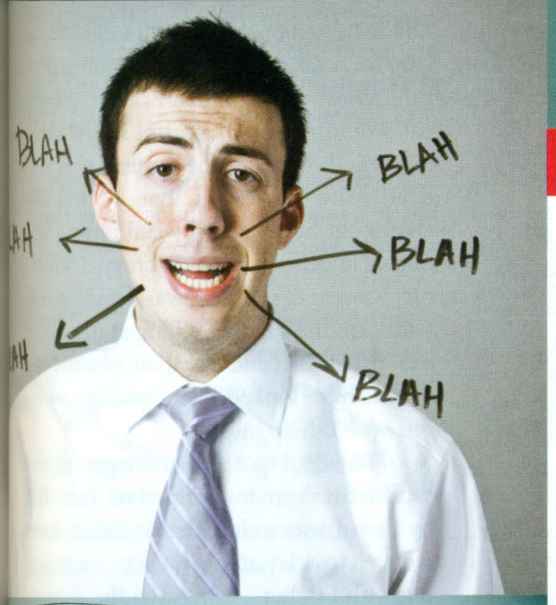
PM: ACFE is an extraordinary organization, growing fast in a remarkable moment when deception has hit epidemic levels. I am especially impressed by the important research ACFE takes on regularly to track and benchmark fraud frequency. ACFE's greatest challenge is to keep up with the fast-changing form fraud takes, especially as cyberthreats emerge. ACFE members are keenly aware of these challenges and are unique in their passion for truth. That's what I love about the organization.

FM: What can you say to encourage fraud examiners who are trying to spot those elusive liars?

PM: Fraud examiners do difficult but incredibly important work. Always remember not to leap to conclusions, not to judge your subject and stay focused on the facts. When you signal to those around you that you are a fair and objective operator, the truth comes your way. ■ FM

Dick Carozza is editor in chief of *Fraud Magazine*. His email address is: dcarozza@ACFE.com.





LISTENING TO THE WORDS

Detecting deception in what they say

BY PAMELA MEYER, CFE

Do you think you can spot liars? Here are some tips for mining deception indicators in subjects' choices of spoken words and phrases.

"People want to tell you what they've done. They want to confess to you. We just have to listen."

— Todd Brown, detective[1]

From "Liespotting" by Pamela Meyer. ©2010 by the author and reprinted by permission of St. Martin's Press, LLC.

In the January/February 2012 issue, Paul M. Clikeman, Ph.D., CFE, taught us "The 10 Tell-Tale Signs of Deception" with linguistic text analysis. Now Pamela Meyer, CFE, further shows us how to detect deception in the words subjects speak. Meyer, an expert on using visual clues and psychology to spot liars, will be a keynote speaker at the 23rd Annual ACFE Fraud Conference and Exhibition *June 17–22 in Orlando, Fla. This article is an excerpt from Meyer's book, "Liespotting: Proven Techniques to Detect Deception," available in the online ACFE Bookstore. – ed.*

Jeff was a district manager for an industrial copier company. His sales force sold to businesses all over the East Coast. Though he was generally satisfied with his staff's performance, Jeff was starting to wonder whether one of his sales reps, Wade, still had his heart in his work. Wade had always been a great team member, reliable and on target, but lately he seemed to be struggling to meet his goals and closing deals in a panicked rush at the last minute. Over the past year, he had started going for long periods of time without answering his cell phone. Finally, Wade missed a meeting without offering any reason why, and a client complained to Jeff.

Jeff believed in second chances. He didn't want to fire an employee who had shown so much potential. Hoping to get a better sense of what might be going on, Jeff asked Wade to join him for lunch at a local café. When the men were led to a corner table by the hostess, Jeff allowed Wade to choose his seat. He didn't want to make any gestures that Wade could interpret as one-upsmanship.

