Use of Lie Detector To Combat Employee Dishonesty Debated

By HENRY J. BECHTOLD
UPI Financial Editor

New York – (UPI) – Two former government security officers turned management consultants are in sharp disagreement as to the lie detector's role in combatting employee dishonesty.

Henry Bechtold

Lincoln M. Zonn of the security consultant firm bearing his name spoke recently of the growing use of the polygraph to reduce company losses from employee thefts, which now amount to more than $4 million a day.

Zonn's firm banks heavily on the lie detector, which it says is the "surest and least costly" way to reduce these losses which, to many firms, may be the difference between a profitable year or one in the red.

However, Harvey Burstein, a Boston industrial security consultant, took issue with Zonn's remarks, stating that the lie detector is a crutch for poor detective work and a doubtful weapon against thieves and pilferers.

Zonn's reply to Burstein was that it is no more of a crutch than is the cash register which is just another technique for internal control of cash.

Burstein also contends that the wholesale use of lie detectors in plant security to investigate thefts was damaging to the morale of honest employees.

Zonn says he has found the reverse to be true. Most people are basically honest, he notes, but many have a low threshold of resistance to temptation.

"These people genuinely appreciate the moral shot of integrity which the lie detector's presence provides. They want to be honest and the machine helps them to do it," according to Zonn.

Burstein claims that a skilled, well-trained, knowledgeable investigator, who has laid the groundwork as he should by interrogating a subject, "can do as good a job without a polygraph albeit perhaps not as quickly."

Big Task Ahead

Zonn countered that no investigator can be positive on verbal evidence alone that he has gotten the full story. He says that without a verification factor the thief tends to admit to lesser crimes, hoping to conceal greater ones.

Burstein also insists that the polygraph is far from reliable and subject to interpretation by the operator who might have a grudge against the suspect.

"No more so thany any investigator not using the polygraph," Zonn states.

Whether the lie detector or the skilled investigator is used, the industrial security consultants have a big task ahead of them.

Zonn notes that from 30 per cent to as high as 80 per cent of all employees engage in dishonest practice – pilfering, embezzling, abusing allowance privileges, making fraudulent sales.

Employee turnover resulting from untruthful pre-employment representations costs business millions of dollars each year.

For every thousand dollars stolen by outsiders, $50,000 in cash and merchandise is taken wrongfully by employees.

Sports Car Gets In Way of Truck

Portland – (UPI) – A heavy freight truck ran over a small foreign sports car late Monday and the sports car driver suffered minor injuries.

Police said the car, driven by Robert E. McDonald, 17, collided with the side of the truck, operated by Billy G. Pierce, 32. The rear wheels of the truck rolled up and over the low hood of the sports car.

McDonald was treated at Portland Sanitarium.

At the end of 1958, the American petroleum industry represented an estimated gross investment in fixed assets of $71.2 billion.

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Family Council

Editor's Note: The Family Council consists of a Judge, a psychiatrist, three clergymen, a newspaper editor, a women's editor and two writers. Each article is a summary of an actual case history. The Council reports on problems that have been dealt with by responsible agencies and counselors

Lucy J. – Marge should find a nice guy and get married.

Marjorie F. – There are no "nice guys!"

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Lucy J. – I am a married woman, trying to help my sister Marjorie, who may be going to the bad as a result of a tragic experience.

A year ago, when she was 16, she was the victim of an attack by a distant cousin who came to the house when our parents were away. The whole thing was hushed up because we belong to a nice family and didn't want to be involved with the law.

Since that time Marge has taken up with a group of wild girls who have gotten into a lot of trouble in our neighborhood. A couple of them have been arrested for shoplifting. They all say they hate men and they're proud of it. I have tried to explain that all men aren't alike and that Marge should find a nice guy and get married, but she laughs at me.

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Marjorie F. – I sure would like to see some of these "nice guys" Lucy talks about. She thinks her husband is great, but I've seen him looking out of the window, ogling everything in skirts that passes by.

Even my own father is like that. I'm sure he has been unfaithful to my mother because I once overheard something when I was around 13 My mother was crying and begging him to give up some woman and he just laughed at her.

• • •

I haven't had a date in nearly two years and I don't miss it. But I have to have some fun and friends. The girls I have been hanging around with aren't really bad. The two who got into trouble were always wilder than the others. The way I see it, you get into less trouble without men than with them.

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The Council: Marjorie is the victim not only of one brutal incident, but of even more brutal neglect on the part of her family.

The incident involving the relative never should have been hushed up. The man should have been brought before the law. Possibly, these parents feared a revelation that Marjorie was not a completely innocent victim, but even if that had happened, the results might have been less serious.

As things now stand Marjorie inevitably feels her family did not stand by her in a time of crisis. Also, the help and guidance she would have gotten from a social worker or a doctor were denied her.

Actually, the family neglect goes back farther than the attack. Girls who have had wholesome family relationships all their lives do not turn man-haters as the result of one dreadful experience. They eventually come to accept the experience as an accidental misfortune.

Marjorie is far from ready to think about marriage. Her sister's lecturing although well intentioned, is of no help to her.

Things have gotten very serious in this case and there is an urgent need for the professional services of a trained individual. Such a person might well suggest that the girl would be better off in a new environment for a time.

Essentially, Marjorie needs to develop goals and interests to restore her self-esteem. When this has happened, she will quite naturally become interested in the doings of normal, wholesome young people and will seek to join them as a matter of course.

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