

## All that glitters is not **GOLD...**



### Truth, Lies and Polygraphs

#### Do You Know Who You Employ?

It is a known fact that the majority of workplace crimes are committed by employees. This could have been avoided if pre-employment screening was done and culprits identified before employing them. This edition focuses on the effectiveness and legalities of using a polygraph test to prevent dishonesty and/or identify culprits of dishonest acts.

#### The “Do’s and Don’ts” Involved in Using a Polygraph Test

##### Can an employee be forced to take a polygraph test?

No. You need their permission at the time or it should be written into an employment contract that both the employer and employee have previously signed. Every polygraph examination should be preceded by the completion of a “polygraph consent form”. Bear in mind the suspicion created when an employee refuses to consent to a polygraph examination without reasonable grounds.

##### Can an employee be dismissed for failing a polygraph test?

No. The information can only form the basis of an investigation and must be supported with further evidence which proves, within a “balance of probability”, that an offence has taken place. The polygraph can therefore only be used as supporting evidence in a disciplinary hearing and it is not accepted as evidence in a criminal trial, where guilt has to be proven “beyond reasonable doubt”.

##### Can an employee be questioned about more than one

##### issue in the course of one test?

Yes. The success of a polygraph examination is based on the composition of the questions, therefore the series of questions to be asked must be carefully formulated and not vague or generalised.

##### How many relevant questions can be asked in the course of the test?

Preferably, no more than four.

##### Can a pregnant female be polygraphed?

No, although there is no medical evidence to date that the polygraph can cause harm to the mother or unborn child.

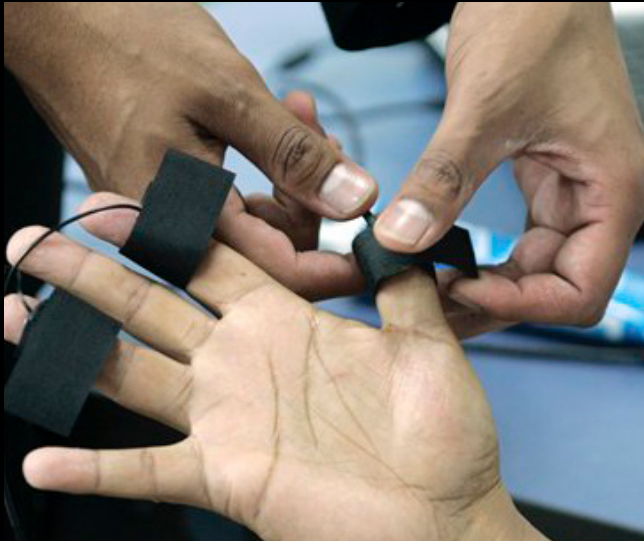
##### How accurate is the polygraph test?

The American Polygraph Association has a compendium of research studies available on the validity and reliability of polygraph testing. The 80 research projects listed, published since 1980, and involved 6 360 polygraph examinations or sets of charts from examinations. Researchers conducted 12 studies on the validity of field examinations, following 2 174 field examinations, providing an average accuracy of 98%.

##### If a person is a habitual liar, can he still be polygraphed?

Yes.

##### Is it legal to subject prospective employees to a pre-employment polygraph test?



Yes, if they agree to it. As a matter of routine, polygraph testing should be considered for inclusion in employment contracts.

What elements could have a negative effect on a polygraph?

Noise, language and distraction.

Does sleep deprivation or liquor consumption affect a polygraph?

No. This is situational - the examiner must make the decision on whether the examinee should be tested. The USA Department of Defence Polygraph Institute (DODPI) conducted research to assess if variables such as number of hours the subject slept prior to the test, the subject's alertness during the test, general health, level of physical discomfort and if the use of alcohol, nicotine and coffee prior to the test had any impact. In general the situational variables had little impact on test outcome (US Joint Security Commission Report 1994).

Do the electrolytes in your body affect the polygraph?

No.

What about prescription drugs for post traumatic stress disorder that calm the brain or a drug that has ephedrine in it?

No.

What about anabolic steroids?

No.

Is it true that if you undergo a test on an empty stomach it will affect the result?

No.

I'm told that if I'm nervous, I could fail the test. Is this true?

No. This is a long standing belief that holds no truth whatsoever. Everyone who takes a polygraph examination will be nervous, whether they intend lying in the exam or not. The polygraph exam identifies truth and deception, no matter the level of nervousness in the subject.

How does the polygraph detect lies?

When we lie about something important, changes occur in our bodies that we have no control over. The polygraph records these changes. The Autonomic Nervous System in our bodies consists of two systems - the Sympathetic and the Parasympathetic. When we lie, physiological changes occur at the Sympathetic level, beyond our control, and the polygraph records these Sympathetic arousal responses.

Will it work on someone with no conscience - a psychopath, for example?

Yes. Research has shown that the polygraph is just as accurate on psychopaths (in fact even more so in many cases) as it is on non-psychopaths. This is according to practical field results, not theoretical academic work.

Would bias be evident towards whoever is paying for the exam? (If it's a company, for example, it is hard to believe that they won't be given the result they're looking for.)

When the examinations are conducted, impartiality remains. Trustworthy and dependable examiners would be registered with both the American Polygraph Association and the Polygraph Association of South Africa and therefore are bound by codes of ethics as well as standards and principals of practice.

Should more information visit the Symbiotix website: [www.symbiotix.co.za](http://www.symbiotix.co.za)