



# Practicum

Advances are made by answering questions.  
Discoveries are made by questioning answers  
by Tuvya T. Amsel\*

## Case study

One early morning, a man rode his bike to the kindergarten with his 3-year-old daughter. That was about the only quality time he had for himself before the hectic day awaiting our man, a top business tycoon. He parted from his daughter with a hug and a kiss, and was ready to go home when someone approached him, introduced himself as a police detective, and arrested him for sexually molesting his daughter. His house was searched for paedophile materials but nothing was found. His wife was arrested for conspiracy while taking their son to school. Both were interrogated for hours, denying the allegation and demanding to be polygraphed. The man took the test next day and failed it. In the afternoon he was confronted with the complainer: the kindergarten teacher. After the confrontation, the teacher confessed that she made up the whole story because her best friend who worked in one of the

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tycoon's companies was fired. Case closed, all allegations dropped. Yet, the polygraph failed by scoring *a false positive*.

The case was analysed later at the police polygraph lab that conducted the test. It seemed flawless: conducted by an experienced examiner, with a prolonged textbook pre-test, in APA validated Utah ZCT PLC test format, with the acquaintance test, 3 repetitions, clear charts, and a distinct numerical scoring of DI. Yet, the man was innocent. The chief examiner, a validated protocols fanatic, concluded the analysis by saying: "research shows that false results are expected and are part of our practice". And that was it; case closed. Was it, however, inevitable or was it a result of rigid adherence to a test protocol and a failure to pay attention to some possible potholes present in such tests?

A polygraph test is basically an venture into the examinee's mind and soul, and these may not be simple at all because of our personality types as well as circumstances. It is the examiner's responsibility to perceive possible contaminating factors that might affect the test resulting in a false conclusion, and to deal with them. Spanning over 35 years and over 25,000 polygraph tests, my experience has taught me that examiners *should not adjust the examinee to the test but rather adjust the test to the examinee*.

The purpose of this column is to share my experience with my fellow examiners, discuss some common phenomenon that we practice, and suggest possible remedies. You are all more than welcome to express your views, raise doubts, and/or share your experience.

Recently we witness a growing tendency of "manualising" everything. Books telling us "How to...", designed "...for Dummies" and others of that ilk suggest remedies to all aspect of life. Though being a strong believer in the necessity of protocols and checklists based on solid research, I perceive a down side in those, namely a protocol that, if followed rigorously, may turn a polygraph examiner into an experienced technician, and remove from the picture discretion and flexibility: commodities that are necessary as they let the examiner handle subjects not as a text book models but as unique individuals.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Professor Widacki and the editorial staff of *European Polygraph* for enabling me to express my views.

PS: The reason behind the false positive result in the case study mentioned above will be given in one of the forthcoming issues.