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I write about leadership, body language, and professional success.

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Why We Suck At Spotting Liars

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Dianna Booher could have begun her insightful book (*“What More Can I Say?”*) (http://www.amazon.com/What-More-Can-Say-Communication/dp/0735205337/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1424557640&sr=1-1&keywords=what+more+can+i+say) with an example of the positive application of her nine principles of persuasive communication. But, instead, she tells the story of how some of these same persuasive strategies were used to by two con artists — and ended up costing her \$25,000.

Reading her account of a Hollywood producer who lied about presenting Dianna’s reality TV show proposal to a major studio, reminded me of just how easy it is to be deceived. And how smart, savvy, normally skeptical people like Dianna (and you and I) find it so difficult to spot a liar.

Recognizing that we are being lied to is an important social and business skill. But surprisingly small factors — where we meet someone, what they wear, what their voices sound like, whether their posture mimics ours, if they mention the names of people we know or admire — can enhance their credibility to the extent that it actually nullifies our ability to make sound judgments about them. Our own unconscious biases, vanities, self-deceptions and desires only add to the hijacking of our reason. When we put our faith in a co-worker we don’t really know or hire someone we haven’t properly investigated, (or give \$25,000 to a seemingly influential man), we almost always do so for reasons of which we are completely unaware.

Based on content from *“The Truth About Lies in the Workplace: How to Spot Liars and What to Do About Them,”* (http://www.amazon.com/Truth-about-Lies-Workplace-Liars/dp/1609948378/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1424557707&sr=1-1&keywords=the+truth+about+lies+in+the+workplace) here are six reasons why we suck at spotting liars:

1. We trust people just because they remind us of ourselves.

There is a well-known principle in social psychology that people define themselves in terms of social groupings: Any group that people feel part of is an “in-group” and any group that excludes them an “out-group.” (You know,

it's the "us" and "them" division.)

Similarities make us feel comfortable. We assume we know what in-group people are like – they're good people, like we are! Differences, on the other hand, make us a little wary. When we see people as part of an out-group, we are more likely to judge them as untrustworthy. Deceivers with whom we have things in common are much more likely to gain our trust – regardless of how little they may deserve it.

2. We disbelieve people who act "inappropriately."

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Has Your Collaboration Strategy Fallen Into The 'Say-Do' Gap?

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Last year, I spoke on “The Power of Collaborative Leadership” to business audiences in The United Arab Emirates, Scotland, England, The Netherlands, Belgium, Canada and four states of the U.S. Audience members represented industries including engineering, manufacturing, retailing, construction, shipping, technology, energy, utilities, printing, pharmaceuticals and consulting – plus a range of government agencies.

After my programs, I asked audiences to fill out questionnaires that would give me a sense of their enthusiasm for and commitment to the idea of better collaboration as essential for corporate performance. I found plenty of enthusiasm and no end of commitment – but it soon became clear that however sincerely people wanted more collaboration, they weren’t very sure how to get it. The “Say-Do” gap had opened before them.

My first question asked for participants to rate on a scale of 1-to-10, the importance of greater collaboration to their organizations. Eighty-seven percent gave ratings of 8-10, 13 per cent said 7-10, and only two of the 286 who participated gave ratings 6-10 or lower. Accompanying comments were equally upbeat:

“Collaboration is one of our corporate values.”

“Our focus is *Working Together to Make it Happen.*”

“We have a *One Team* motto.”

Those responses told me that my audiences had already faced up to the complex, ever-shifting ocean of change that characterizes today’s corporate world, and that they had now largely agreed that the untapped potential of collective brainpower across the organization was an essential ingredient for greater success in the future. So far so good . . .

But then, in response to my next question about implementation, uncertainty and skepticism began to surface:

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