

Unit 6: Take the Money and Run?

Host: How many of you have heard of the phrase 'if it's too good to be true, it probably is'?

Wise words to live by, right? What if we set up an experiment where that wasn't the case? Would people's distrust keep them from taking advantage of a no-strings-attached, guaranteed-win situation? We're about to find out in this next game.

For this next experiment, we're setting up a booth in a public place. We're gonna offer free money to people walking by. They can take as much or as little as they want. We've hidden cameras everywhere: They're in the booth, in the buildings. They're even hidden in the bushes. What do you think people will do? Will they take the cash?

So, is this the dumbest experiment we've ever done? Of course people are gonna take the money—or will they?

Would you like some free money? Excuse me, do you want some money for free? Hey, you guys want to take this cash? We're giving it away. Free money.

So, what would you do? Would you take some money, or would your trust detectors go off?

Do you want some free money?

Woman: Is it really free?

Host: It's free money.

Woman: Are you serious?

Host: I mean, this is all about trust, so you have to trust me.

Woman: Are you serious?

Host: Yeah! This is about trust. I'm smiling.

Woman: Is someone going to attack me or like, what?

Host: I promise there's no strings attached.

Woman: Do you pinky promise?

Host: I pinky promise. There's no strings attached. It's just free money. Just free money.

Woman: You swear?

Host: It's free!

Even when people took the money, they were sure it was a trick.

Take as much as you like.

Man: What's the catch?

It's free money. Enjoy.

We're giving away free money.

Man: Seriously?

Host: Yeah, it's free, man.

Man: What's wrong with it?

Host: Nothing's wrong with it. No, this is about trust. It's not fake. It's about trust.

Man: Can I put in a dollar?

Host: Can you put in? If you like! But this is more for you to take.

We are giving people a chance to take money, and he's trying to put money in. What's wrong with these people? You would think it would be easier for people to take money, but people just hesitate.

Now we've refilled the box, and we're gonna make one big change: We're going to leave the booth unattended. I'm up in the control room watching the action being recorded by our hidden cameras. Without me guarding the cash, we expect people to take the money. I would. Wouldn't you?

Ah, here it is. Oh! Right away. Oh, oh, oh! She's like, yeah!

If I was walking to work and saw that box of money, I'd do the same thing.

Wow, that didn't last long. We loaded it up with cash one more time. As we expected, the money was gone in a flash.

What if we replace me with a giant pair of eyes? Will people still take the money?

Oh, there's a guy! Oh, oh! Come on, man. Live the dream, dude. Live the dream!

Look at these two guys. They're like, yep, drinks on me, man. No. People just aren't trusting. They just assume that there's a catch. Free money. A sign that says so. A box of the cash. Take it. People just don't.

Here's a guy. He's observing. He's like, what is this? Free money, huh? Whoa, I wonder if it's real. What's he looking for? A bigger box of cash?

This guy's skeptical. He's thinking about it and he's looking around. He's like, what is this? How could this be? He's so confused and the eyes are staring him down, causing even more—Oh, ho! And he nods and leaves!

This guy's afraid to even touch it. Don't worry. It doesn't bite.

You see the big pair of eyes staring people down. People feel watched. They're not taking the money. There's a reason for that.

There are huge sections of neural territory devoted to processing and creating eye movement. When people see these eyes, even though it's just on a poster, it reflects something deep and innate inside of them, and you can see that in these people's responses to those watchful eyes.