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The Art of Deception

by Ivor John

‘Ah good morning Mr Sutton, sorry to interrupt you, but could I have a quick word? I’m sure it’s a misunderstanding perhaps you could pop into the office. Perhaps now? If that’s convenient?’

I stifled my immediate feeling of panic. Confident that I hadn’t betrayed myself in my body language. You had to be so careful with that. People noticed, even if you didn’t yourself. Subtle clues which people could read subconsciously. We have all experienced it, that sense that something isn’t right with someone, but you couldn’t explain why. If there was a skill to what he did, then this was it, his ability to disguise his actions. It was difficult, make no mistake. When you look at a picture, you can immediately spot even the slightest slant. Everyone can, it may or may not bother you, but you will certainly notice the imperfection. Well, it’s similar with people.

‘But then, someday, the truth would come out. It always did,’ someone would say.

That is what people believe. My skill then is in concealing my true intention. The amateurs, the dilettantes so often they get this wrong. Thankfully so. They are the people whose pictures appear on social media. ‘This man ripped me off’. Or on local news stories. ‘Elderly woman in Polegate is conned out of her life savings by this woman’. They make a fundamental mistake in believing they can control how they appear. The thing is, you never can, not really. Remember the picture? The slightest bit out of true. The secret and so my skill, is not that I can conceal my body language. As we have already established, that is difficult to the point of impossible. You can manage it to an extent. Dressing appropriately, having the right accent.

I am fortunate in having a range of accents which I can use convincingly. As with all of this, it must stand scrutiny otherwise you are done. Nothing raises suspicions faster than being heard to be false. A Scottish accent always sounds very convincing. It has a warmth about it which people trust. Not Glasgow of course. It is much too harsh and reminds people of Trainspotting.

Never Liverpool or West Midlands obviously, you have to have a good memory if you do use accents. Changing from a Scots to a home counties accent would take some explaining. This is part of the reason I avoid them other than when there is a definite need to do so. Avoiding detection would be a good example. I tend to prefer a slightly coloured RP. Maybe just a hint of Essex so as not to sound suspiciously posh.

The thing with body language, 'leakage' if you will, is that you can control it to an extent, but never completely. The tell tale signs of a lie will always be there. You need to use distraction. Think of the close-up magician, the conjurer, producing coins from behind your ears and flowers from behind his back. You know there were no coins and he couldn't have flowers behind his back. But you believe the schtick. You try to work out how he has done it. But you know how he must have done it. But you still believe it. His craft is in the distraction rather than in the trick. Causing you to look elsewhere while he slips the coin from his cuff or the flowers from his sleeve. Well, it works the same for me. Distraction. So that you don't look too closely.

Being likeable is also important. People trust the people they like. So a bit of banter. People are in the main very predictable. It is often easy to see what they like.

'Apologies for detaining you and thank you for popping in Mr Sutton. I can see that I've embarrassed you. It's about your account with the hotel. For some reason your last credit card payment didn't go through. I am sure it is just a problem with the bank. But it you would give them a call to resolve it.'