

by Jeff Silver

The Best Policy?

It started out innocently enough, but somehow I'd lost the ability to distinguish fact from fiction, truth from lies. My therapist, Dr. Beverly Friendly (pronounced "Friendly"), was helping me sort it all out.

At work I'd been put in charge of marketing for our client, RobiLube, the all-in-one motor oil and cough suppressant. I hated the assignment from the beginning but told my boss, "Thanks, Mr. Slagg. I've got some great ideas and can't wait to get started!" Then I added, "I love a challenge," referring to Castrol's motor oil/contraceptive product that had a three month head-start on us. Obviously I couldn't tell Mr. Slagg how I really felt. I wanted him to like me and respect me.

For days I couldn't come up with anything the RobiLube people liked. One night, I tried watching the "Bewitched" marathon on TV Land until 3 a.m. hoping for inspiration. What would Darren do?

I finally decided I was trying too hard and needed to relax - let the ideas come to me instead of chasing so deparately after them. It was a long, long night as I lay on the sofa listening for the dull pop of a light bulb going off over my head.

The next day, Mr. Slagg asked for an update on my progress. I told him everything was under control and that I was very excited about the new campaign. Looking haggard and dishevelled from lack of sleep only enhanced my charade as the eccentric genius at work.

Slagg was actually buying everything I was dishing out. Then, he suddenly looked as though he'd made an incredible discovery and blurted out, "Terrific! Bring your ideas in on Friday and run 'em past me. Can't wait to hear what you've got."

FRIDAY!!?? I ran back to my office and panicked. I could barely breathe knowing there was no way I could tell Mr. Slagg the truth, but I couldn't go into his office empty-handed either. After all, I wanted him to like me and respect me.

With nowhere else to turn, I called my sometimes girlfriend,

made me use skim milk in my coffe instead of imitation Amaretto flavored non-dairy product.

I broke down and told her the whole story of the lies and deception, how I'd clawed my way to the top at work, how I'd hoped to use her for my own comfort and inspiration in a moment of crisis. She tipped her head slightly, paused for a moment and with a puzzled look said, "Do you like my hair this way?"

Thrown off-guard, I proceeded cautiously, deciding that honesty was still the best approach. "I always love it like that. It makes you look like Uma Thurmon - but in *The Truth About Cats and Dogs* not, like in *Gattica*."

Her smile faded. Methodically she slipped on her sweater, picked up her bag and stood with the remaining spotlights behind her so that looking up, even squinting, I couldn't see her face. A cold voice said, "This is a totally new look. You couldn't possibly have seen it before. I even darkened it two shades. If you can't pay attention, why can't you at least be honest with me? I guess you'll never change." And with that, she walked out.

Although my career is still hanging by a thread and my social life has ceased to exist, I have learned a lot from Dr. Friendly these last few months. She's shown me how lying is a matter of degree and context, how I have to be clear on when and why I'm lying and whether it's for a worthy cause.

She also has me reading *Honesty is the Best Fallacy* by the famous sociologist, Malomar Schlitz. If it can be believed, reserach from his Veracity Insitute has shown that

"Lying is a Matter of degree and context."

Penny, who in the right light with the right music in the right restaurant was the girl of my dreams. Even in poor lighting, being with Penny was better than eating alone. I called and told her I'd been thinking about her, (which was true), that I really wanted to see her, (also true), and that I felt bad about how we'd left things two weeks before, (which was so close to being true that I hardly had to change my voice at all to make it sound sincere). You know, I just wanted her to like me.

That evening we met at the Palm Pom, which has some of the best lighting in town. I did everything right. I complimented her dress, "Are those new earrings?", "You look just great." I was on my way to the heady, ozone-thin atmosphere of a good date where I planned to lose myself and wait for a brilliant RobiLube epiphany to catch me by surprise and save the day.

All was going swimmingly as we sat at our table, when the unthinkable happened. One of the small spotlights that shone down on our banquette went out, casting a harsh, slightly chilling shadow down the left side of Penny's face. Seeing her in this light shocked me back to reality as if someone had hit me with a rubber hose or

36% of men between 29 and 42 are "sometimes less than honest" with their girlfriends, 33.5% of that age group lies to their wives, 23.3% fib to their bosses and 96.3% of them lie to their wives and girlfriends. Schlitz also found that in our society dishonesty cuts across gender lines, socioeconomic levels and professions. His data on auto mechanics, lawyers and psychotherapists, however, has provided contradictory evidence warranting further study.

So far, the work with Dr. Friendly is going well. She seems to really like me and respect me.

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