The men ordered. Jeff noticed that Wade seemed a little quiet and that he kept fingering the tines of the clean fork resting next to his plate. His right hand remained somewhat awkwardly in his lap. Already he seemed uncomfortable, but Jeff did his best to put him at ease.

After some easy banter about local sports and the two men's families, Jeff remarked brightly, "I've been meaning to congratulate you on the sale to Bayern Designs. I can't believe they're taking over two additional floors in their building. Things must be going well for them."

"Must be," replied Wade, nodding, as the food arrived. Before Jeff could even arrange his napkin on his lap, Wade was diving into his lunch.

"Well, how about you? How are things going with you?" Jeff asked. He did his best to sound unthreatening.

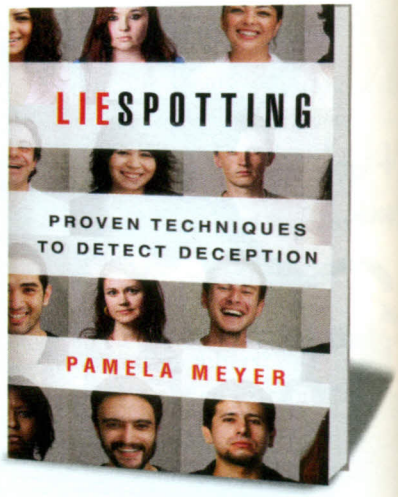
Wade finished chewing, swallowed, and replied, "How are things going? They're going fine."

Clearly, Wade wasn't going to give him an easy way in. It was time to get to the real topic. Jeff put down his fork. "Wade, you know I have to ask you about the missed meeting with Ann Fischer. Can you tell me what happened?"

Wade took a sip from his glass and put it down carefully before answering. Holding Jeff 's gaze, he said, "I know. I sent her an apology, and I called her, too. Not that that will make much of a difference. It was just a rotten day, I guess. I got a late start. I printed out some proposals at home, and that set me back. And then ... well, then I shouldn't have bothered with the drive-through at Starbucks; it always takes too long. I was so frustrated I just grabbed my coffee and drove off without the muffin I'd ordered. I was really worried that I'd be late for the presentation, but I made it by nine. It went great. They seemed mostly interested in the features on the Canon, but they asked a few questions about the Toshiba, too. Once I pull some numbers together for them, I think they'll see the Canon is a perfect fit for what they need."

Jeff said, "Good, good. Now, what about the meeting?"

Wade shook his head. "Oh, sorry. Well, so then I was really hungry because



I hadn't eaten breakfast, and I decided to stop for a sandwich before heading over to Fischer's office. When I came out, my car wouldn't start. I do not know what happened, but, uh, the battery was just dead. And on top of that, I'd left my charger at home and my cell phone was out of juice, too. Sounds crazy, I know, but I swear it's true. I was banging my hands on the car and yelling at people to see if they'd let me use their phone, but I must have looked like a maniac — no one would help me.

"Finally I got the manager at the sandwich shop to jump-start me. But by then I was so late that it didn't seem worth it to drive across town to the meeting with Fischer — I figured the woman was pissed at me anyway by then. So I just went home. I know that was a stupid thing to do. I'm really, really sorry, and it will not happen again. It will not. You have my word."

Wade looked earnestly at Jeff, who nodded. He wasn't ready to say that he

©Kemal Bas/iStockphoto

knew Wade wasn't telling the truth. The two men finished their lunch pleasantly enough. But when they got back to the office, Jeff told Maxine, the head of HR, that he needed to draft a warning letter informing Wade that he was in danger of being terminated. "Keep that file close," he told Maxine.

Within a few months, Wade missed another appointment, and Jeff fired him. He found out shortly thereafter that Wade had checked himself into drug rehab.

Humans excel at adapting language to suit their needs. We hear a clever phrase and make it our own; we pick up slang; we order "soda" until we move to another part of the country and start ordering "pop." Each of us has developed a singular style of verbal communication that is heavily influenced by our geographic location, our life experience, and our social, ethnic, and economic demographic.

