

Being deceptive — or not totally honest — in negotiations is fairly common. But experiments found that it can have a harmful effect:

**This article discusses the research findings and offers measures that can curb the practice of potentially contagious excessive deception.**



Imagine you're trying to strike a deal with a supplier or you are a supplier trying to strike a deal with a potential customer and the other company's negotiator lies to you. Do you

- A) respond with honesty or
- B) lie right back?



**Choice A** is for the white knights among us who strictly follow Kant's categorical imperative of acting the way how you would want others to act.



However, many people opt for the "tit for tat" behavior and choose **Option B**: They lie back.

There is a dark side to Lying. Lying once can be contagious. It can pave the way for lying again in other interactions or negotiations with people at other companies. Therefore, there are actions that companies should take to curb such behavior and prevent it from spreading.



## TO PREVENT LYING...



### Ensure your negotiating team has at least two people

The mere existence of a second pair of eyes may make the lead negotiator more aware of his or her own behavior and, as a result, resist the kind of impulsive actions that lead to lies.



### Strongly reinforce your code of conduct

For example, you might require employees in negotiation positions to undergo biannual ethics training rather than the one-off crash ethics course at the beginning of employment that other workers often receive. You might also ask team leaders to remind employees about the company's core ethical principles in monthly team meetings. Finally, negotiating teams could jointly review their behaviors after a negotiation to reflect on whether the code of conduct was violated. Knowing that one's dishonest negotiation behaviors will be reviewed by colleagues may create peer pressure, causing that person to better adhere to the code of conduct.



### Carefully screen the other company's negotiators

Certainly, some degree of dishonesty can be viewed as part of the negotiating game, but given that such behavior can infect your team and have lasting effects, you shouldn't tolerate extremes. While there is no vaccine, these measures may help your firm become more resilient against contagious dishonesty.

Excerpts from <https://hbr.org/2022/11/research-in-supplier-negotiations-lying-is-contagious>

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