

“If you tell the truth, you don’t have to remember anything.”

Mark Twain

It’s not the mistake that matters – it’s lying about the mistake that will come back to haunt you. Don’t try to lead the public up the garden path

The PR trade and its representative bodies are very clear that deliberately misleading the media is a bad thing; that ‘spin’ gives communications a bad name; and that it’s counter-productive.”So in the space of a couple of days, we have two examples of people being economical with the truth. And why? Because they’re afraid to either justify what’s happened or apologise for it.

First up - the Environment Agency. The resignation of Sir James Dilley, Chairman of the Environment Agency was the result of media pressure relating to his perceived lying (the Sunday Times headline called it a “whopper”) about where he was while parts of the UK were under water as a result of his Agency’s flood defences being overwhelmed.

The Environment Agency initially sought to justify his absence by saying he was “at home with his family”. When it emerged that he was in Barbados, the Agency issued a revised statement that

Year’s Eve. Their boss should have joined them.”

The Environment Agency press office emerges from this story with little credit. If they knowingly drafted these deliberately misleading statements, then they have broken the cardinal rule of media relations – do not lie. If they advised against it and were over-ruled, then it does them discredit that they went along with it. If senior management misled them, then it tells you how little the communications function is valued and how it has failed to address this with senior management.

Given that ‘weasel words’ were at the root of his downfall, his resignation statement compounds the public take on the story. He wrote: “My reason for resigning is that the expectations of the role have expanded to require the Chairman to be available at short notice throughout the year, irrespective of routine arrangements for deputy and executive cover. In my view this is inappropriate in a part-time non-executive position, and this is something I am unable to deliver ... the media attention has also affected and intruded on my immediate family, which I find unacceptable.”

Many Chairmen have to be available at short-notice, especially when there’s a crisis. He is clearly unwilling (rather than unable) to make himself available and we get no sense that he understands that if you take a public role and accept £100,000 a year from the taxpayer, that media attention comes with the territory – especially if you’ve cocked-up!

Next we have Jeremy Corbyn’s newly



appointed Shadow Defence Secretary, Emily Thornberry. Given the split between the Labour Parliamentary Party, the majority of which supports replacing Trident, and the Labour Party

“Unlike her predecessor, she supports unilateral nuclear disarmament. It’s why her predecessor was moved from the role.”

membership, the majority of which do not, the appointment was bound to generate headlines.

Yet when she was appointed, she sidestepped questions about whether this was a move by Corbyn to lead a change in the Labour Party’s current policy supporting a UK nuclear deterrent by saying “I don’t know why Jeremy gave me this job”.

Really? This seems highly unlikely. You accept a new job and the party leader says nothing to you about why or what he expects of you (particularly when by your own admission you know nothing about defence matters)? This is either a very poor reflection on her for not asking her leader about priorities, another very poor reflection on the way Corbyn makes his appointments or a lie. Or maybe a combination. Her line-to-take – if indeed you can call it that – did her and the Labour Party no credit. The public – the majority of which supports a nuclear deterrent – aren’t stupid.

And why does this matter? In the words of Friedrich Nietzsche: “I’m not upset that you lied to me, I’m upset that from now on I can’t believe you.”

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said: “Sir Philip Dilley is at home with his family, who are from Barbados.” This was revealed to be untrue. His wife is not from Barbados but Jamaica (1200 miles away); he had built a second home in Barbados where he chose to holiday over Christmas and not return when the flooding became national news. In the words of Tim Farron MP, “Many [Agency] staff gave up their Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and New