

FORMER CIA OFFICERS TEACH YOU
HOW TO DETECT DECEPTION

SPY THE LIE



PHILIP HOUSTON, MICHAEL FLOYD,
AND SUSAN CARNICERO

WITH DON TENNANT

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ICON

***For those who have sacrificed in service to a noble
cause***

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DON TENNANT'S PERSONAL ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I have the immense good fortune of living on the grounds of Green Acre Bahá'í School in Eliot, Maine, where values like truthfulness form the foundation of the school's very existence. My wife, Ardith, is on the staff here, so I'm able to live and work in an environment that fosters a deep appreciation for the inherent nobility of mankind. It was a gift to be able to help write this book in a setting where our flaws as human beings are recognized as hurdles that face us all. So it's a good place to be if you find yourself writing about situations in which people are tested with the choice to be truthful or untruthful. There is no inclination to judge or to cast any stones, because there are routine reminders that we're all in this thing together, and that we all have work to do to get to where we need to be. I want to express my sincere gratitude to all of our friends here at Green Acre, and in the greater Eliot community, for that cherished gift, and for their encouragement and support along the way.

When I consider everything that has happened in my life, and everyone who played a role in making my involvement with this book possible, my thoughts keep going back to my family. My kids—Ardith (named after her grandma, making her the third in a row), Don (yes, our first two kids had our names—just let it go), Dan, and Shelly—have given me more than I could ever give them in ten lifetimes of being their Daddy. They each have qualities that I hope I have when I grow up. Finally, and most precious of all, my beloved wife taught me what it means to truly love

someone, and to truly be loved by someone. She is, and will always be, my angel.

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Our World

Imagine that it's the late afternoon of September 11, 2001. Rescue crews are dealing with the unthinkable amid the massive heap of acrid rubble at Ground Zero in New York, where the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center stood that morning. The wreckage of United Airlines Flight 93 has turned a peaceful field near Shanksville, Pennsylvania, into a horrifying disaster site. The charred gash in the northwest face of the Pentagon, just minutes up the George Washington Parkway from where you and your colleagues are still coming to grips with what has happened, is smoldering. The United States of America is under attack.

You're not unlike the hundreds of millions of your fellow citizens of America and the world who are trying to come to grips with the same thing. Just about all the emotions are the same. The difference is that you're an officer with the Central Intelligence Agency, and you have unique skills that will be tapped to help determine the source of the attack, the nature of the immediate threat to the nation, and our country's best chances for preventing a recurrence. Welcome to our world.

The three of us came into this world from entirely different directions, and from vastly different backgrounds. The common denominator was the combination of a fascination with human nature, and a conviction that untruthfulness lies at the heart of all too many of the

problems we face as individuals, as a nation, and as a global community.

Phil Houston was a career CIA officer, whose years of experience as an Agency polygraph examiner positioned him not only for senior-level assignments overseeing internal investigations and the security of CIA personnel and facilities, but for the creation of that unique skill set, born of hundreds of interviews and noncoercive interrogations, that the country would be tapping at one of the most dire hours in its history. Michael Floyd's CIA service was preceded by a separate career as a private-sector polygraph expert. He provided training for polygraph examiners in the CIA and throughout the public and private sectors, and conducted polygraph examinations in hundreds of criminal investigations, many of them high-profile cases. Susan Carnicero, an expert in criminal psychology, was a CIA operative under deep cover before coming in from the cold and serving as a polygraph examiner and personnel screening specialist. Eventually, we shared an overarching, driving passion: to be able to know whether or not a person is telling the truth.

The deception-detection methodology we will share with you in this book has its roots in the polygraph-examination experience—an experience that can ascertain a person's truthfulness quite effectively when administered by a skilled examiner. Our methodology can be employed with a degree of effectiveness that equates to or even surpasses what is achieved by means of a polygraph.

