



Spy the Lie: Former CIA Officers Teach You How to Detect Deception

By Philip Houston, Michael Floyd, Susan Carnicero, Don Tennant

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Three former CIA officers—among the world's foremost authorities on recognizing deceptive behavior—share their proven techniques for uncovering a lie

Imagine how different your life would be if you could tell whether someone was lying or telling you the truth. Be it hiring a new employee, investing in a financial interest, speaking with your child about drugs, confronting your significant other about suspected infidelity, or even dating someone new, having the ability to unmask a lie can have far-reaching and even life-altering consequences.

As former CIA officers, Philip Houston, Michael Floyd, and Susan Carnicero are among the world's best at recognizing deceptive behavior. *Spy the Lie* chronicles the captivating story of how they used a methodology Houston developed to detect deception in the counterterrorism and criminal investigation realms, and shows how these techniques can be applied in our daily lives.

Through fascinating anecdotes from their intelligence careers, the authors teach readers how to recognize deceptive behaviors, both verbal and nonverbal, that we all tend to display when we respond to questions untruthfully. For the first time, they share with the general public their methodology and their secrets to the art of asking questions that elicit the truth.

Spy the Lie is a game-changer. You may never read another book that has a more dramatic impact on your career, your relationships, or your future.

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Editorial Review

Review

“This book is both entertaining and highly informative—and it’s the real deal. It gives readers genuine practical tools and tactics to use in all walks of life. I highly recommend it.”

—David J. Lieberman, Ph.D., *New York Times* bestselling author of *Never Be Lied to Again*

“For many years, Phil and his team have employed their skills to vet terrorist sources, catch spies, and protect the nation’s secrets. With this book, they have done something perhaps even more remarkable: Equip anyone to reliably detect deception. Consciously or not, we all judge others’ sincerity and truthfulness to protect ourselves. Most of us do it badly. This book will teach you to do it well.”

—Robert Grenier, chairman of ERG Partners, former director of the CIA Counter-Terrorism Center

"In this entertaining, instructive, and fascinating book, Phil, Michael, and Susan lay out an easy-to-follow process for detecting deception, with real-life stories that are the stuff of spy novels. I have used their model for years with phenomenal results.”

—Marisa R. Randazzo, Ph.D., managing partner at SIGMA Threat Management Associates, former chief research psychologist, U.S. Secret Service

“A terrific resource for anyone who would love to be able to tell when someone is lying. Having undergone their training, I’ve applied their methodology in some critical situations, and I’ve been blown away by its effectiveness. *Spy the Lie* is a captivating read with practical takeaway you’ll use every day.”

—John Miller, senior correspondent at CBS News, former associate deputy director of National Intelligence, and former assistant director for public affairs at the FBI

“When my detectives on the LAPD’s Counterterrorism Bureau and Robbery-Homicide Division took the course, we had veteran investigators tell us, ‘No one should ever be promoted to the rank of detective without taking this course,’ and ‘I now want to go back and re-interview every suspect I ever questioned.’

What this team has developed is truly unique, and anyone can learn to use it.”

—Bill Bratton, chairman of Kroll Associates, former LAPD chief, former NYPD and Boston Police Department police commissioner

About the Author

Philip Houston, a twenty-five-year veteran of the Central Intelligence Agency and a recipient of the Career Intelligence Medal, is a nationally recognized authority on deception detection, critical interviewing, and elicitation. He has conducted thousands of interviews and interrogations for the CIA and other federal agencies, and is credited with developing a detection of deception methodology currently employed throughout the U.S. intelligence and federal law enforcement communities.

Michael Floyd is a leading authority on interviewing, detection of deception, and elicitation in cases involving criminal activity, personnel screening, and national security issues. In a career spanning more than thirty-five years, he has served in both the CIA and the National Security Agency, and founded Advanced Polygraph Services, where he conducted high-profile interviews and interrogations for law enforcement agencies, law firms, and private industry.

Susan Carnicero, a former security officer with the CIA specializing in national security, employment, and criminal issues, is an eminent authority on interviewing, detection of deception, and elicitation. Trained as a forensic psychologist, she is the developer of a behavioral screening program used extensively in both the public and private sectors, and is currently involved in conducting high-level screening interviews within the U.S. government.

Don Tennant is a former National Security Agency analyst and business/technology journalist. As editor in chief of *Computerworld*, he won a variety of national journalism awards, including the Timothy White Award for Editorial Integrity and the Jesse H. Neal National Business Journalism Award from American Business Media.

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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 numerable 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, Langley, 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 ha...

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