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# Kluwer Mediation Blog

## Lie to Me (diation)

Andrea Maia (Mediar360 – Dispute Resolution ) · Saturday, October 25th, 2014

I must confess that I am getting addicted to the TV series “Lie to Me”.

Dr. Cal Lightman, the series protagonist, and his assistant, Dr. Gillian Foster, are specialists in fraud detection through a rather unconventional method: facial expression and body language analysis. Dr. Lightman’s character is based on the well known psychologist Paul Ekman, and his client list varies from the FBI to private institutions, and even individuals interested in finding out some hidden truths in their personal lives.

Despite the cinematographic approach, “Lie to Me” tries to provide a scientific overview of a rather unexplored segment (body and facial expressions), demonstrating, through simple examples, how it can sometimes be very effective, and not so difficult, to detect trends in behavioral and emotional patterns through the simple observation of those involved.

Although it may seem rather strange (just like when our local police tries to emulate “CSI” practices on their real cases), I have recently started to pay closer attention to the series in order to find out if any of the aspects portrayed in the episodes could in fact be applied (or related) to our profession. Oddly enough, at least in two different occasions, I could.

The first time occurred when the academic Dr. Lightman was confronted by his new assistant (Torres), a professional without his background (training and experience), but with a natural in-born ability to “read people”. Regardless of the nature and the outcome of this fictional dispute, the similarity to the fact that, in Mediation, in-born talent is in some cases more important than academic training and experience in order to create rapport and gain trust with all parties involved in the case, is a point that I repeatedly reinforce, and thus could not go unnoticed.

The second, obviously, is through actually trying to understand in a more scientific way the usage of body language under different situations and circumstances. Dr. Paul Ekman, the actual psychologist who inspired the series, spent most of his academic life trying to demonstrate that there are some basic emotions that can be equally perceived by everyone, regardless of their personal influences (culture and gender), providing some valuable insights for those willing to further advance in the subject:

- **Observation:** Although obvious, it is in fact the first, and probably the most important, skill or aptitude that someone must master in order to fully grasp all elements of non-verbal behavior;
- **Lie:** To find out whether the person is lying or not is relatively easy (once you develop the

skills). What is needed, however, is to be able to find out why the person is not telling the truth (and that is where other Mediation skills must be applied);

– **Self Knowledge:** In one of the episodes, the evaluation of the case is totally misled on account of the previously conceived sentiment (hate) of a person from Lightman’s team towards one of the suspects. To be able to understand when you are previously affected by outside circumstances is particularly important, especially in cases involving high profile people, where “previous knowledge” can actually blind one’s ability to observe or arrive at an unbiased conclusion.

Finally, as we could see, there are in fact several situations where the ability to understand the signals provided by the body language field can help us to incorporate another dimension in our quest to provide the best possible outcome to our cases. Neither body language nor any other technique or theory, is sufficient in itself to provide all answers to our needs; however, when combined, they can in fact be very effective.

*“Just because you can see everything, it does not mean that you can understand it all”* Dr. Gillian Foster – episode 8

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The graphic features a black background with white text and a circular icon. The icon depicts a group of stylized human figures, with one figure in the center being magnified by a magnifying glass. The background is accented with horizontal lines in blue and green.

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