Phil was the principal architect of the methodology, which was developed within the CIA for applications that were Agency-specific, and that cannot be shared here due to the need to protect CIA sources and methods. But its effectiveness became so quickly and widely recognized that the broader intelligence community and federal law enforcement agencies sought and received training in the methodology. The three of us have since worked together to further its development and to fine-tune it for a wider range of applications.

The event that cleared the way for us to share the methodology with you took place in 1996, when Phil and several of his colleagues in the CIA's Office of Security received the Agency's permission to provide the training to the private sector. While much of its application within the intelligence community was clearly classified, the methodology itself was determined to be unclassified, so there was no reason the training couldn't be made available to outside interests. Susan, who would become the lead instructor in the methodology within the Agency, joined the outside effort a short time later. Since then, the three of us have provided the training to hundreds of organizations, from Wall Street clients, corporate enterprises, and law firms, to nonprofits, academic institutions, and local law-enforcement agencies.

Still, we recognized that the applicability of the model is so universal that there remained a massive audience that we could never hope to reach through our training programs. So we decided that the next logical step was to

introduce the model to people everywhere who could use it in everyday life—at work, at home, and at school. That's where you come in.

You, like everyone else, routinely have questions, the answers to which have a meaningful impact on your life. Is your boss being completely up front about those projections for the next two quarters and why it behooves everybody to stick around rather than bolt to a competitor? Is your significant other being straight with you about having done nothing more last night than hook up with a couple of friends for a drink? Is your child being honest when he assures you that he has never experimented with drugs? Other questions may be less personally consequential, but you still want the answers: Does that quarterback mean it this time when he says he's not coming back next season? Is that politician being truthful when she says she's not going to run for president?

Imagine that you were able to identify deception in response to these and the countless other questions like them that arise all around you every day—that you were successful in developing skills that take you to what we call the “spy-the-lie moment.” Welcome to your new world.

1.

The Difficulty We Have in Calling Someone a Liar

People do not believe lies because they have to, but because they want to.

—Malcolm Muggeridge

It appeared that Phil had drawn the long straw that day. The foreign asset he was scheduled to meet at a downtown hotel in a country that can't be identified due to the sensitive nature of the CIA's work there had served the Agency well for twenty years, and his loyalty was thought to have been proven. The asset, whom we'll call "Omar," had been questioned by CIA personnel on numerous occasions over the years in debriefings and routine security interviews, and his credibility was reinforced with every encounter. Omar had earned his stripes as a trusted partner who was prepared to carry out the mission whenever he was called upon.

Phil and an Office of Security colleague had been dispatched from their home base at Langley a couple of weeks earlier to conduct routine interviews with key assets in several countries in the region. Just like the CIA employees themselves, these assets had to be regularly interviewed to ensure that they continued to meet the Agency's stringent security requirements. The work was interesting—it was always a welcome change to get out into the field—but grueling. These interviews could be

extraordinarily intense and could go on for hours if an asset showed any sign of deception under questioning.

A stickler for doing his homework, Phil reviewed Omar's file like he was preparing to coach his beloved East Carolina University Pirates in a game against Virginia Tech. He studied accounts of Omar's past activities as if he were watching game film, trying to pick up any obscure detail or nuance that would help ensure a win. When he finally closed the file, he basked in his good fortune. This one was going to be easy. Omar was obviously squeaky clean.

Phil's colleague caught him at the door as he was leaving their secured location to conduct the interview with Omar.

"Hey, I guess you're not gonna be around to get some dinner later, huh?"

"Oh yeah, I will—this one's a piece of cake," Phil assured him. "I'll be there in two hours."

His colleague was clearly skeptical. "No way," he said.

"Look, I finally got lucky," Phil insisted. "I know I've had a ton of tough ones lately, but this one's different. This guy's been looked at by so many of our guys that there really just isn't anything to worry about. Two hours."

Phil headed for the prearranged site of the meeting, a guest room in a high-rise hotel in the middle of town. Just getting Omar to the hotel was a clandestine operation in itself, a carefully choreographed plan that had been carried out with exacting precision to protect Omar from discovery by hostile intelligence services. When Phil and Omar were securely settled in the designated room—a suite with a comfortable sitting area on one of the higher floors—the

two engaged in cordial conversation, and then Phil got down to business.

