NEWS LESSON

Does Confidence Mean Someone Is Right?



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. Do you believe people more when they sound confident?
2. Who do you trust when you want to understand the news?
3. Is it easy to tell online when someone really knows a subject?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**complicated**	☐	A	saying something that is not true
2	**surface**	☐	B	in an easy way, with no stops or problems
3	**distrust**	☐	C	a good or bad part of a person's character
4	**quality**	☐	D	a person you do not know
5	**stranger**	☐	E	difficult to understand because it has many parts
6	**smoothly**	☐	F	people who know a lot about a subject
7	**experts**	☐	G	the top part of something, not the deeper part
8	**lying**	☐	H	to not trust someone

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

Some people sound sure about everything. A psychiatrist says that is exactly when we should ask more questions.

1 You are watching a video. The speaker looks straight at the camera. Their voice rises and falls. They never hesitate, and they explain a complicated subject in one clear minute. You find yourself nodding. But do you actually know whether they are right?

2 Alex Curmi, a psychiatrist writing in the Guardian, thinks this is a problem worth taking seriously. He describes meeting a confident stranger in a bar. The man spoke easily about economies, space travel and politics, and Curmi felt he could learn a lot from him. Then the man said that some people even believe the Earth is round. The confidence had been real. The knowledge had not.

3 Curmi calls this quality charisma: the ability to make other people trust you, like you or follow you. He argues that charisma is not magic. It is a set of skills. Eye contact, body language, a voice that changes in pitch and speed, a good story at the right moment. Some people are born with these skills. Others learn them, and online there are plenty of guides that teach them.

4 So why are we so easily persuaded? Curmi offers an explanation from our distant past. For most of human history, people lived in small groups, sometimes only twenty people. You saw the same faces every day, in good times and in danger. If someone was only charming on the surface, you found out quickly.

5 Today we judge people on very little. We see a few minutes that they have chosen to show us, carefully edited, with the rest of their life left out. Our brains, Curmi says, did not evolve for that.

6 His advice is not to distrust everybody. It is to separate confidence from knowledge, and to treat them as two different things. When someone speaks smoothly about health, money or world events, he suggests a few simple questions. What experience do they have? What do they gain if you agree? Is there a good argument on the other side?

7 None of this means that a confident person is lying. Plenty of experts are also excellent speakers. It means that sounding sure is not evidence, and it never was.

Sources: The Guardian, Why you should treat charisma as a red flag. Picture: .

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. Alex Curmi is a psychiatrist. T F NG
2. Curmi believes charisma is a kind of magic that cannot be explained. T F NG
3. Curmi suggests asking what a speaker gains if you agree with them. T F NG
4. Most people cannot tell when a speaker is exaggerating. T F NG
5. Curmi says people should stop trusting everyone. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

advice	charisma	danger	evidence	hesitate	knowledge	persuaded

1. A speaker with great _____ can make a room full of strangers trust them.
2. He speaks well, but he has no _____ of the subject he is talking about.
3. Before you share a claim, ask yourself whether there is any _____ for it.
4. When the question was difficult, the speaker did not _____ for a second.
5. Many people were _____ to join the group after hearing the confident speech.

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. At the moment, you _____ a video of a very confident speaker. (WATCH)
2. Then the man _____ that some people even believe the Earth is round. (SAY)
3. Curmi's article _____ readers to ask questions before they trust anyone. (ENCOURAGE)
4. In the past, people in small groups _____ the same faces every day. (SEE)
5. Our brains, Curmi says, _____ for that. (EVOLVE)

7 Language focus: collocations

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. A collocation is a pair of words that go together naturally. Learn the pair, not just one word.

argument	attention	contact	experience	explanation	language	pressure

1. Good speakers keep eye _____ with the audience.
2. The teacher gave a clear _____ of how the trick works.
3. Before you trust an online expert, ask about their _____ in the subject.
4. He lost the _____ because he had no facts to support his view.
5. Body _____ can make a speaker look more sure.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. What makes a speaker sound trustworthy to you?
2. Should schools teach students how to check information? How?
3. Have you ever changed your mind about someone you admired online?

9 Role-play: should I trust this expert?

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the excited friend

You watched a video by a very confident online coach. He explained how to make money in one clear minute. You want to pay for his course. Tell your friend why you trust him.

Student B · the careful friend

You think the coach sounds too sure. Ask about his experience, what he gains if people agree, and whether there is another side. Do not call your friend silly.

Useful phrases

He sounds very sure, but what's his experience?
What does he gain if I agree?
I'm not saying he's lying, but I'd check first.
Is there another side to this?
That's a fair point, I hadn't thought of that.
Let's look for some evidence before we pay.

Afterwards, tell the class: did the friend decide to pay, and what changed their mind?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 E · 2 G · 3 H · 4 C · 5 D · 6 B · 7 F · 8 A

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 F · 3 T · 4 NG · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 charisma · 2 knowledge · 3 evidence · 4 hesitate · 5 persuaded

6 Verb forms

1 are watching · 2 said · 3 encourages · 4 saw · 5 did not evolve

7 Language focus

1 contact · 2 explanation · 3 experience · 4 argument · 5 language

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