

HUMAN CHEATCODES · FREE CHAPTER

The Unfair Advantage

Chapter One

You've Been Playing One Game

Read anyone before they speak. Spot the games. Stop getting played.

humancheatcodes.org

CHAPTER ONE

You've Been Playing One Game

"The whole room laughed. I was the joke, and I laughed too."

"I found out about the weekend from a photo. I liked the photo."

"He started with 'do me a favour'. I'd said yes before he finished the sentence."

"I knew I was right. I still opened with 'I might be wrong, but—'."

"He only calls when he needs something. I always pick up."

"The smile switched off the second she turned away. I told myself I imagined it."

"I said it. Nobody heard. He said it. Everyone nodded. I nodded too."

"Thirty years and I do all the ringing. I rang again on Tuesday."

"He was suddenly lovely to me on the Friday. I found out why on the Monday."

"I got talked over. When I got back in I started with 'sorry, just quickly'."

"He made me the punchline again. I retold the story myself later."

"He replies to everyone within the hour and me in three days. I still reply in two minutes."

"Somebody insulted me politely. I thanked them."

"They stopped inviting me. I still say yes the moment they do."

"She told me what everyone else was saying about me. I thanked her for the heads up."

"I rehearsed the whole conversation in the car. Then said none of it."

"I had the perfect answer an hour later, in the shower, on my own."

Every one of those people knows they lost something.

Not one of them can tell you where.

That's the shape of it, and it's why it goes on for years. It isn't that you can't see it. It's that you can see it and can't name it — and a thing with no name can't be raised, can't be proved, can't be argued. Eventually you stop being sure you saw it.

So you let it go. And then you start wondering whether you're the one making it up.

You're not.

You've been in rooms where two things were happening and you were only told about one of them. That's not a character flaw. That's an information problem, and information problems are fixable.

Everyone starts with the face. The eyes. The mouth. The smile that comes too fast. What it means when someone's gaze drops while you're mid-sentence.

Fine. Start there. I'll give you the two signals in that category I'd actually put money on. Then I'll tell you why nearly everything else you've been shown about faces is worthless, and name some of it.

Two minutes. Then we get to what actually moves.

Everyone teaches you where the eyes go. Almost nobody teaches the part that carries information: what happens the second after someone looks away from you.

This one comes from a theatre director, not a psychologist, and I'll say so up front. Keith Johnstone spent years teaching actors to play status on stage and noticed something his students could feel instantly and had never been able to name.

Watch for the glance back.

Someone breaks eye contact, then flicks their eyes back to yours a beat later. That flick is a question. They're checking — did that land, are we alright, are you still with me. The glance back belongs to someone whose position in the room isn't settled yet.

Then there's the other kind. They break eye contact and don't come back. No check, no flick. They look away like the matter's closed and let the silence sit.

That's not rudeness and it's usually not deliberate. That's someone who isn't asking.

Johnstone's actors could produce either on command inside an hour. That's how mechanical it is once you can see it.

You'll have heard a real smile reaches the eyes. That one's genuinely old — a French neurologist called Duchenne worked it out in the 1860s, which is why the muscle still carries his name. It's true. It's also hard to read on a stranger across a table.

Use timing instead. Easier, and it's where the research is clearest.

A real smile is slow at both ends. It lands a beat late, the face catching up to the feeling, and it fades rather than stops. Researchers measuring this frame by frame find spontaneous smiles come on smooth and go off smooth, usually running half a second to four seconds.

A social smile is fast at both ends. Instant, full strength, gone. On,

off. The face underneath completely unchanged — a blind going up and straight back down. Deliberate smiles show a sharper onset and a more abrupt, often lopsided exit.

The arrival is easy to fake. Almost nobody manages the exit, because nobody knows they're performing the exit.

So stop watching the smile. Watch the second after it, when the face thinks the job's done.

Notice what those two have in common, because it's the rule that separates them from the hundred you've scrolled past.

Both are timing — what a face does once it thinks it's finished. Nobody rehearses an exit. That's why timing survives scrutiny.

Everything else you've been sold is position. A hand here. Arms like this. Eyes that way. And here's what the research actually says about position: there is no single body movement that reliably indicates deception. None. Joe Navarro spent twenty-five years in FBI counterintelligence and says it plainly in his own books. Aldert Vrij has spent a career measuring these cues and finds them weak and inconsistent nearly across the board.

