



Celebrating “National Tell the Truth Day”

Ralph Marston said, “The more completely you live in truth, the more fully you will connect to, and realize, your best possibilities. Truth will show you who you are, and enable you to go where you most sincerely wish to go.”

In case you were unaware, National Tell the Truth Day is celebrated on August 17 (www.tell-thetruthday.com). A visit to the official website offers the idea, “Imagine everyone speaking the truth, all the time, even for 24 hours.” It got me to thinking about telling the truth and the PR profession. After all, we’re usually referred to as spin doctors, which some believe is just another form of lying.

Frankly, I detest the word spin and all it implies. Rather, I view our profession in its purest form as assisting organizations and individuals to tell their stories in their own voice, from their own point of view. That said, I truly believe it should be done honestly and transparently, and that the role of the public relations professional is to ensure that these voices are truthful.

I wonder, as the website challenges, could we all do our jobs effectively for one day without telling a single lie (albeit the occasional white lie)? After all, a recent survey shows that the average person tells four lies a day, or 1,460 a year for a total of 88,000 by the age of 60. The most common lie? “I’m fine.”

The study, done by the Daily Mail of London, also concluded that most lies are told to work colleagues, followed by parents, partners and spouses. The survey revealed that two-thirds of those polled do not feel guilty for lying, and 40 percent think they’re pretty good at it.

So, what are we lying about? A study of children suggests we all lie for the following reasons:

- Fear of disappointing someone
- To avoid punishment
- To get attention
- As a cry for help
- To avoid stressful situations
- To imitate the behavior of those around us (peer pressure)

I see these reasons behind most lies told to coworkers, clients and the media. Can you? My team and I set out to document some of the most common lies in our profession...perhaps you’ll recognize them, and hopefully, start to avoid them.

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Lies told to media:

- I'll get back to you by the end of the day.
- There's nothing else like it on the market.
- The survey results were just released.
- Of course I can make our CEO available.
- Such-and-such celebrity has been known to use the product; I even use it!
- Yes, it will be in stores within a month.

Lies told to clients:

- Oprah? No problem, we know a producer there.
- Of course we have healthcare/tech/consumer experience.
- The people you see in this room will be handling your account.
- The media is going to LOVE your story.
- Yes, we will personally pitch everyone on the list.
- We'll be dedicating at least five account people to your business.

Lies told by media:

- I misplaced your release, could you resend it?
- I know it's a great story, but I'll have to run it by my senior producer first.
- Oh, I remember seeing that.
- I'm not really the one who handles this.
- We love the story, but just don't know where to fit it.
- We can't use it right now, but I'll hang onto it and use it later.
- It's not really something we would cover.
- We only cover hard news.
- We only have one camera crew and they're already committed to another project.

Lies told by clients:

- We seem to have misplaced your invoice, could you resend it?
- The check is in the mail or it's definitely in the next check run.
- The agency review process is just a formality, don't worry.
- Our new CMO has no intention of changing agencies.
- Our CEO believes PR is a priority.
- We just don't have enough budget for that. (By the way, can you do a release on our \$50 million ad campaign?)

While we can all share a chuckle over some of these familiar phrases, the bottom line is that they are really unnecessary. It's far better to know why your pitch isn't working so you can go back and refine it. It's also important to have a frank discussion with your client about your relationship so you can do exceptional work together. Finally, remember that credibility does more to ensure your long-term success in this business than any falsehood ever will.