

Christopher Hadnagy with Seth
Schulman

**Human Hacking: Win Friends,
Influence People, and Leave
Them Better Off for Having Met
You**

Made by Blinkist



These key insights in blinks were written by a team of experts at Blinkist. We screen the world of nonfiction to choose the very best books. Then, we read them deeply and transform them into this concise format that brings you the most inspiring ideas from the text.

Maybe these blinks will inspire you to dig deeper, or maybe they're enough to start you thinking and then on to something new. However you read blinks, we hope they help you become an even brighter you.

What's in it for me? A practical guide to becoming a master human hacker.

Do you ever feel like people in your life misinterpret what you say? Or do you sometimes struggle to convince others to agree to your requests? In daily life, a lack of communication strategy leads to countless problems, from hurt feelings to slighted egos.

Luckily, you can learn how to use the principles of social engineering to plan for successful interactions. While hackers have used psychological tactics to scam and cause harm, you can use many of the same tools to your advantage – but ethically and compassionately.

In these blinks, you'll discover tactics to influence others to help you get what you want, and at the same time leave them better off than before!

In these blinks, you'll learn

- how the position of your wrists can affect your conversation goals;
- why a receptionist knowingly let a deceitful intruder into her workplace; and
- how you can use nonsense to get others to reveal information

Set out to exert influence on people with their best interests in mind.

Not long ago, author Christopher Hadnagy was checking in at London's Heathrow Airport with his family. While he was rummaging in his suitcase for passports, his wife spontaneously complimented the attendant behind the counter on her scarf. The attendant smiled and said thank you.

Maybe this seems like a completely forgettable – if pleasant– moment. But if that's what you think, you'd be missing out on a chance at human hacking.

When faced with this scenario, the author – a security expert – sensed an opportunity for social engineering. So he stepped up to the desk and casually asked how much an upgrade would cost. The attendant took one look at his wife and whispered: “I'm putting you all in first class.”

The key message here is: Set out to exert influence on people with their best interests in mind.

So what exactly happened here? The author figured that this woman usually had to deal with grumpy and stressed-out passengers day in and day out. In this moment, though, she'd just received an unexpected compliment, and by her genuine smile, he could tell that her mood had been boosted.

Since the author had a social engineering background, he knew that this combination of events was advantageous for him and his wife. So he decided to make a request – and was doubly rewarded for it.

What's important is that he didn't try to coerce the attendant into offering a free upgrade. Unlike ethical human hacking, criminal hacking involves preying on people's emotions to compel compliance, regardless of how negatively

it affects them. But when you apply social engineering ethically, it enables others to feel happier about themselves by giving you what you want, as in the case of the airline attendant. It's a win-win situation.

In the following blinks, we'll introduce practical tools to influence both people of interest and strangers alike, for your mutual benefit. As you start using these tools, keep the human hacking code of ethics in mind, which asks that you pledge to "leave others better off for having met you" in every interaction. Employ these tactics with compassion, not for the sake of manipulation!

But let's not get ahead of ourselves. Before you can influence others, you have to be able to hack yourself.

Master your own communication tendencies before assessing others.

Let's say a friend asks your opinion on a personal matter. As you're giving your honest assessment, he cuts you off and calls you insensitive. You're stunned: you were just sharing your thoughts as requested. You conclude that your friend is overly sensitive. But could it simply be that your natural ways of communicating don't match up?

Here's the key message: Master your own communication tendencies before assessing others.

Before hacking others, you need to be objective about how your natural communication tendencies come across. The author recommends DISC, a popular profiling tool pioneered by psychologist William Moulton Marston in the 1920s. DISC divides people into four distinct "types": Dominants are usually confident

and results-oriented; Influencers tend to be enthusiastic collaborators; Sincere types are often calm and supportive; and Conscientious types are primarily organized and factual.

To gauge where you stand, ask yourself two simple questions: In social encounters, are you usually people-oriented or results-focused? In conversations, do you prefer to be direct or indirect? If you tend to prioritize results and favor a direct communication style, you're likely either a Dominant or an Influencer type. On the other hand, if you prioritize social connection and tend to communicate indirectly, you're probably a Conscientious or Sincere type.

Knowing roughly where you fall is especially helpful for identifying points at which your primary communication tendencies work to your disadvantage. Think about recurring social situations,

like specific conversations with friends, family or coworkers, where you express yourself in ways that others don't like. Once you pinpoint the problem, you can come up with a strategy to compensate for it.

