

Honestly speaking

Whether it's with your workmates, your partner or your friends, here's why it pays to tell the truth (well, most of the time...)

How many of us tell our partners we don't mind doing the bulk of the housework, we have no problem with their unplanned after-work drinking sessions, we 'quite like' that loud colleague who makes terrible jokes, and their mother's critique of our children's diet is 'useful'? Taken individually these small deceptions seem harmless but the cumulative effect of never allowing the world to know you as you really are can be extremely damaging. Experts agree that although there are risks in honesty, a relationship built on a foundation of small and apparently harmless lies is fragile. This could lead to stress, misunderstandings and a superficial relationship.

The whole truth

'Not being honest with someone can lead to resentment or missed opportunities,' says clinical psychologist Linda Blair, author of *Straight Talking* (Piatkus, £10.99). 'And while you're feeling bad, the person you're angry with is oblivious, so nothing changes.'

Most people would probably say they were honest – and it's definitely what we expect from other people, according to Blair – but in reality we often hold back from honesty. 'For most of us this is because we don't like confrontation and we want to be liked,' says business life coach Rebekah Fensome (www.rebekahfensomelifecoach.com). And personality doesn't really come into it – shy people are no less likely to be honest than extroverts, and confident people can often be unassertive and avoid confrontation. 'Past experiences and upbringing are much more important,' says Blair.

'People tend to work out whether they're going to gain or lose before being

honest,' says Professor Alex Gardner, psychologist on ITV's *Fat Club*. 'And they often lack honesty when they feel they have something to lose.' He claims that we're more likely to avoid being honest at work – mainly because it's a higher risk strategy and we have more to lose. 'It's easier to be honest when you're intimate with someone, a partner for instance, because you know them well and it's not so high risk,' he says.

To complicate matters, honesty doesn't always make people more likeable. Researchers at the University of Massachusetts found that the most popular teenagers are those who

are best at being deceptive. They also found 60 per cent of us lie at least once during a 10-minute conversation.

Although men and women seem to lie the same amount, say scientists at the University of Virginia, men are more likely than women to lie about themselves, to make themselves look better. 'People exaggerate how great they are to boost self-esteem,' says Professor Gardner. 'This can help in job interviews – as long as they can live up to the job if they get it.'

Women, however, are more likely to lie to protect other people's feelings. Although honesty is important in friendships, for the sake of a friend's self-esteem, Professor Gardner says it's OK to hold back from the truth now and then. 'If your friend is trying on an unflattering dress, you'd say it looked hideous if you were being honest,' he says. 'It's kinder to say it's nice but you've seen her in better outfits.' But Blair doesn't agree. 'Many people fall into a trap in friendships by not being honest just so their friend will

Amazingly, research has found that 60 per cent of us lie at least once during a 10-minute conversation

like them more,' she says. She doesn't believe in trying to raise their self-esteem if it involves being dishonest. 'If you tell them they look great in a dress that looks terrible, you're being a bad friend,' she argues.

What if a friend constantly lets you down? 'Most people respond well if you approach it as your problem, not theirs,' says Blair. 'So if your friend's lateness is bugging you, say something like, "I have this thing about lateness". But don't bring it up when they've just been late, she says, do it when you're relaxed over a nice meal.'

Who's the boss?

What about a difficult colleague or boss? Ever since Jenny, a 29-year-old events organiser from London, contradicted her boss in a meeting, she's made her life a misery. 'She undermines me publicly, sets me unrealistically short deadlines and she's on my back the whole time,' says Jenny. 'I can't tell her how I feel because she'll just humiliate me even more and now I dread going to work.'

To deal with Jenny's situation, Fensome recommends that she is fair, efficient and professional in all her encounters with her boss and that she keeps a diary of all her dealings. 'But if things don't improve, Jenny should arrange a meeting with her,' says Fensome. 'Jenny should say that she's aware things have deteriorated in their working relationship and she thinks they should get to the bottom of it.' She should remain confident and calm, take charge of the meeting and avoid accusing or emotional language. Putting forward ideas for solutions and following up the meeting with a summary email is also a good idea. 'But if this fails and the bullying continues, she should consider legal action,' she adds.