

The art of lying never dies, and the biz of detection thrives

BY VLAD LAVROV
Post Staff Writer

"In a civilized and democratic society, people do have the right to lie," said Andriy Volyk from behind his desk in a small, ascetic office in an old two-star hotel on the outskirts of Kyiv. "But," he adds, "they also have the right to know the truth."

Volyk detects lies. He learned his trade at the Arizona School of Polygraph Science, and says that observing people who lie and watching how they behave has always been his hobby.

In 2000, he turned his hobby into a business. His Argo-A company sells equipment and conducts a range of tests using a polygraph, or lie detector.

His office, which is no bigger than 12 square meters, is designed simply — the walls are white, the furniture is black, and there is no evidence of a fancy renovation. The aim is to create an environment free of distractions, in which subjects feel at ease — but not too at ease.

"Some people would be intimidated by luxury...instead, they should be intimidated by the consequences of lying during the test, now that they have agreed to it," says Volyk.

The idea of polygraphists offering tea and coffee seems to him outrageous.

"It is simply wrong to be overly personal with people you test. You have to be respectful and charming, but still keep a barrier, because at one point or another during the test, you will have to put on pressure."

Most of his business in Kyiv comes from companies seeking to screen new employees. A test can cost up to \$500, and companies can learn about a potential hire's past, his reasons for seeking work, his loyalty, and his willingness to

abuse his position.

Lie detection can also be used to resolve conflicts, usually involving a theft. Volyk says his company demands a percentage of recovered funds in addition to a fixed payment.

Volyk says his business is doubling every month. He is positive that the increasing demand for his services is directly related to the recent shift to a more democratic society in Ukraine.

To him, being free to choose when to be honest is a sign of a free society. At the same time, he adds, employers have the right to know more about people

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they want to hire, even if the company is private, and not affiliated with security agencies.

All services at Argo-A require a 100 percent down payment. Volyk explains that most of his corporate clients want to hear that someone is lying. If a company wants to test 200 employees to find out who stole some money, there is always a chance the tests would show that none of them is guilty and the theft was committed by an outsider.

"In this case, anyone would be prone to look for excuses not to pay for the services provided."

Inquiring minds

Volyk has noticed one significant difference between his Ukrainian and

foreign clients. Ukrainian businesses want to know much more about their employees, while foreigners rarely go beyond the standard personality evaluation.

"It is mainly local companies that want to know about loyalty, gambling habits, suicidal thoughts and gun possession."

Alla Sokolova, business development manager of the U.S.-based Executive PowerPact HR Consulting, says her company prefers to use more ethical methods, like professional tests, competency-based interviews and assessment centers when selecting personnel for their clients. Sokolova adds that using a polygraph is not a generally accepted method for international recruitment, even though it might be justified for highly security-sensitive jobs, for example, in a banking institution.

Volyk denies that regularly testing employees is unethical or damages the working climate within a company. He cites as an example his own company, which has 14 employees. He and his deputy director routinely test one another to look for possible leaks of testing results to outsiders.

Argo-A's private clients are mainly interested in theft. The second most popular topic is marital fidelity. Volyk himself admits to testing his wife. She passed. He performed the same procedure on his sister and her fiancée before their wedding.

All of this might sound a little like an obsession, but, to Volyk, healthy obsession is the key to his success.

"It is something like being a doctor or a psychologist — you have to think about it all the time, even when you are with your family. There is no other way you can polish your skills."



Argo-A's Andriy Volyk straps a subject into a polygraph machine for an impromptu test on March 28. Volyk's corporate clients tend to be interested in screening new employees. (Post photo by Yulia Pobedinska)