

L.I.A.R.

Robert Thornton is a professor of economics at a university in Pennsylvania. In the past, he—like many teachers—did not look forward to the task of having to write letters of recommendation for people with questionable qualifications. But, those days are behind him. He has put together a collection of statements that can be used for recommendations and are able to be interpreted in two ways. He calls his list the “Lexicon of Inconspicuously Ambiguous Recommendations,” or L.I.A.R., for short.

Thornton explains that L.I.A.R. may be used to offer a negative opinion of the personal qualities, work habits, or motivation of the candidate while allowing the candidate to believe that it is high praise. The power of L.I.A.R. is in the ambiguity (confusing meaning) of the English language and the need for context in order to properly interpret many statements.

Consider some examples from his lexicon to see what I mean:

- To describe a person who is extremely lazy: “In my opinion, you will be very fortunate to get this person to work for you.”
- To describe a person who is totally inept: “I most enthusiastically recommend this candidate with no qualifications whatsoever.”
- To describe an ex-employee who had problems getting along with fellow workers: “I am pleased to say that this candidate is a former colleague of mine.”
- To describe a candidate who is so unproductive that the job would better left unfilled: “I can assure you that no person would be better for the job.”
- To describe an applicant who is not worth further consideration: “I would urge you to waste no time in making this candidate an offer of employment.”
- To describe a person with lackluster credentials: “All in all, I cannot say enough good things about this candidate or recommend him too highly,”

Robert Thornton is right, isn't he? Whether you've had to write a recommendation for someone else or not, we've all been placed in positions before that are uncomfortable. Positions that test our integrity and tempt us to stretch the truth or lie in order to please someone. We don't like to hurt people's feelings, but we don't want to be dishonest either. So, there is a certain appeal to being vague at times. This can be a temptation for preachers or Bible class teachers also, particularly when dealing with issues that are likely to offend the listeners. We may call it ambiguity, speaking a half-truth, using mental reservation, twisting the truth a bit, being ambivalent, etc. But, ultimately, when we are purposefully ambiguous in order to deceive or avoid a conflict, we are dishonest. Thornton was quite honest when he referred to his Lexicon of Inconspicuously Ambiguous Recommendations as L.I.A.R.!

It may be that no Christian characteristic has suffered more in the workplace than honesty. It shouldn't be that way. Jesus wants His people to be known as a people of truth. It is important that those around us can trust what we say without wondering whether we really mean it or not. We should be clear and truthful in our communications.

Let us conclude by considering some relevant Scriptures on this theme:

- Ephesians 4:25 - “Therefore, putting away lying, ‘Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,’ for we are members of one another.”
- Colossians 3:9 - “Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds.”
- Matthew 12:36-37 - “But I say to you that for every idle word men speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”
- Revelation 21:8 - “But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and **all liars** shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”

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