Yet trained deception detectors know that though everyone has a unique way of expressing himself, there are some near-universal ways in which liars reveal themselves when they speak.

The verbal habits of deceptive people

Everything about Wade's story made sense, so how did Jeff know that his salesman didn't miss his meeting thanks to a perfect storm of poor planning and unreliable technology? Because as convincing as he was, Wade dropped a cluster of verbal clues to deceit. Liars usually work very hard at constructing a convincing narrative, making sure that each part of their story is plausible and logical. But just as unconsciously leaked facial micro-expressions and body language can betray a liar's true emotions, unconsciously leaked verbal slips can betray one's underlying train of thought. For the liespotter who knows how to listen well, the random words, sounds, and phrases in a person's speech are never as random as they seem. They offer a clear sight line into the liar's psyche.

LIESPOTTING TIP

Watch for incongruencies in a person's words, facial expressions, and body language. Liars often struggle to keep them all in sync, whereas truth-tellers will broadcast the same message consistently across all channels.

After all, lying is hard work. As the Swedish researcher Aldert Vrij observed, liars "have to think of plausible answers, avoid contradicting themselves, and tell a lie that is consistent with everything the observer knows or might find out" — and they have to do all this while reminding themselves not to make any mistakes. And remembering not to look nervous. And not to act differently from how they'd normally act in this situation. And — speaking of acting — to be sure to display the emotions they'd normally show.[2]

Is it any wonder that they can't always pull it off?

To spot verbal indicators of lying, deception detectors pay close attention to four characteristics of speech — statement structure, verbal leaks, vocal quality and attitude.

Statement structure

A person's statement structure — his choice of words and phrases — is a rich source for any liespotter to mine for possible deception indicators. As always, it's important to remember that any number of physiological and psychological factors — fatigue, stress, hunger, concern about getting home on time — can affect how someone expresses himself.

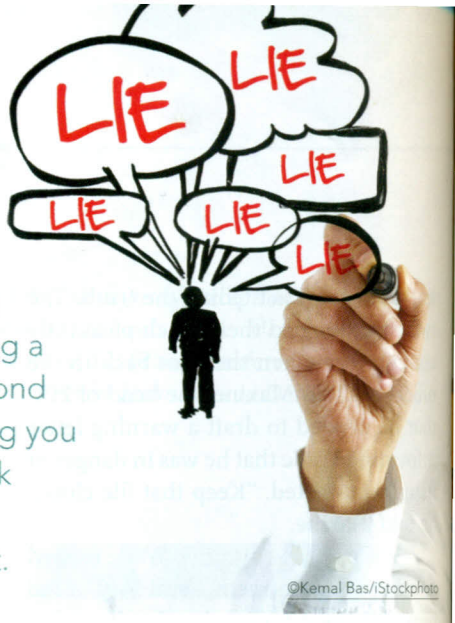
Truth-tellers who expect others to believe them tend to speak naturally and unself-consciously. But if they don't expect to be believed, they may try too hard to seem honest. Unfortunately, the result makes them sound less believable.[3]

Obviously, then, not every oddly phrased statement is a lie. Still, there are tactical turns of phrase that should raise a liespotter's eyebrows — not because of what the suspect says, but instead due to what these tactics help him avoid saying.

There are several types of statements liars often use to evade questions or deflect suspicion.

Parrot statements

If you ask a question and someone repeats it back to you, she may be stalling to buy time to think about how she wants to reply. For example, if you ask "Which email account do you use for business correspondence during non-work hours?" and you hear back, "Which email account do I use for business correspondence during non-work hours? Well, I guess that would be my company account," pay attention. Had you simply heard, "My business correspondence?" or "During non-work hours?" she could have been clarifying your question to make sure she told you what you wanted to know. But repeating the question in its entirety suggests that she doesn't want to answer.



