

Laughing Gas

Gaseous Planet: Truth Be Told

By Harrison Chow, M.D., M.S.

Today, the hot ticket to power and money isn't to be found on the campuses of Harvard, Stanford or West Point, but in the up-and-coming American Liars Institute (ALI). ALI's graduates with a M.M.A. degree (Masters in Mendacious Arts) hold leadership positions in many of this country's Fortune 500 companies and in government. Recently, while on a fact-finding trip for the CSA, I interviewed the current dean, Professor Thomas Bull, at ALI's bucolic campus overlooking Washington, D.C.



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HC: Professor Bull, thank you for meeting with me. May I ask how the Masters in Mendacious Arts surpassed the Harvard M.B.A. as the “must-have” degree among the world's elites?

TB: Mendacity is certainly not new, but with the advent of popular media forms, the newspaper, radio, television and the Internet, the demand for duplicity has never been greater. Today, one needs to be fluid in ever-new forms of lying. Thus, our highly-trained graduates can expect higher pay, more responsibility, and vast career opportunities.

HC: So, the old adage “Always tell the truth” is not true?

TB: Yes, it's not “true.” Let me explain. Lying is a form of public control. For example, the American public believes there is a Medicare trust fund because their elected leaders say so. If the public ever found out that the Medicare trust fund was actually paid for from stolen Nigerian credit cards, mass hysteria and revolt would break out.

HC: How do you select your promising students?

TB: A bachelor of science degree—you know, a BS—is not necessary, even if it would appear more impressive after one of our graduates' names. We like to see letters of recommendation and original performances of mendacity. This year we had an applicant who submitted a videotape of himself at the San Francisco Airport misdirecting visitors looking for a bathroom, using multiple languages. The admissions committee was quite impressed.

HC: Where do you find the curriculum for lying—aren't most liars hidden?

Laughing Gas (cont'd)

TB: We feel fortunate that our students have so many public role models today. Our students have a core curriculum studying the classics such as Sun Tzu, Machiavelli, and, of course, the Nixon and Clinton tapes. We also expect each student to complete a thesis on a big whopper lie in their chosen field.

HC: You actually certify liars?

TB: Oh, yes. A Class I liar tells a lie that is perceptible to the untrained eye. Class II liars tell lies that are only detectable to trained eyes. Class III liars convey lies which are only detectable using an FBI lie detector test, and Class IV liars lay out those which are undetectable by any means. Class IVs are stone-cold liars representing our very best, but they pay a very high personal cost.

HC: What kinds of sacrifices do you mean?

TB: Well, a Class IV liar can be an executive or even presidential material, but many destroy personal relationships because they are unable to control their lying to loved ones—or even to themselves. For example, one of our most successful graduates, a billionaire CEO of a large, national health insurance company, recently came to me for help because his wife was seeking a divorce. As the story goes, he was caught withholding Medicare and Social Security taxes from his 5-year-old son's allowance, and also spending his son's trust fund on his Brazilian stripper mistress.

HC: “Truly” heart-wrenching. Did you help him?

TB: No, I couldn't tell if he was lying.

At this time Professor Bull introduces me to graduating senior Bob Squishy, who is majoring in Health Services. Bob has just completed his thesis on “The Cost-Effectiveness of Health Insurance CEOs' Private Cessna Jets on Patient Outcomes.”

BS: First, let me tell you, Dr. Chow, what an honor it is to meet you and how much I respect the hard work and commitment the physician community performs for patients.

HC: Uh, thank you—I think. Tell me how you came to the conclusion that CEO Cessna jets were cost-effective for patients in your research?

BS: Certainly. I studied how CEOs of the major health insurance companies commute to work, and I found that those who commuted to their office by private jet were positively correlated with insurance plans that were more cost-effective for patient care.

HC: I would think the expense of CEO private jets would have a negative correlation on patient care?

Laughing Gas (cont'd)

BS: On the contrary, the expense spent on CEO jets leads these plans to greater restrictions on patient and provider coverage. Any delay in coverage usually leads either to significant claims dropout or statistical life dropout by patients.

HC: By “statistical life dropout,” you mean patients just died.

BS: Precisely. Death is a highly cost-effective outcome, and Death right away with no dilly-dallying is really cheap indeed. Tell me, Dr. Chow, what is your field of medicine?

HC: I'm an anesthesiologist in Silicon Valley.

BS: Say, Dr. Chow, I have been exploring ideas about how to best maximize profits in hospitals, particularly looking for synergistic cost margin relativity.

HC: Uh, what did you just say? I lost you there.

BS: I mean how to stop paying for wasteful physician perks. For example, I would use consultants to prove that the elimination of call rooms and food stipends will provide better patient outcomes and higher physician satisfaction.

HC: I don't see how it would improve either. Besides hospitals often require “in-house” call—where would doctors sleep?

BS: With no call rooms, on-call physicians would be forced to stay in the hospital lobby with patients and their families. This way doctors could stay in touch with their patients and maybe even make new friends. Doctors would be happy, the patient would be happy, the hospital would be happy—this is synergy—a classic win-win situation.

HC: Well, the “truth be told.”

BS: Thanks for the interview. As an ALI graduate, I have big ambitions. Maybe I'll be a Senator someday. Next time, I'd like to tell you about my plan to pay for universal health care with a snack tax.

Dr. Harrison Chow (hchow@stanfordalumni.org) is an anesthesiologist in Silicon Valley and prone to telling lies about fly-fishing.

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