Phil sat on the sofa, and invited Omar to have a seat in the adjacent easy chair. With hundreds of similar interviews under his belt, Phil had the drill thoroughly rehearsed. He was relaxed, but businesslike, as he began to go through the prepared list of standard questions. Not surprisingly, Omar responded to them directly and comfortably—Phil could see that after twenty years Omar, too, knew the drill.

“You’ve worked for us for years,” Phil acknowledged. “Have you ever worked for anybody else?”

It was an easygoing way of confronting this longtime, trusted asset with the question that had to be asked: Had he ever worked for the bad guys? What happened next stunned Phil.

Omar shifted in his seat, paused, and with visible discomfort responded with a question: “Can I pray?”

Phil felt like a quarterback who’d gotten creamed from behind as he scrambled out of the pocket. *Whoa. Where did THAT come from?* He had absolutely no expectation of seeing that behavior from Omar. And yet there it was.

“Sure, no problem,” Phil said, still recovering from the wallop. He expected Omar to bow his head for a few moments, and then proceed with his response. So what came next was even more puzzling.

Omar got up from the chair and went into the bathroom, and returned with a towel. Whatever this guy was doing, Phil was thinking, it wasn’t good. And it simply didn’t make any sense. Omar’s unblemished record and Phil’s certainty

that he hadn't been lying in the interview to that point meant there had to be a reasonable explanation for Omar's actions.

Omar approached the window as Phil scrambled to make sense of what was happening. *What is this guy doing? Is he going to try to signal somebody with the towel? How bad is this going to get?* And then it dawned on him. Omar is Muslim. He was at the window to get his bearings so he could pray in the direction of Mecca. Muslims pray at set times throughout the day, and maybe this was one of those times.

Sure enough, Omar carefully spread the towel on the floor to use it as a prayer rug, and prostrated himself on it. As Omar prayed, Phil's mind was whirling, and he began to second-guess himself. Had he said anything to offend Omar? Had he been disrespectful of Omar's faith? He couldn't help but hope that it was his handling of the interview, not Omar's actions, that were problematic. After all, Omar was a key asset of the local CIA operation. If Phil were to go back with the claim that a source who had been trusted for so many years and cleared by so many previous interviewers was bad, the head of the local operation was likely to want Phil's scalp, not Omar's. Beyond all that, Phil was getting hungry, and the dinner appointment he promised he would keep was approaching. No one wanted to believe that Omar was clean more than Phil did.

After praying for about ten minutes, Omar arose, folded the towel, and returned to his seat. As Phil gathered his thoughts to resume the interview, he recognized that he

was being swayed by his own bias in wanting to believe Omar, rather than sticking to an objective assessment of Omar's behavior. There was only one thing to do: hit him with the question again.

The response was hardly what Phil was hoping for. Omar paused and shifted his feet uneasily. "Why are you asking me this?" he protested. "Is there a concern?"

If there wasn't before, there was now. Omar's verbal and nonverbal behavior in response to the question told Phil it was time to shift into elicitation mode. Calling upon his well-honed skills in nonconfrontational interrogation, Phil became something of a human GPS, navigating to a predetermined destination: a confession.

Phil reached his destination sooner than even he expected. In less than an hour, Omar admitted that he had been working for an enemy intelligence service for the full twenty years that he had served as a CIA asset.

Still, Phil's job wasn't over. Instead, it took an essential twist. Now he had to be assured that Omar was telling the truth when he claimed to have been working for the bad guys all those years. Remaining squarely in interrogation mode, Phil began asking questions to elicit information that would corroborate Omar's confession. With the truth he managed to conceal for two decades finally exposed, Omar recounted how for years he had to pretend to be a novice when he underwent CIA training—more often than not, he had already received the same training from the bad guys. He began to go into explicit detail about some of his

successes against the Americans. One of his accomplishments was particularly chilling.

