

# Interviewees and the Psychology of Deceit

A **Gower** Book

ROUTLEDGE



## *Deception in Selection*

### ***Advance Praise***

*Deception in Selection is an essential read for anyone who might make a seriously expensive mistake and hire the wrong person. Introducing a sociopath into your team will damage your organisation and the individuals within it. We all need essential advice to reduce this risk, and Max Eggert gives this in his usual accessible and informative style.*

Professor June Andrews, DSDC, University of Stirling

*As usual, Max Eggert is at the forefront of the 'Psychology of Hiring' in the people recruitment space. Max's latest work reveals valuable insights that enable any leader to more accurately sift through the people options presented to them so that the probability of selecting the person of best fit, is increased, appreciably. Thank you once again, Max.*

Peter Spring, General Manager Tyreright

*Integrity in your people is paramount for success in every organisation or service. Deception in Selection, which is as interesting a read as it is comprehensive, will take you a long way down the path of hiring correctly thus ensuring the right people are on-boarded.*

Steve Maher, CEO Urbanedge

*Every selector has been scarred by stories told at interview and examples given do not translate to on the job performance. You were lied to by the candidate. It's embarrassing to you as a professional, it damages good employees and it is very expensive. Max's book will definitely help prevent this happening again in your selection process. I cannot recommend Deception in Selection more highly.*

Jane L. Robinson, General Manager People Services KU Children's Services

*Deception in Selection is a very informative and thought-provoking book, which I encourage any person who is ever involved in recruitment to read. Max always provides reminders of the key life lessons in his books that you can apply to your work and personal life because life can, and does get in the way.*

Rob Davies, General Manager Zoggs Asia Pacific

*Max has a particular gift for unpacking the unconscious and breaking down the processes which occur in a split second. His own self-awareness, mixed with deep perception, enables clear analysis of Malcolm Gladwell's 'thin slice' or very first impressions.*

Andrew Tyndale, Director Grace Mutual Ltd.

*Max has an unnerving talent for recognising that which we know, but can never quite put our finger on; for simplifying the complex; for motivating his readers to deal confidently with issues normally protected by a shroud of professional jargon. This book is not only enjoyable to read, but will serve as a source of reference and inspiration for future generations. Heartily recommended.*

Andrew Brierley, Managing Director The Briars Group Ltd.

*The interview is nothing but a sampling of behaviour and all sampling involves errors. Seasoned interviewers are skilful at controlling such errors. Max Eggert's latest book is a great resource for all interviewers keen on enhancing the validity and reliability of their assessment. Max's insights will help interviewers to gently remove the 'mask' that most candidates wear during an interview.*

T.M. George, Director – Learning and Talent Strategies,  
Australia and New Zealand, Sealed Air Corporation

*Beware the unsuspecting recruiter, and if this latest production by Max Eggert hits the best seller list as predicted, beware the candidate! An extraordinarily relevant instructional reference with scattered humour centered well within reality will easily become the must-have recruiter's guide to avoiding the trials and tribulations of routine candidate selection errors. It is a sobering reminder of how easily selection deception can occur. Thanks Max for a brilliant read.*

Lucy McCarthy, Sales & Marketing Director Allergan

*The pretext of this book is truly astonishing and yet it's conclusions will ring true with any executive who has built their success on the formation of a strong and united management team. We will recognise the mismatch between the promise of a well crafted CV along with a persuasive interview performance and the reality of disappointment down the track. This disconnect brings untold grief and expense as the damage is realised. If this book helps the reader avoid just one such situation it's benefit will be profound.*

Mark Newton, CEO St John Ambulance Australia (NSW)

# *Deception in Selection*

Interviewees and the Psychology of Deceit

MAX A. EGGERT

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*Lying is universal – we all do it; we all must do it.*

*Mark Twain*

*This book is dedicated to the late, great Dr Alan Cowling, my tutor at PCL (University of Westminster) who through insight, intelligence and empathy steered me from the beauty of theology to the splendour of psychology.*

*The mediocre tutor tells.*

*The good tutor explains.*

*The superior tutor reveals.*

*The great tutor inspires.*



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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### **MAX A. EGGERT**

**BSc, MA, AKC, CFIPD, CFAHRI, AMBPS, MAPS**

*Max is an international management psychologist who has the gift of making the complexities of human behaviour understandable and relevant to business.*

*Financial Times, London*

### **Background**

Max is Chief Psychologist with Transcareer, an International Management Psychology Consultancy. He has been interviewed frequently on TV, radio and in the print media both in Europe and Australia. His work and publications have been reviewed both in professional journals and the specialist media. He has lectured at premier universities as well as leading many professional conferences.