Position is what every list on the internet is built from.

Watch what happens when you apply that.

Crossed arms don't mean closed off. Sometimes the room is cold.

Touching the nose doesn't mean lying. Neither does looking up and to the left.

"Ninety-three percent of communication is body language" comes from two small studies run by a UCLA psychologist called Albert Mehrabian in 1967, about how people judge feelings from single spoken words when the tone contradicts the word. That's it.

Mehrabian has spent decades objecting to how the number gets used. And you can kill it yourself in ten seconds: if words were seven percent of the message, you could watch a film in a language you don't speak and miss nothing.

Then the big one.

In 2006 two researchers, Charles Bond and Bella DePaulo, collected every credible experiment on whether people can detect lies by watching. Two hundred and six studies. Close to twenty-five thousand judges — police, detectives, judges, customs officers, ordinary people.

Average accuracy: around fifty-four percent.

A coin flip in a suit. Training barely moves it. Confidence doesn't move it at all — the people most certain they can spot a liar score no better than anyone else. They're just more certain.

That finding is uncontroversial among people who study this. It's only the internet that pretends otherwise.

So: the glance back and the smile's exit tell you something is happening. They don't tell you what it means. Anyone selling you position as though it were timing is selling you a horoscope with footnotes.

Some of these won't apply. That's the point — it isn't a horoscope.

You've replayed a meeting for four days, and the version you replay is never the one where you came off well.

You've left a negotiation having conceded something you never planned to concede, and you still can't find the moment it happened.

You can read the temperature of a room within ten seconds of walking in, and you've almost never been wrong about it.

You've watched somebody with half your competence get taken twice as seriously, and the difference wasn't the work.

You've noticed the half-second pause before somebody congratulated you.

You've been told you're overthinking it by somebody who benefited from you not thinking about it.

You know exactly which subjects are safe with which people. You've never written it down. You just carry the map.

You've had the right answer and said nothing, then watched someone else say it badly and get credit.

You've said "it's fine" in a tone that made it obvious it wasn't, then been annoyed at yourself for the tone rather than for saying it.

You've walked out of a room knowing you lost, without being able to name the round you lost it in.

When someone goes quiet on you, your first move is to search backwards for what you did — before it occurs to you it might not be about you.

You've thought, more than once, that everyone else got handed a manual you never received.

If you marked more than half, look at what's actually going on in every one.

You picked something up. A shift in the room, a tone that didn't match the words, a beat that landed wrong. And then you did nothing with it, because there was nothing you could do with it.

I'm not going to tell you that makes you special. Plenty of people notice plenty of things. Some of what's on that list is perception and

some of it is probably just overthinking, and I don't know you well enough to say which.

What I can tell you is what all of it has in common.

It all goes in. None of it comes out.

You've been playing on read-only.

The data arrives — accurately enough to keep you adjusting — and nothing goes back the other way. You carry the full weight of what's happening in the room and you have no move to make with it.

That's the actual problem. Not that you can't see it. That you've never had a single thing to do about it, so seeing it just costs you.

Here's the correction, and it's more useful than being told you were right all along.

You were right that something was happening. You were wrong about what it was.

You felt the room drop and concluded you'd said something stupid. You caught the pause and decided they were tired, or busy, or that you'd pushed too hard. The signal was real. The explanation you reached for was the one you'd been trained to reach for — check yourself, adjust, smooth it over, try harder next time.

Being right about the signal and wrong about the cause isn't a small error.

It's the exact error that lets something run on you for twenty years.

You weren't losing because you're soft, or slow, or too much, or not enough.

You were losing because you were playing one game and the other person was playing two.

Every conversation you've ever had ran on two channels.

The first is the one everybody watches. The words. The task. The facts. The plan. Who's doing what by Friday. That's the channel you were trained for — do the work, follow the instructions, be straight with people.

Underneath it, something quieter gets settled every single time: who ranks where, who's inside the group, who's safe, and who's steering. Nobody announces it. Nobody writes it down. Everybody feels it, and everybody moves to it.

Call it the Second Game.

The words on top are the cover story. The Second Game decides how the meeting goes, how the deal goes, how the friendship goes, how the career goes.

Your problem was never that you couldn't feel the second channel. You felt it harder than most of the people in the room.