If you realize you're an Influencer type, maybe you'll find that you alienate colleagues by talking about your feelings too much in meetings. To take action, over the next week commit strictly to resisting the urge to talk about yourself each time an opportunity comes up. Prepare for emotional responses that could be triggered in you. Plan to excuse yourself and take a break if that's what it takes.

Once you have a grasp on your own tendencies, you can make DISC assessments of other important people in your life. Instead of being blunt, you'll be able to tailor your feedback to your friend's communication profile, so it

doesn't hurt his confidence. No matter
your end goal, adjusting your
communication to others' needs
improves your chances of success.

Create effective pretexts to skew conversations to your advantage.

Imagine you get an email, with no greeting, from your boss that says: “Call me tomorrow at three.” For the next twenty-four hours, you worry frantically that you’re going to lose your job. But when you call your boss the next day as promised – half-asleep and full of angst – it turns out she just wants to discuss a minor issue in a presentation.

Wouldn’t it have been kinder for her to mention her reason for wanting to meet from the outset? What’s missing from her end is a clear *pretext*, or an effective context that sets up a social interaction for success. It’s what the author calls “the art of the start.”

The key message is this: Create effective pretexts to skew conversations to your advantage.

Pretexting involves considering others' needs to create an advantageous context for the encounter. To pretext effectively before any conversation, the author offers a simple seven-step framework that's easy to remember with the acronym PREPARE. Use it anytime you want to – that's right – prepare for a conversation.

First, clarify in your mind the (P) problem you need to solve and the (R) result you seek. Let's say your daughter's grades are plummeting. The problem is her sudden poor performance in school. The result should be you understanding her obstacle to success, so that you can help her remove it.

But before approaching her to find out, you need to consider the (E) emotional atmosphere you intend the conversation to have, and the (P) provocation necessary on your part to generate those emotions. Say you want this

conversation with your daughter to be calm. To provoke calm, you could frame the conversation in a quiet, empathetic way.

When you know how to strike the right emotional tone, take it one step farther and (A) activate your pretext. This involves clarifying the pretext of the interaction to yourself. In this interaction, your pretext might be “attentive and helpful parent.” All subsequent actions should align with this pretext.

Once you’ve activated the pretext, now decide how to (R) render it. This is the delivery of your message, and involves determining the specifics of where, when, and how to approach your subject. Finally, carefully (E) evaluate whether every step in the PREPARE framework aligns with your pledge to leave your subject in a better position in the end.

Like profiling, pretexting is above all about trying to grasp how others tick, and about reaching a consensus that leaves both of you better off than before the conversation.

Build rapport with others and motivate them to agree to your request.

Let's face it: we're all strapped for time. Whenever we encounter new people, we automatically consider how long an interaction will take and then judge whether it's worth our while.

If you're waiting in line for a coffee-to-go and the person behind you taps your shoulder, responding will probably seem like a low-risk endeavor – you can assume this interaction will only last until one of you has paid and gotten your drink, at the longest. Now, imagine you're on your way to a meeting when someone stops you in the street. In this scenario, you'll be more likely to avoid the interaction altogether. After all, you have places to be!

Be mindful that this applies to other people – so when you're initiating a conversation, show the other person

that interacting with you is definitely worth her time.

The key message here is: Build rapport with others and motivate them to agree to your request.

Since most social situations have natural time constraints, it's important to learn how to build rapport quickly in the course of a first encounter. If you sense you won't be able to help someone within the limited time you have, you'll be more inclined to refuse the request.

Establishing rapport is powerful because it involves the release of oxytocin, a hormone that researchers link to experiences of trust and generosity. Most of us do it naturally – when engaging in banter with neighbors, schmoozing with clients, or asking a grocer how he's doing while he weighs your goods.

When time constraints aren't obvious, like when you stop someone on the street, you can facilitate an opportunity to build rapport by subtly inventing artificial time limits. When stopping a stranger, don't ask if she has a second. Be precise and say, "Excuse me – can I bother you for two minutes? I'm new to the neighborhood and I'm looking for a good restaurant." If you provide a pretext and imply a short duration, the person will be much more willing to talk with you.

Once you have permission to continue a conversation, start building rapport by offering personal information about yourself. If you want to build rapport with your client and you see a photo of a dog on her desk, you could start talking about your own dog. Another tactic is to put your subject in a position of authority. For example, you could ask for advice about the best dog parks. Whenever you give the gift of

information and authority, you motivate reciprocal behavior. By practicing rapport-building more diligently, you'll get more of what you want, while at the same time making others feel good about themselves.