Max first read theology as a preparation for the priesthood and, through his interest in people, undertook degrees in psychology, industrial relations and clinical hypnosis. Several of his books are on the recommended reading lists of London, Sydney, Harvard, Westminster and Sussex Universities.

Married to Jane, with four children between them, they live in Bondi Beach, Australia and, as an Anglo Catholic priest, Max's joy and privilege is being the Priest for The Community of Our Lady of Advent in the Archdiocese of Sydney. When not writing, consulting or counselling, his other consuming passions are riding his thoroughbred 'Zeus', walking his two Jack Russell's, Bana and Daisy, attempting to stop the three cats Solomon, Sheba and Pierre from destroying china mementoes and failing to stop Mary, his Electus parrot, from using expletives in the presence of house guests.

Max can be contacted at [Max@transcareer.com.au](mailto:Max@transcareer.com.au), you can discover more about his secular work at [www.transcareer.com.au](http://www.transcareer.com.au).

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Charles V. Ford, *Lies! Lies! Lies!* (American Psychiatric Press Inc., 1999, 978-0-8804-8997-3).

Mark L. Knapp, *Lying and Deception in Human Interaction* (Penguin Academic, 2007, 978-0-2055-8064-4).

Aldert Vrij, *Detecting Lies and Deceits* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2008, 978-0-4705-1625-6).

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## PREFACE

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*Deception in Selection* is written essentially for fellow Human Resource professionals particularly for those involved in the pragmatics of selection who do not need all the supporting theory or research. Consequently I ask my fellow behavioural scientists, as well as those with significant understanding of the cognitive aspects of psychology, their sympathetic understanding if, in this work, as far as academic sources are concerned, we bounce like a stone on a pool without plumbing the depths to explore the additional academic beauty which is there. However, certain stable landmarks which are the psychological anchors of the subject will be referenced appropriately.

I came to this subject mainly through two very different routes.

The first and foremost, somewhat embarrassing as a junior HR person, through all the errors I made in selection. My proudly displayed psychology degree on one wall and my MIPM, as it was back then, certificate next to it, but still unable to distinguish or disentangle truth from deception in my interview candidates. I came from a seminarian background of believing every candidate told the truth, the whole truth and nothing but ... The reality? As an interviewer, if you cannot distinguish truth from untruth and in your naivety select poor candidates, you soon become an interviewee. In life you can get things right by getting them wrong. Organisations are not that generous. As an Anglican Priest I wondered why deception was so apparent in interviews until, as happens to all of us, I found myself being challenged by selection professionals from the other side of the selection desk as I tried to transfer from being a curate in a West London parish to an HR sprog in the City. *Mea culpa*.

The second is from school days and poetry lessons. With Miss Schofield, she who must be obeyed, we worked through Sonnet 138 by the Bard. I knew that I was not intellectually challenged at the time since I had worked out that Father Christmas was as fake as Santa Claus, and it was intelligent to deliberately not share my

findings with my parents,<sup>1</sup> but I must have been stuck in Piagetian Concrete Operational stage.<sup>2</sup>

By period four I had concluded that poetry was not only difficult but also illogical. I thought it was neat that there was a pun on the two meanings of lie in the last quatrain but the rest was just plain silly and made no sense at all.

Ponderings to simple self:

- Why does he believe her ‘though I know she lies’? That is silly.
- Why does he ‘credit her false tongue’? That is silly too.
- Why ‘in our faults by lies we flatter’d be’? What does this mean?