Your problem is you were taught it doesn't exist — that decent people don't play it, that noticing it makes you paranoid, and that the correct response to feeling it is to be a bit nicer and work a bit harder.

Signal received. No permission to act on it.

Let's fix that. One move.

Here's a real one, because everything so far has been outline.

A project review. Eleven people, one of them the person who decides budgets next quarter. A man I'll call Adam has run the project for nine months and it's gone well. Four minutes in, a colleague says — pleasantly, to the room rather than to Adam:

"I just want to make sure we're not repeating what happened last

time."

Adam answers it. Of course he does. He explains what happened last time, what was different, why this isn't that. He's calm, he's accurate, he's got the numbers.

And he's already lost, and he won't work out why for about a week.

Watch what actually happened. Nothing was alleged. Nobody was named. There was no claim in that sentence to deny — and yet the whole room now has last time sitting in their heads with Adam's name attached, and Adam is the one who put the detail there. He briefed them on his own worst quarter, in front of the person who signs off budgets, and he did it voluntarily, believing he was defending himself.

If he'd said "which part?", the colleague would have had to either produce something or back off. Instead Adam produced it for him.

That's not clumsiness on the colleague's part. That's the design.

That's the most common way an attack gets delivered anywhere — a meeting, a group chat, a kitchen — and I'd bet you've never once named it while it was happening.

The attack isn't in what the sentence says.

It's in what the sentence assumes.

"I just want to make sure we're not repeating what happened last time."

The surface is about process. That's the bait. Sitting underneath it — presented as already settled, already agreed, already obviously true — is this:

There is a pattern here, and it's yours.

That was never up for discussion. It got smuggled in under a sentence about planning.

Now watch what you do next, because you've done it a hundred times. You go for the bait. "That was different, the supplier pulled out, and I flagged it in March —"

And in doing that you've agreed with the accusation. You're now defending a pattern, which means you've accepted a pattern is fairly in question.

You didn't lose that because you were outargued.

You lost it in the first six words, before you opened your mouth.

Once you know the shape you can't stop seeing it.

"Even you should be able to manage that." Underneath: you generally can't manage things.

"Why do you always take his side?" Underneath: you always take his side. Answer the "why" and you've conceded the "always."

"I'm surprised you got that done on time." Underneath: you normally don't.

"No offence, but someone had to say it." Underneath: everyone thinks this. I'm just the brave one.

"Someone who actually cared about this team wouldn't have raised it in the meeting." Underneath: you don't care about this team.

"No, no — do it your way. You always know best." Underneath: you're arrogant and you don't listen. Delivered as permission, so that objecting proves the point.

Same architecture every time. There's a thing being argued and a thing being assumed. You were raised to be reasonable, so you go for

the thing being argued.

The assumption walks straight past you and sits down.

One sentence. You can use it today.

Don't answer the bait. Name the assumption out loud, as a flat question.

Not angry. Not wounded. Not clever. Flat and mild — the voice you'd use to read out a train time.

"I just want to make sure we're not repeating what happened last time." "Which part are you referring to?"

"Even you should be able to manage that." "Sounds like you think I usually can't. Is that right?"

"Why do you always take his side?" "You said 'always.' Which times are you thinking of?"

"I'm surprised you got that done on time." "Surprised? Say more."

"No offence, but someone had to say it." "Who's someone? Who else has been saying it?"

"No, no — do it your way, you always know best." "That sounded like it had something underneath it. Did it?"

Then — and this is the whole skill — stop talking.

Don't soften it. Don't explain why you asked. Don't fill the pause. The silence isn't rude. The silence is the move. You've taken the buried thing and put it on the table, and now it belongs to them.

I'm not going to pretend this is easy. You'll try it this week, so you should know what's coming.

First time, you'll miss it. You'll spot the trapdoor twenty minutes later

on the drive home, the way Adam did. Good — twenty minutes is a massive improvement on never.

Second time you'll catch it and say nothing, because catching it and speaking are two different skills and you've only got one so far.

Third time you'll say it and your voice will come out wrong. Too sharp, or with a laugh on the end to soften it. The laugh undoes it. So does the sharpness.

That's not failure. That's the normal sequence, and it runs about a fortnight.