The individuals who hold the keys to the secrets of any CIA operation anywhere in the world are the communications officers. They are the ones who handle all the message traffic between their post, CIA HQ, and other CIA posts worldwide. They have access to the CIA's ultrasensitive communications network and every classified document that's transmitted to or from their post. If hostile intelligence services see the personnel at a CIA post as a potential gold mine of information, the comms officers are the mother lode.

Omar, it turned out, had gotten disturbingly close to the communications personnel at the nearby CIA post. The location had two comms officers who shared a house and employed a servant from the local population. Omar had scored a major win by gaining eyes and ears inside the comms officers' residence: he recruited the servant.

That revelation came as another body blow to Phil, who was well aware of the damage that such a compromise could inflict. This time, the impact was swiftly moderated. Omar went on to confide in Phil that after only a couple of months, the servant abruptly and unexpectedly quit his job at the comms officers' home. When Omar went to his handler to deliver the bad news, the handler, a former competitive weight lifter, was so incensed that he picked up a chair and broke it with his bare hands. Omar told Phil he had no idea of the value the bad guys placed on having an asset within the comms officers' living quarters, and he

began to fear for his own safety when the handler got in his face and began screaming uncontrollably at him.

Phil nodded attentively and compassionately as Omar unloaded it all. Inside, he was exhilarated. He had missed plenty of dinner appointments with far less consolation.

It was dawn when Phil wrapped up the interview. Omar went on his way, no doubt well aware that measures were firmly in place to ensure that the necessary follow-up on his case could proceed. Phil went back to the CIA facility and immediately cabled Langley. The revelation of Omar's duplicity was received with near disbelief. How could this have happened? How was Omar able to keep the masquerade intact all those years?

Phil was beginning to grasp the answers. Deception, he well knew, could be unyieldingly difficult to detect. He knew he had come perilously close to blowing it himself in that hotel suite with Omar. He recognized how much he wanted to believe this guy—he found himself looking for reasons to believe him, blaming himself for his insensitivity to Omar's religious beliefs and practices. It was only when he disciplined himself to adhere to a systematic, objective approach to the interview that he prevailed.

That systematic approach was crystallizing in Phil's mind. It was a work in progress, an amalgamation of the training he had received and the attention he gave to the behaviors he had observed in the course of conducting hundreds of interviews. He seemed to have a knack for assessing human behavior, and it was becoming more acute all the time. There was a gut feeling at work, yet it was more than

that. There was a cognitive analysis going on, an almost imperceptible, subconscious cataloging of verbal and nonverbal behaviors exhibited in response to the questions Phil would ask. And those behaviors were beginning to coalesce into an approach to detecting deception that was proving to be extraordinarily effective. Phil was transforming his knack into a quantifiable, replicable set of skills. He had no way of knowing at the time that that transformation would ultimately lead to a methodology for distinguishing truth from deception that officers throughout intelligence and law enforcement communities, and ultimately people from all walks of life in the private sector, would be trained to use.

2.

Navigating the Deception-Detection Obstacle Course

The greatest problem in communication is the illusion that it has been accomplished.

—Daniel W. Davenport

There is no such thing as a human lie detector. Let us be clear that we certainly don't think of ourselves that way. No individual on the planet can know beyond question whether what someone says is a lie, unless it's contrary to what that individual already knows to be true. If someone tells you he was an assistant coach with the Washington Redskins under head coach Mike Shanahan in 2008 and 2009, and you happen to know that Shanahan wasn't hired by the Redskins until 2010, you know that the person has told you a lie. If you don't know Mike Shanahan from Mike Ditka, and you have no clue who coaches the Redskins, you have no way of knowing at that moment whether the person is lying. Nothing in this book, or any other book, will change that.

What we can do, however, is give you some tools that have proven in countless situations to be remarkably effective at detecting lies, and we can show you how to use them. Think of those tools as the means of applying the systematic approach that Phil was developing in the course of conducting those hundreds of interviews and interrogations for the CIA—an approach that was