Combine subtle tactics to influence others to do your bidding.

As a security expert, the author was tasked with breaking into companies' securities systems in order to identify vulnerabilities. On a mission to access a company's executive offices, he noticed the receptionist in the lobby was playing a game on her computer. This presented him with an irresistible opportunity for social engineering.

The first thing the author did was warn her that he could see what was on her screen. The receptionist shut her game down, just at the moment her boss was walking past. Grateful, she mouthed "Thank you" to the author.

That's when he took his chance to ask her to let him in. When he lied that he was late for a meeting, the receptionist gave him a knowing look, indicating that she knew he was lying. And yet she hit

her buzzer and let him in anyway. As a result of this short encounter, the author was able to hack all the company's data.

Here's the key message: Combine subtle tactics to influence others to do your bidding.

The approach the author used here wasn't rapport building, nor was he mobilizing a clear pretext. In this scenario, he reached for a similar set of human hacking tools known as the *principles of influence*. More specifically, here he used a principle called *reciprocation*. He offered the receptionist information that was valuable to her, so she felt indebted enough to return the favor.

Similarly, instead of placing your subject in a position of authority as in a rapport-building exercise, a powerful tool of influence is to place yourself in a position of authority. Since most of us are socialized to respect authority figures,

you can quickly earn people's trust by suggesting expert knowledge. When trying to convince a boss to hire you, for example, you might use sophisticated vocabulary appropriate to the job.

Why not test the principles of influence this week? Pick a friend and try to convince him to eat something he never wanted to try. If you want to get a raw-food-averse friend to try sushi, for instance, you can pay for the meal to activate the reciprocation principle. During the meal, you can demonstrate authoritative knowledge by throwing around sushi terms. Don't be surprised if the powerful influencing tools will inspire your friend to expand his culinary horizons!

As you start executing tactics in the moment, abandon or modify them as necessary. But don't overdo it – subtlety is key. If your intentions are obvious,

people will catch on and you'll risk coming off as unlikeable.

Get people to give you the information you want without asking.

Let's say you're on a first date. If you want to find out whether your date wants kids, has a job, and shares your interests, one option is to just come out and ask. Your date may answer truthfully, or not. Meanwhile, you risk turning the encounter into an interrogation.

Now, what if you could get all the information you need without posing a single question, and still keep the conversation light and fun? By employing the simple tool of *elicitation*, you can get people to reveal almost anything. And you don't even have to ask.

The key message is this: Get people to give you the information you want without asking.

Elicitation is a specific form of influence in which you prompt people to divulge

what they might otherwise keep secret. Criminals use this tactic all the time. For example, spies create fake social media profiles to connect with unsuspecting people and extract sensitive information like bank details from them.

And yet, what makes elicitation such a successful tool is that it is inherently non-threatening. It simply requires you to divulge information strategically to motivate your subject to reveal new information that you want.

Let's say you want to find out if your date wants kids without directly asking. To find out, you can state a reported fact – “I read today that many young people don't want to have families for environmental reasons.” A statement like this will likely invite a revealing response, without you having posed a direct question.

Another easy technique is to make a false statement. People have a natural

tendency to correct erroneous statements, so if you purposely say something untrue, it will usually prompt your subject to correct you and reveal new information in the process. The statement can be completely nonsensical. One of the author's students practiced this tactic to get people to tell him their birthday without asking. He would approach them while they were eating and say: "If you're eating strawberries, it means your birthday is in February." The statement is obviously illogical, but people would always respond with a correction, going on to reveal their actual birthdays.

The clearer your goal is in your mind, the better you can steer an encounter. As you practice these techniques and gain some success, you'll start to feel more assertive in your abilities as an elicitor.

Learning how to read and display nonverbal cues can boost communication in your favor.

When a friendly dog rolls onto its backside and exposes a soft underbelly for you to scratch, it indicates the pet trusts you. This cue is known as *ventral display*, referring to the belly of an animal or a human.

Indeed, if a person tilts his hips and belly toward you, this can also indicate openness and comfort – a phenomenon that former FBI investigator Joe Navarro calls *ventral fronting*. Gaining an understanding of such physical cues equips you with a technique you can immediately employ to improve your social interactions.

The key message here is: Learning how to read and display nonverbal cues can boost communication in your favor.