The flat tone is the hard part, not the words. The words are six syllables. What makes it work is that nothing in your face or voice is asking for anything — not agreement, not an apology, not permission. You're checking a fact, the way you'd check a departure board.

Practise on something harmless first. Someone makes a mildly barbed remark about traffic and you say, evenly, "Say more." Then watch what your own body does. That flinch you feel is the thing you're training out.

There are only three outcomes. Learn to recognise each.

They back off. "No, no, I didn't mean it like that." Which concedes there was a "like that" to mean. Note it. Move on. Don't press — you've won the exchange, and pressing converts a win into a fight and hands them the grievance.

They say it openly. "Well, frankly, yes." That's a gift and it won't feel like one. For the first time the thing is above the table where it can be answered. You may not like the answer. You won't be confused by it, and confusion has cost you far more than the answer will.

They attack the asking. "Why do you have to analyse everything?" That's the response of somebody who needed the assumption to stay buried, and it tells you which kind of person you're dealing with.

All three have one thing in common.

You know something you didn't know an hour ago. Every time.

And you said nothing you'd be embarrassed to have repeated back to you — which matters more than it sounds, for a reason we're about to get to.

I'd be selling you something if I stopped there, so I won't.

That move works cleanly when it's the two of you.

Put nine people in the room and the same sentence — same words, same tone, same person — will sometimes turn you into the problem. The room closes around them, and you end up apologising for something you didn't do.

Same move. Same delivery. Opposite result.

It isn't your tone. It isn't your timing. You didn't do it wrong.

Knowing the words is about a tenth of the work. The rest is two questions you answer before you open your mouth — and they're the two nobody's ever handed you.

One: who else is in the room?

Not "am I nervous in groups." Something specific changes when there's an audience, and it changes what the identical sentence does. Get this right and you'll know whether to say it now or say it Tuesday, one to one — and you'll know inside two seconds.

Two: are they doing it on purpose?

Everything turns on that one. If they genuinely can't see what they're doing, they've earned some patience and you owe them something. If they can see it perfectly well and do it anyway, then your patience is the raw material they've been building with.

Every piece of advice you've ever been given skipped this question. Half of it says give people the benefit of the doubt. The other half says protect yourself. Both are correct — for different people — and nobody tells you which one is sitting across the table.

And here's what took me longest to work out: you can't answer it by reading their intentions. You'll never see inside anyone's head, and the ones worth worrying about are exactly the ones who look sincere while doing it.

You answer it by watching what they do at one specific moment. Takes about two weeks. You don't have to confront anybody to find out.

A move like that, used at the wrong moment, doesn't just fail. It hands them something.

Those two questions are the rest of this book.

The Unfair Advantage is eleven chapters on how people actually work. How you get read before you speak. How respect is won and lost. How influence really operates. How the deliberate ones do it — and how to tell them apart from the careless ones. How you get played, and how you stop.

It's the manual you were supposed to be handed at nineteen.

About the title, since you've read this far. The unfair advantage was never yours. It belonged to every person who understood this while you didn't — the ones who could see the second channel and knew you couldn't. That's what made it unfair.

This is where it changes sides.

Three things it won't do, in writing:

It won't tell you to cut anyone off. Most people can't and wouldn't. There's the job, the money, the family, the history. This is written for people who are staying.

It won't teach you to manipulate anyone. Not one page. If that's what you came for, wrong book, and I'd rather lose the sale.

It won't tell you it's your fault. Not one line about what you attracted or what you need to work on in yourself.

Do one thing.

Not this week. Not when things calm down. Today, or tomorrow.

The next sentence somebody hands you with a trapdoor in it — and there'll be one, probably before Friday — don't defend yourself, and don't go quiet the way Adam did in that meeting. Say the flat version:

"Which part?"

Then be quiet.

That's it. Six syllables and a silence.

You've been reading these rooms your whole life. You were never wrong that something was happening.

You were only ever missing the move.

Who else is in the room — and are they doing it on purpose?

END OF THE FREE CHAPTER

You've seen the board. Now play the whole game.

That was Chapter One of eleven. The full book unlocks reading people, influence, manipulation, the dangerous few, power, desire, love, money and the inner game — every hidden rule, with the practice and study tools.

Get the full book:

humancheatcodes.org/#books

© Human Cheatcodes · This free chapter may be shared. The full book is for the buyer only.