

# The Economic and Interpersonal Consequences of Deflecting Direct Questions

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Direct, difficult questions (e.g., Do you have other offers? How much did you make in your prior job?) pose a challenge. Respondents may incur economic costs for honestly revealing information, reputational costs for engaging in deception, and interpersonal costs, including harm to perceptions of trust and likability, for directly declining to answer the question (e.g., I would rather not answer that question.). Across four experiments, we explore the relative economic and interpersonal consequences of a fourth approach: Deflection, answering a direct question with another question. We contrast deflection with other types of responses and show that deflection can mitigate the economic costs of honest answers, the reputational costs of engaging in deception, and the interpersonal costs of directly declining to answer a question. Paradoxically, deflection works by invoking the same Gricean norm, the norm of answering a direction question, that deflection violates.

