

THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

Worksheet for Doug Williams | The Truth about Polygraphs and Lie Detection (Episode 291)

On old episodes of *The Twilight Zone*, Rod Serling made us aware of a fictional realm existing somewhere between science and superstition. On this episode, ex-cop Doug Williams teaches us how thousands of lives are ruined every year by a very real menace that occupies a similar space: the polygraph test. Billed as a “lie-detector,” there’s never been any scientific evidence to prove the efficacy of polygraphy in rooting out true deception — only the trappings of nervousness and anxiousness any normal person might feel under the scrutiny of intense questioning and the say-so of an “expert” who may actually be paid more by the failure than the success of any given subject.

According to Doug, polygraph accuracy is about 50 percent — the same as your average coin toss or consultation with the neon-announced psychic on the wrong side of the tracks. And while private industry in the United States is now forbidden from using polygraph testing to screen job applicants, the government relies on it and some states allow its results to be admissible in court. The thing is, with the right know-how, anybody can learn to trick the results of a polygraph test in their favor and potentially get away with murder or gain access to national secrets — just ask Edward Snowden, Aldrich Ames, or Doug Williams.

THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

A Psychological Billy Club

“The signs of fear look exactly the same for a liar afraid of being caught and a truthful person afraid of being disbelieved.” -Paul Ekman

When Doug was first trained to use the polygraph machine, he quickly identified it as a reaction recorder rather than a magic oracle that can determine with consistent accuracy whether or not its subject is being honest. About 50 percent of the time, it will conclude the subject's fingertip sweat, blood pressure variation, and rate of heartbeat to be indicative of lies, but it's equally likely these are merely symptoms of a perfectly honest subject reacting to anxiety and general nervousness at being so heavily scrutinized. In other words, the data is arbitrary, but it allows the polygraphist to manipulate it for a desired result — such as the prosecution's case that the subject is guilty of a crime in states where polygraph tests are legally admissible, or in government agencies that want to weed a subject out of the hiring process.

“I knew right from the get-go we didn't have a lie-detector here,” says Doug. “What we did have though was a legal rubber hose, a psychological billy club that I could use to great advantage to coerce and intimidate people into giving me confessions and admissions of wrongdoing, which I did for about almost six or seven thousand tests.”

If you've ever had to take a polygraph test, how accurately did it gauge your answers? If you've never had to take a polygraph test, would you agree to take one with the understanding that it's the person operating the machine — not the machine itself — that will ultimately judge the trustworthiness of your character?

THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

Who Monitors Bias?

In 1986, Doug appeared on *60 Minutes* with Diane Sawyer to prove just how much the outcome of a polygraph test is dependent on the person administering it. In all three investigations, innocent subjects were branded as guilty of a fabricated crime.

It stands to reason that if a polygraph test is heavily predicated on the person administering the test, we're going to find all sorts of bias: racism, sexism, stereotyping, in addition to letting people pass because they're either good liars or the polygraphist liked them for some reason — they were friendly or nice or charismatic — and this is troublesome on many levels.

Incidentally, while the Employee Polygraph Protection Act — forbidding the use of polygraph tests as a prerequisite for employment in the private sector — came about largely from public awareness generated by this episode of *60 Minutes*, government agencies require them. Let that sink in.

Would you agree to take a polygraph test with the understanding that it's the person operating the machine — not the machine itself — that will ultimately judge the trustworthiness of your character and potentially damage your reputation on permanent record? If so, *why*?

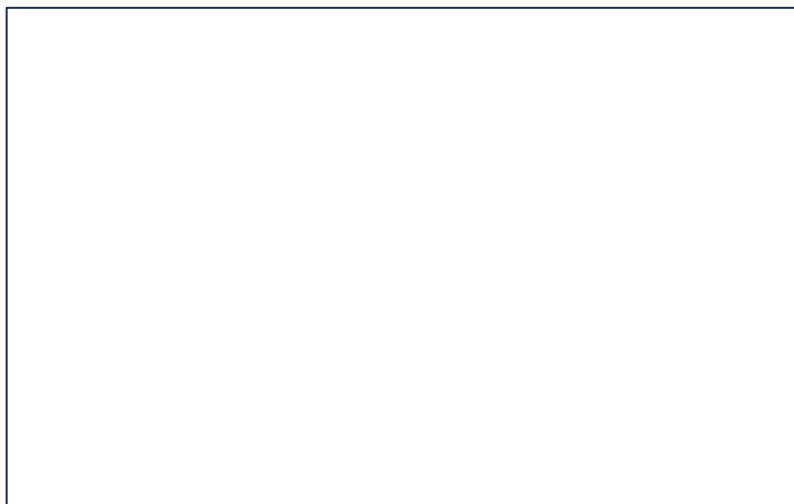
THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

When Coaching is Criminal

In 2015, Doug was sentenced to two years in federal prison for coaching prospective polygraph subjects in ways to beat the test.

“They put me out of business,” says Doug, “a perfectly legitimate business of teaching people how to control themselves. Hell, I was just teaching basically a takeoff on the Lamaze childbirth thing. Teaching them how to relax on relevant questions and show a reaction to control questions. It’s so utterly simple.”

Do you feel Doug’s punishment fit the crime — or was what he did a crime at all? If polygraph testing is inaccurate to the point of being arbitrary and its results are so easily manipulated, should it even be used in law enforcement and government? What might you suggest in its place? Feel free to drop Doug and me a line at Twitter to share your thoughts!



Full show notes and resources for this episode [can be found here](#).

THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

About



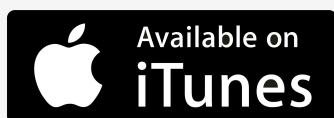
Join us as we get deep into the untapped wisdom of the world's top performers — from legendary creators to intelligence operatives, iconoclastic writers to visionary change-makers.

We deconstruct the playbooks of the most successful people on earth — and learn new strategies, perspectives, and insights you can't find anywhere else. Then, take these valuable insights into your own life and live what you listen.

THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

support@jordanharbinger.com

THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW



Share This With
Your Friends!



Share This