Miss Schofield must have taught well since the poem resurfaced during spiralling adolescence with Vivienne C. Kyriako – she who I worshipped from afar for a whole school year – well worshipped across two rows of desks.

Reflecting on why she eventually consented to having her hand held after school became one of those ‘all the lights go on’ events. Suddenly I understood there is a place for lies when you desperately wish for something. ‘When my love swears that she is made of truth I do believe her, though I know she lies’; all I had to do was to swap ‘old’ for pubescent ‘acne’.

Reflecting on this teenage tryst much later in my life, George Steiner captured my new understanding exactly when he wrote:

*At every level brute camouflage to poetic vision, the linguistic capacity to conceal, misinform, leave ambiguous, hypothesize, invent, is indispensable to the equilibrium of human consciousness.*

George Steiner<sup>3</sup>

Could it be that lies, even big ones, are permissible in some situations? Great moments of cognitive penny dropping are never forgotten. When, if ever, are lies permissible? And whether they are or whether they are not, to be able to spot

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1 Lie Classification: A utilitarian lie of omission.

2 *Concrete Operations: A Taxonomy of Intellectual Development Advanced* by Jean Piaget suggested that from the age of six or seven through to 12 or 13, young people are very literal in their understanding of the world, and need realistic demonstrations to help them think. (If I take three calculators from five calculators how many calculators will be left?). Analogy and metaphor is lost on them.

3 Steiner, G. (1975), *The Bronowski Memorial Lecture 1978*. Heidegger Harvester Press. Also, *After Babel, Aspects of Language and Translation*. Oxford Press, and his later thoughts expressed in ‘Has Truth a Future?’

mendacity and deceit is an important skill. A vested interest in keeping my job after two years on the graduate milk round and thereafter a career interviewing hundreds of candidates – board room through to mail room – with so many swelling their qualifications and experience, my experience eventuated in this book.

To assist in understanding this writer's self-disclosure, here is the work that was so confusing to the then 10-year-old:

*When my love swears that she is made of truth  
I do believe her; though I know she lies,  
That she might think me some untutor'd youth,  
Unlearned in the world's false subtleties.  
Thus vainly thinking that she thinks me young,  
Although she knows my days are past the best,  
Simply I credit her false-speaking tongue;  
On both sides thus is simple truth suppress'd.  
But wherefore says she not she is unjust?  
And wherefore say not I that I am old?  
O, love's best habit is in seeming trust,  
And age in love loves not to have years told.  
Therefore I lie with her and she with me,  
And in our faults by lies we flatter'd be.*

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## INTRODUCTION

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*Lord, Lord, how this world is given to lying.*

Shakespeare, *Henry IV, Part I*

At present it is an employers' market: too few good jobs and too many aspirants. During these competitive times, when applicants are trying every which way to get that lead over the next man or woman, the interview all too frequently becomes a bold cocktail of ego, confidence, thespianism and fantasy.

Interviewers are almost hostages to the way candidates present themselves. When faced with a body of evidence, circumstantial, anecdotal and supported by dubious academic claims but presented fluently, with great interpersonal charm and even more confidence, then such an assault can beguile even the most professional.

So, to prevent you from feeling overwhelmed, our purpose here is to understand and examine some proven techniques and tactics to balance the game, to restore equity to the clever approaches that sophisticated candidates bring to the interview.

Most of my working career as a management psychologist has been spent in the area of outplacement. I suppose outplacement consultants are the spin doctors for the applicant seeking employment. We don't encourage direct lies and fabrication but in the selection game, and it is a game played both sides, 'fabrications' of all types, particularly lies of omission and impersonation, abound. Every applicant tiptoes between a favourable self-presentation and absolute fiction. Inevitably candidate spin is at the messy end of the selection ruler.

Economies with the truth, if not downright lies, are not only endemic to the selection process but are also systemic in the anticipated rhythm of the whole process. There is no rubicon between spin and deliberate deception – of course interviewees will omit to say they were incompetent, fired, hated their job, their manager and pretend they have the qualifications required. To confess such inadequacies is to condemn oneself to being the applicant and never the appointee.