

## **Lies, damn lies and Body talk**

'You can tell when politicians are lying' so the cynical adage goes ' because their mouths move'

Unfortunately using body language to decipher whether someone is telling the truth or lying is not quite that simple says David Leigh , a body language expert and the founder of BodyTalk a seminar company dedicated to highlighting the importance of non – verbal communication.

The ability to tell whether someone is trying to deceive you is an important life skill but in journalism it can be the difference between a good story and a ruined reputation. You can often discover more by a face to face meeting coupled with a disarming smile than you could do with hours researching on the internet.

One of the questions most frequently asked by journalist is how can you tell when the person you are interviewing is lying.

The bad news is that while there are number of indicators which could suggest that a person is 'lying through their teeth' there is no one characteristic which guarantees it. Nevertheless there are some specific factors which can help you recognise if the person you are interviewing is telling the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

### **Look for incongruity –**

Often we can tell whether someone is lying because their words and gestures don't match up. If someone says they are delighted to talk to you about a topic but at the same time they sit with their arms crossed and make little or no eye contact you are likely to pick up these incongruities and disbelieve the person's statement.

In research it has been conclusively shown that where there is a discrepancy between what someone says and their body language- in the majority of situations we believe the body talk .

### **Look in to their eyes**

The eyes are the most conspicuous channel of non-verbal communication and the one we often attach the greatest importance to . The rationale for this is that while it is possible to manipulate what we say, our eyes are a much more accurate barometer of our true feelings. Who we look at and how long we look for can reveal a substantial amount about us. For example , someone seeking to cover their feelings because they wish to hide the truth will hold eye contact for a third less time than normal. Similarly our normal blink rate is 6-8 blinks per second but this increases under pressure. This nervous

response will also result in the pupils of the eye widening. When excited or distressed the pupils of the eye will expand to four times their normal size. Hardly surprising that many professional poker players opt to wear sunglasses to avoid revealing their true hand.

### **Look for masking behaviour**

This leads on to the somewhat indelicately titled topic of 'leakage'. Try as we might we cannot **not** communicate'. Even when we try to be as unemotional or 'Poker faced' as we can our true feelings will often leak out through micro gestures, These are the smallest gestures which indicate how we really feel even though the signals themselves often last no more than nanoseconds.

These micro gestures can be as fleeting as a nervous twitch or more contrived such as a nervous cough, repeated tie straightening or scratching the nose or neck. This 'displacement activity' is used as a substitute gesture to cover the lie.

Consequently, a really accomplished liar will avoid face to face contact completely preferring instead to communicate by phone or email . And just in case you were wondering which sex makes the better liars they are equally deceptive .The only real difference appears to be in the reasons for being dishonest. Men are more likely to lie to impress others while women are more likely to lie to improve social relationships. As it is estimated that a third of our daily contact is spent deceiving others in some shape or form, the ability to detect deception is probably a skill worth perfecting!. However, a word of warning just because someone scratches their nose it doesn't prove conclusively that they were lying. It could just be that they have a itchy nose!

(695 words)

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