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Send editorial items to the editor, Richard A. Swanson, University of Minnesota, 1954 Buford Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55108. Telephone 612-376-5065. A broad range of contributions are accepted for the *Journal*, brief news items, opinion articles, letters to the editor, data-based articles, papers of a theoretical nature, tips for technologists, poems, humor, and other original items. Manuscripts submitted for the Research and Theory Department will be refereed. The *Journal* generally cannot handle manuscripts over 2000 words (eight double-spaced, typewritten pages). The APA style of documentation is prescribed. Author guidelines are available from the editor.

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## Secrecy And Lying

I do not pretend to be a source of important thoughts on ethics and the more specific topics of secrecy and lying. I do acknowledge a deeply vested interest in the subject as it applies to our profession. In case the message is not clear by the end of this editorial, I'll summarize first and then expand on my thoughts.

In summary, I find lying abhorrent and secrecy tolerable. This is not a vote for secrecy, rather an acknowledgement of its situational nature. The goal in raising these ethical questions is to encourage additional reader discussion on ethics in human performance technology.

Being against lying at the theoretical level is easy. Most of us live in national and local cultures that have a clear view of lying. Lying is wrong, a deliberate deception. When lies inflict pain on others and the liar is discovered, the liar is subjected to retribution. Secrecy is another issue. Secrecy has to do with withholding information from others. Withholding information usually conjures a darker side of human behavior.

Yet, as parents we regularly withhold information from our children under the guise of lack of readiness or because we believe that the information should be procured by our children on their own initiative. Many parental decisions are situational. Similarly, professional educators and trainers must continually make decisions as to what information we should present to learners. We make conscious decisions to include or withhold information. In fact, definitions of training often include the concept of "controlled information." Most of us deal with work situations that require us to withhold information, if only from the press of time.

Human performance technologists historically have moved from organizational performance deficiencies, to specific interventions, and back to assessing the resulting performance improvement. All through this process there are information sharing and withholding decisions. While most may want to invoke the shroud of professionalism on past practices, the ethical perspective should not be taken for granted. It must be consciously reviewed.

As organizations have increased demands for performance, those in the business of human performance technology will be expected to be major contributors. Access to progressively more sensitive information will only serve to stretch them ethically to their limits—first, in the realm of secrecy and second, in the realm of lying. Recent references in the popular literature have made note of these problems (Banzai, 1983; Bok, 1978, 1983).

Information is power. While withholding information may not appear to be sinister, it does hold the potential for abuse. The withholder's intent and the potential for gains over the withholder is at the ethical core. Lying, a deliberate deception, is an automatic abuse. As human performance technologists move from the service role to the strategic planning role in an organization, temptations to gain and retain power through lying will increase. We will need to increasingly monitor our ethics and those of the profession. P&I

Richard A. Swanson  
Editor

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