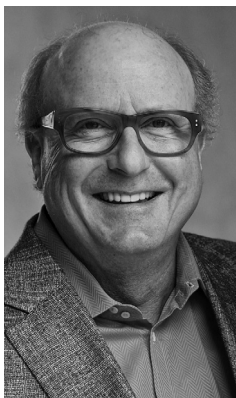


What They Really Meant



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It would be a very different world if people responded to what others really meant rather than to what they actually said. Everyone understands this distinction intuitively since it is at the very core of our inborn social instinct. Humans are born without much of a cortex, which is the part of our brain that does the real thinking. But even without a cortex babies are born with the ability to read their parent's minds by making eye contact and interpreting facial expressions, and this ability only improves with age. This extra nonverbal information is called prosody or body language. It is often said that something like 90% of the information that humans exchange is nonverbal, which is nonsense. There is nothing like language for conveying a lot of information rapidly, and that is exactly how we do it; by talking. But prosody helps us interpret what people *really* mean by whatever it is they happen to actually say.

Consider the common phrase "*Yeah, right.*" Depending on the tone of voice, facial expression, posture and other subtle indicators this could mean either that the speaker agrees or that they disagree. Even when all the nonverbal indicators line up, you still need to consider the possibility that the speaker is either lying or mistaken, for which you rely on your assessment of their character, intelligence, motives, intentions and circumstances. While this assessment is going on, the polite thing is to respond to whatever people actually *say* rather than what you know they really *mean*, so people often wind up having diplomatic exchanges rather than genuine conversations. This approach may avoid conflict but it is usually impossible to resolve serious interpersonal issues without speaking plainly about them. It would be a very different world if people responded to what others really meant rather than to what they actually said. Trust me. Call me.

Concise Personal Counseling

\$150 per 70-minute session

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