



Contact: Jeffrey Hansler, CSP (714) 960-7461 (810 words)

jhansler@oxfordco.com

<http://www.oxfordco.com>

Bad Boys ***Keep yourself from getting conned***

By Jeffrey Hansler, CSP

Con artists, "bad boys", people that want to steal from you. How do you recognize a con artist? What are the telltale signs that let you know you're about to be conned? How do you protect yourself from these people?

Recognizing a con artist from looks or words is very hard to do. These people are experts at communication, and because they are not worried about products or employees or developing relationships, they have a great deal of time to spend learning how to manipulate others.

It is nearly impossible to point a finger at a person and say, "That is a con artist." Why? Because there are many "well meaning and good" experts at communication. The only separation between a good communicator and an effective con artist is the purpose of their communication. A doctor that is a good communicator may help you override your fears for a necessary operation. An effectively communicating quack can be just as persuasive in talking you into an unnecessary operation for the sole purpose of making them money. Unless you are a medical expert, it's almost impossible to tell the difference from the conversation.



So what are some visible signs that you're being conned if you can't tell from the individual or the conversation. You can look at the environment and lifestyle of the person (or group of people) to provide clues that a con game is going on. Although con artists may try to appear to be upstanding businesses (investment firms, banks, medical facilities, manufacturers, real estate owners...), there are visible clues stemming from a lack of congruency. The following are indicators of a possible con.

First of all, the "promise" seems too good to be true or it promises something for nothing. In nature, nothing is free, everything requires energy from some other source. A higher rate of return must always be associated with greater risk. A high rate of return guaranteed and without risk is the first indication of a con. This was the first indication of the Lincoln Savings investment misrepresentations.

Second, the opportunity is presented as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that must be acted upon now. In nature, such once-in-a-lifetime opportunities happen without prior notice or large numbers of people. A clear indication of a false opportunity is a glossy publication foretelling a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to make a fortune. When a company makes every effort and spares no expense to make themselves look permanent and long term just to offer you a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity something doesn't fit. Someone will come up short, and that someone will most likely be you.

Third, when you find your motivation, your reason for taking action, is the fear of missing out, you are often being invited into a con game. Whenever you get the feeling that you are no longer satisfied with what you have, and that you suddenly want more at the expense of something you currently own, and you feel that success is just one easy decision away, chances are you are in the hands of a con artist.

So how does a con artist get you to do what they want? First, they find out what motivates you at the core level. Literally, they find out your fears and desires. They play with these fears throwing them at you and watching how you respond. They watch your reactions and learn to guide you to act in the way they desire through your emotions.



For example, if I say "Don't think of a blue elephant", what do you think of? A blue elephant. If I say, "Don't worry about the security of your family", what is a natural reaction? This statement becomes even more powerful when it follows a story of a similar situation of a "friend" that just died and his kids had to go to foster homes because there wasn't enough money to support them. In the hands of a con artist, you may spend a great deal of money to buy a product promising security for your family.

How do you protect yourself from con artists? Learn to trust your feelings. At the subconscious level, you pick up information from body language, choice of words, and the environment that you translate into feelings. Trust these feelings.

Never invest more than you're willing to lose into anything. If you do lose it, it can be a learning experience, not a financial crisis.

Be honest with yourself. If you feel that you are getting into something out of a fear of loss, stop.

Learn about communication. Just because your heart beats and your blood flows, it doesn't mean you understand medicine. Likewise, just because you talk all the time, it doesn't mean you understand communication.

Trust in nature. In the long run, the good always prevails - it's just natural (although the road can get very bumpy along the way).

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Jeffrey Hansler is a professional speaker, author, and consultant. He is a frequent speaker at association events and is the author of Sell *Little Red Hen! Sell!* He can be reached at jhansler@oxfordco.com.

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