



# People Lie More Often By Email Than Face-To-Face



Keld Jensen April 7th, 2020

## Honesty and the Internet: Are You Being Virtually Lied To?

Have you ever lied? Most likely, the honest answer to that question is yes. I would even suggest that anyone answering no is actually lying!

Unfortunately, people lie. In fact, research has found that many people lie quite a bit – and perhaps surprisingly, that they lie more often in emails and on social media than in face-to-face encounters.

In the business arena, studies have shown that on average, people engaged in negotiations lie once in every fifth negotiation which lasts longer than ten minutes. That means that in the course of any negotiation lasting 50 minutes or more, it's a near certainty that you'll be lied to at least once.

An even greater cause for concern is this: when a negotiation is conducted online rather than in person, the probability of a lie being told increases by a factor of five.

## Trust is at the lowest level

So whether the context is business or social, a person is more prone to falsehood when physically and psychologically distant from the person with whom he is communicating – that’s according to a study conducted by Mattitiyahu Zimbler and Robert S. Feldman of the University of Massachusetts.

In a personal survey of 5,500 executives, I found that 49% felt it was occasionally necessary to lie during a negotiation. Three percent considered that being untruthful was required in any negotiation.

In an article for Forbes, I described how trust in our society had recently been measured at its lowest level in the past 50 years. That measurement represents trust between individuals, between organizations, and between individuals and organizations. One of the reasons for such a decline is that we’ve come to believe and expect that others will be dishonest with us.



## Cash based honesty

Also, as mentioned earlier, our interactions with others are increasingly conducted over the Internet – and the more web-oriented we become, the more our trust and honesty decline.

In another interesting study, a group of students was told they would receive cash for every question answered correctly on a 50-question test – one dollar bill for every right answer. They were also to self-evaluate the test – no one else would verify their answers

A similar group of student was given an identical test, but instead of cash for each correct answer, they would receive a token valued at one dollar, which they could redeem in the school cafeteria for whatever they wanted. Once again, they would be grading their own tests, with no outside verification.





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## Business is Between Individuals

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The results were revealing: The first group of students (the cash-reward group) averaged 39 out of 50 correct answers. The second group (rewarded with tokens) scored an average of 48 correct answers. Either the second group was far smarter than the first, or they were more strongly motivated to cheat!



We conducted a similar study in a college dorm, where we placed six cans of Coke in a communal fridge. Returning a week later, we found all six cans were gone. Obviously someone had stolen them. Next we placed a glass stuffed with one-dollar bills in the same fridge. When we returned the following week, all the cash was still there!

Apparently, then, human beings tend to be more honest in transactions and situations where cash is physically present, seen and felt. The further away we get from cash – such as in online transactions – the lower our inclination to honesty.

I always laugh when I read that Company X has made a deal with Company Y. That never happens. Two companies cannot and will not make deals with each other. Mr. Smith of Company X makes a deal with Ms. Woon of Company Y. Perhaps the deal wouldn't have happened if Mr. Smith had been replaced by Mr. Hanson – if Mr. Hanson hadn't inspired the same degree of trust as Mr. Smith, negotiations might have collapsed.

# The Web, the World, and Trust

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Think about the great and increasing number of transactions and negotiations being conducted virtually, with no direct interpersonal contact – not even a handshake. Online auctions, proposals, requests for proposals, etc., occurring by the millions every day without the parties involved ever meeting. No direct conversation or observation, no chance to establish trust. Business-wise we are becoming more and more distant and detached, despite our greatly expanded virtual connections via social media.



Video on trust

Social media can be a powerful force, but they do not foster greater trust or honesty – quite the reverse!

One of the world's lowest-ranking countries in terms of trust is the USA. In such a geographically expansive country, physical distances often make virtual communication the preferred method, saving travel time and costs. By contrast, one of the very highest measured trust levels is found in Denmark: a tiny country where physical distances are easily crossed, and meetings are simple and inexpensive to arrange.

## Conclusion

In your own business dealings, work toward making face-to-face meetings and direct communication more the rule than the exception – especially for high-stakes discussions and negotiations, and at the beginnings of business relationships.

As to your own honesty, one of my long-time mentors often repeated this sage bit of advice: “If you always tell the truth, you don't have to remember what you just said”

## Here is a small example of how trust (or lack of it)

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I married a beautiful American citizen. The complexities of planning a wedding in the U.S. have been like what you might expect for the merging of two sizable corporations. The vendor contracts, meetings and negotiations seem endless.

I discovered that in the U.S., even vendors with only minor roles to play – with estimated charges as little as \$450 – required a contract, and a down payment of 50% or more, the remainder to be paid 60 days prior to the wedding.

Their reason? They want to be very sure they get paid. But wait a minute – how are the groom and bride (or their parents) to be confident the service will be delivered, with full payment already rendered two months before the big day?

Now let's compare this with a wedding in Denmark. There would be no contracts to sign. Down payment for goods and services would ordinarily be no higher than 30% – and the remainder would not be due until after delivery.

### Can You Spot a Liar?



I am often asked if it's possible to identify a person who is lying. The answer is yes, in most cases. We can detect a lie with approximately 90% accuracy through observation of nonverbal behavior – body language. The 10% miss occurs largely when we're dealing face to face with a sociopath.

In order to detect lie-betraying body language, the person we're observing has to be aware that he or she is lying! Sociopaths often believe their own lies – so there are no non-verbal signals to indicate untruth.



# Center for Negotiation

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## Keld Jensen



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KELD JENSEN is an internationally recognized expert and advisor on business, communications and negotiation. He works with governments and major corporations in applying the techniques of SMARTnership negotiation, while maintaining a busy teaching schedule at top-ranked universities around the world. Mr. Jensen has made more than 200 international TV appearances, and contributes regularly to Forbes magazine, reaching more than 2.8 million readers.

His corporate clients include Vestas, Novo Nordisk, LEGO, Johnson & Johnson, Carlsberg Group, Siemens, Rolls-Royce, SAB Miller, Bang & Olufsen; he has also worked extensively with UNICEF and several national governments.

A prolific author, Keld has written 24 books to date, with his works available in more than 38 countries. In 2016 he was named as one of the world's Top 100 Thought Leaders in Trust. In 2017 his concept of SMARTnership won the Best Negotiation/tender award by The Organization of Public Procurement officers and the same year he received the prestigious Innovation Award from The International Association of Contract and Commercial Management organization.