When you're conversing with people, it's helpful to keep track of whether or not they're feeling comfortable with the situation as you go along. The easiest way to do this is to pay attention to subtle shifts in their body language – also known as nonverbal communication.

As all social engineers know, there are many ventral displays that you can tune into. For example, people naturally tilt their heads and show the underside of wrists and hands to indicate openness. If, while asking someone to lunch, you expose your palms and neck, you're issuing the invitation in a way that suggests an eagerness to be friendly. But if you keep your palms facing down and head straight, you command a more formal presence.

When entering a social situation, it's important to clue in to nonverbal cues immediately, as they provide valuable information that can boost your rapport-

building efforts. Whether it's a stranger or someone you know well, watch the person for twenty to thirty seconds if possible. This is just long enough to pick up on key signals, but not so long that it becomes awkward. If during the course of a conversation you notice that the person abandons the open ventrals and takes on more self-protective signals, it's time to change approach, or abandon the conversation completely.

In addition to displaying open ventrals deliberately to show a willingness to engage, you can also use body language to influence the emotions of others. Because of a phenomenon scientists call "mirroring," displaying pleasant facial expressions – by smiling for example – prompts positive emotions in the onlooker. In most situations, if you make a point of conveying happiness and confidence through your body language, you will be rewarded for it.

Recognize devious manipulation techniques so you can avoid them at all costs.

Have you ever put a jacket on the bus seat next to you to avoid sharing the space with another passenger? Maybe you even put on headphones to dissuade people from asking you whether the seat is taken. Such scenarios don't exemplify human hacking, but rather manipulation.

Using ethical tactics of influence, you would engage in polite conversation with anyone who tried to sit next to you and try to motivate that person to sit elsewhere. But forcing others into making a decision based on false pretenses, and for selfish gain, strays into the territory of unfriendly or even devious manipulation.

Here's the key message: Recognize devious manipulation techniques so you can avoid them at all costs.

When strangers are competing for a scarce commodity like seats on a bus, manipulative behavior is common. But it's also surprisingly common in daily life, even in small ways. Honestly speaking, when you want something from someone close to you, are you always straightforward? Or do you sometimes arouse certain emotions to push that person to do what you want?

Like social engineers, manipulators increase their odds of success by playing on various aspects of human psychology. But rather than compassion, manipulation involves what science journalist Daniel Goleman terms “emotional hijacking.” Scammers and other manipulators like to elicit strong emotions such as fear or pain because these activate a walnut-sized piece of gray matter in our brain known as the amygdala, which shuts down critical thinking and increases susceptibility to external influence.

To do this, manipulators often implement a nefarious technique to make people doubt what they think they know; this technique is known as “forced evaluation.” If you get an email telling you to click a link to book your COVID vaccine date, even if you didn’t sign up, it might hijack your amygdala and convince you to click. Or if a company announces pending staff cuts, that could manipulate employees to work extra hard by arousing fear of job loss. In addition to sparking a negative emotion like confusion, uncertainty prompts increased psychological powerlessness, which can have devastating long-term effects on people.

Instead of resorting to manipulation at the risk of causing pain and suffering, take the higher road. Ask yourself honestly what manipulation tactics you typically use and how you might replace them with ethical tools like profiling, pretexting, rapport-building and body

language to get what you want. After all,
good human hacking is about mutual
benefits.

Final summary

The key message in these blinks:

Before you can hack others, you need to master your own communication tendencies. Keep others' emotional needs in mind to build rapport more quickly and make people more likely to agree to your requests. Deploying subtle tools of influence and observing non-verbal cues will also help you set every conversation up for success. Make sure that you use human hacking with empathy and compassion, to get what you want while making others happier.

Actionable advice:

Boost your listening skills by posing reflective questions.

To improve your listening skills, pose reflective questions by repeating the last three or four words someone says and

posing them as a question. For example, if a friend says, “Peru is the coolest country I’ve ever visited,” your reflective question would be, “Really? Peru is the coolest country you’ve ever visited?” Not only will this keep your friend talking about the topic, but challenging yourself to pose reflective questions will help you build a habit of listening more actively in conversation.

Got feedback?

We’d love to hear what you think about our content! Just drop an email to remember@blinkist.com with *Human Hacking* as the subject line and share your thoughts!

Nice work! You're all done with this one.

We publish new books every week at
blinkist.com.

Come and see – there's so much more to learn.

Inspired to read the full book?

[Get it here.](#)

Copyright © 2014 by Blinks Labs GmbH.
All rights reserved.