
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

How honest are we?



NB: This is not a word-for-word transcript

Neil

Hello and welcome to 6 Minute English, where we bring you an interesting topic and six items of vocabulary. I'm Neil, and joining me is Rob.

Rob

Hello there! And today we've got six minutes to talk about honesty and how honest people are – particularly when it comes to spending money. So Neil – what's an 'honesty box'?

Neil

Well, it's where you pay for something by putting money in a box – but it's up to you to put in the right amount. A small business might use this method to take money for things like parking your car or buying a newspaper because it means you don't need a sales assistant.

Rob

But that means people could take a newspaper or park their car without paying anything! An honesty box relies on people being honest. The adjective **honest** means truthful and not trying to cheat people.

Neil

And the noun is honesty – the quality of being truthful. Have you ever cheated an honesty box, Rob?

Rob

Absolutely not! I never have!

Neil

Honestly?

Rob

Honestly! And to **cheat**, by the way, means to trick or deceive someone to get something you want. Honesty is the best policy, as they say...

Neil

Which of course leads us on to our quiz.

Dan

The 6 minute English quiz! Who said 'honesty is the best policy'? Was it...

- a) Donald Trump
- b) Benjamin Franklin or
- c) Richard Nixon?

Rob

Honestly, Neil! Everyone will know the answer to that.

Neil

But do you know the answer to that, Rob?

Rob

Well, I'll have an honest guess. I think it's b) Benjamin Franklin.

Neil

Well, you might be right, but you might not – we'll find out at the end. I did like your use of 'honestly' there, Rob. We can use the adverb 'honestly' at the beginning of a sentence to show that we're feeling irritated – for example when your co-presenter picks a quiz question that's too easy!

Rob

OK, OK, let's move on now and hear from Philip Graves, a psychologist, and author of the book *Consumerology*, who can tell us about why honesty isn't always the best policy.

INSERT

Philip Graves, Psychologist and author of the book *Consumerology*

The question is not 'Are most consumers honest, the question is 'Are most people honest?' – And the answer to that is 'no'. We have evolved with the capacity to be dishonest. It's part of our evolutionary psychological make up – because if we can gain an advantage over the people around us, we have a greater chance of surviving. Now what's important in that is that we also benefited from being in a social group and that was important in our evolutionary past so there is a balance to strike between the extent to which we can feather our own nest, so to speak, and the risk of being ostracised by the group.

Neil

A **consumer** is a person who buys things or services – for example, food or clothes.

Rob

Or the use of a parking space – or a taxi.

Neil

Now, if I park my car and don't pay for the parking space, I'm being dishonest, but I'm also saving money.

Rob

And Philip Graves says being dishonest is part of our 'psychological make up'. What does that mean?

Neil

Our **psychological make up** is the way the human mind works – the way we think.

Rob

And it makes sense to be dishonest if you gain an advantage through this behaviour. So when you take something without paying for it, you save money you can spend on something else.

Neil

So why do we place such importance on being honest then? – If we benefit from being dishonest?

Rob

Because it's selfish behaviour – which other members of our social group won't like. If everybody acted selfishly and dishonestly all the time, the world would be a very unpleasant place!

Neil

Selfish – meaning only caring about yourself and not about other people. That's a good point, Rob.

Rob

Yes, societies work better if people behave **co-operatively** – which means working together towards shared goals.

Neil

So honesty really is the best policy then – at least most of the time!

Dan

And now it's time for the answer to the quiz. Who said 'honesty is the best policy'?

Neil

What do you think, Rob?

Rob

OK. Was it Benjamin Franklin?

Neil

And that was... the right answer! Maybe the question was too easy! Benjamin Franklin wrote it in a book of proverbs called *Poor Richard's Almanac* between 1732 and 1758. Other famous quotes include 'There are no pains without gains' and 'Have you something to do tomorrow? Do it today.' OK let's follow Franklin's wise words and move right ahead with the vocabulary items we learned today.

Rob

First up was the adjective honest – meaning truthful and not trying to cheat people – For example, 'Neil has a very honest face'. OK, then there's ... um honesty and honestly... the noun and adverb forms. For example, erm...

Neil

Honestly, Rob, hurry up and do the second item!

Rob

OK, OK, I'm getting there! To cheat – means to behave dishonestly to get what you want.

Neil

My granny always used to cheat in card games. It was so annoying!

Rob

And I always used to cheat in spelling tests at school!

Neil

How dishonest, Rob! OK, number three. Consumer – a person who buys goods or services for their own personal use.

Rob

For example, 'I am a big consumer of chocolate bars'.

Neil

That's terrible English, Rob! How about – 'We asked UK consumers how much money they spent on food every month'?

Rob

OK, I agree that's a better example. Anyway, I never consume chocolate. Number four!

Neil

Psychological make up – the way our minds work. The way we think.

Rob

For example, 'He had the psychological make up of a serial killer...'

Neil

That's nasty! Moving on – selfish – caring only about yourself and not other people.

Rob

You only made yourself a cup of tea – that was a selfish thing to do!

Neil

What???

Rob

It was just an example. You're not selfish, Neil. You're actually the most co-operative person I know – you're happy to work with others towards a common goal.

Neil

Not selfish then?

Rob

Never selfish. Always co-operative... And honest too.

Neil

Great. Now, I honestly recommend that listeners visit our Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube pages.

Rob

You can co-operate with other learners in your common goal of improving your English! Bye-bye!

Neil

Goodbye!