©Kemal Bas/iStockphoto

Instead of trying to put you on the defensive, a liar using a protest statement will respond to questioning by reminding you that nothing about her track record indicates that she is someone capable of deceit.

Dodgeball statements

Let's say you ask, "What computer system do you mainly use when you're in the office?" and someone replies, "Are you interviewing all of IT, too?" When people ignore or deflect your question, and lob a new one right back at you, it's often an attempt to find out how much you know before volunteering an answer. In this example, the subject may be trying to determine whether you've noticed something suspicious about her email activity. "Do I have to come up with an explanation for something?" she may be asking herself.

Guilt-trip statements

A guilt-trip statement is an evasive tactic that tries to put you, the interrogator, on the defensive. Say you ask an employee which exit she generally uses when she's leaving the building at the end of the day. If she's trying to avoid the question, she may make a show of taking offense: "I'll bet you're not hounding any of the execs about their comings and goings. You guys in HR always think it's the people on the ground who are on the take." She's hoping that you'll abandon the question while defending yourself or getting caught up in proving that you're not biased. Don't take the bait.

Protest statements

Instead of trying to put you on the defensive, a liar using a protest statement will respond to questioning by reminding you that nothing about her track record indicates that she is someone capable of deceit.

- Q: "What exit do you generally use when you leave the building at the end of the day?"
- A: "It depends on the day. Look, I'm a mother, I go to church, I give blood. I don't understand why you're talking to me like a criminal!"

Too little/too much statements

In the split second before someone prepares to answer a question, he will consciously or subconsciously evaluate what the best possible answer might be.[4] For a truthful person, the best possible answer might omit some information. It might have a few extraneous details. But it will still offer the information requested.

"Why don't you tell me what you know about the email one of our clients received the other day?" you ask.

Ask open-ended questions to collect facts, and yes/no questions to assess behavior.

An honest employee might say, "All I know is that Bill Patterson called on Friday saying that Jane sent him an email calling him a drunk and a loser. Now she's saying that I somehow hacked into her email account and sent it. It's no secret that Jane and I don't get along, but I'm not dumb enough to risk my job just to mess with her."

For an employee who's trying to deceive you, however — let's call him Todd — the best possible answer is often the one that doesn't make him repeat the ugly details of the accusation. "Not much," he might answer evasively. "He says he got a rude email from Jane, right? And she thinks I did it? I don't know why she'd think I'd do such a thing." Steering clear of the specific charges helps him to keep himself at a psychological distance from them.

On the other hand, Todd's reply might be unnecessarily wordy: "What do I know? I know Jane is trying to get me fired. Basically, she's never liked me. This isn't the first time she's tried to get me into trouble. Ever since that mix-up last year, when her shipment went AWOL for a few days — she says I never put the order in, but I definitely did — I've told people we need to get a system upgrade to keep stuff like that from happening. Now someone is upset and Jane's saying it's my fault? She has a lot of nerve."

Two clues in this reply indicate guilt. The first is that Todd is using a lot of words to say very little. The second is that nowhere in the midst of all this verbiage does he actually answer the question. ■ FM

Please see Fraud-Magazine.com to read the rest of this chapter. - ed.

Pamela Meyer, CFE, is founder and CEO of Simpatico Networks, a private-label, social-networking company that owns and operates online social networks. She holds an MBA from Harvard University and has extensive training in using visual clues and psychology to detect deception. Visit www.liespotting.com. Her email address is: pmeyer@manhattanstudios.com.

[1] Christopher Quinn, "Technique Sets the Truth Free," Orlando Sentinel, Sept. 23, 1991, per LSA Laboratory for Scientific Interrogation Inc., http://www.lsiscan.com/id36.htm.

[2] Par Anders Granhag, ed., "The Detection of Deception in Forensic Contexts" (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 292.

[3] Ibid., 17.

[4] http://tinyurl.com/7xttr6a.