

Getting Straight Answers - How to Spot Evasion and Read Body Language When Speaking To A Renewable Energy Developer

As rural landowners and farmers, we've all been around the block a time or two and believe we have a good sense of judgment when it comes to someone's honesty or character. We've learned to trust our instincts in many situations. However, for those who are either on the fence or have no clue when someone might be dodging the truth, I offer the following guide.

This article will help you identify when someone is avoiding your questions, read their body language for additional clues, and press for answers in a respectful and effective manner.



Top 10 Ways to Identify When a Speaker is Avoiding a Question and How to Respond

One - Redirecting the Topic

Example: You ask, “Will this project impact my well water?” They respond, “This project will produce enough energy to power 10,000 homes.”

Respectful Response: “That’s impressive, but I’m specifically asking about potential effects on my well water. Could you address that concern?”

Two - Answering a Different Question

Example: You ask, “What will happen to the land after the project ends?” They reply, “Solar panels are designed to last 25 years.”

Respectful Response: “Thank you for sharing that, but my question is about land restoration after the panels are removed. Could you explain the plan for that?”

Three - Overloading with Irrelevant Details

Example: You ask, “What are the local tax benefits?” They dive into a long explanation about national energy policies.

Respectful Response: “I appreciate the context, but I’d like to focus on how this project will impact tax revenue for our community. Can you clarify?”

Four - Generalizing or Vagueness

Example: You ask, “Will the runoff damage my crops?” They reply, “We work to minimize environmental impacts.”

Respectful Response: “It’s good to hear you prioritize the environment, but could you provide specific measures you’re taking to prevent crop damage?”

Five - Deflection

Example: You ask, “Why weren’t landowners consulted earlier?” They respond, “You should direct that question to the zoning board.”

Respectful Response: “That’s helpful to know, but I’d still like to understand your company’s approach to engaging local landowners. Can you explain?”

Six - Ad Hominem or Emotional Appeal

Example: You ask, “What happens if there’s a chemical spill?” They reply, “Do you really want to stop progress for clean energy?”

Respectful Response: “Clean energy is important, but so is protecting our community. I’d appreciate it if you could explain how spills will be managed.”

Seven - Repeating the Question

Example: You ask, “What’s the benefit for farmers like me?” They reply, “The benefit for farmers like you? That’s a good question.”

Respectful Response: “Yes, and I’d like to hear your perspective on how this project will benefit farmers in practical ways.”

Eight - Using Humor or Sarcasm

Example: You ask, “What happens to panels after they’re decommissioned?” They joke, “Maybe we’ll sell them as antiques!”

Respectful Response: “That’s funny, but I’m serious about wanting to understand the decommissioning process. Can you share the plan?”

Nine - Claiming Ignorance or Inability

Example: You ask, “What’s the backup plan if the project fails?” They reply, “I’m not the right person to ask about that.”

Respectful Response: “I understand. Could you direct me to someone who can answer this question or provide a timeline for getting that information?”

Ten - Promising to Answer Later

Example: You ask, “What guarantees are there for land restoration?” They say, “We’ll get back to you after more studies.”

Respectful Response: “I understand that studies take time, but this issue is important to me. Can you share a preliminary plan or timeline?”

Body Language or Behavioral Signs of Dishonesty or Lack of Knowledge

When someone isn't giving you a straight answer, their body language and behavior can reveal the truth. For those unsure of what to watch for, here are key indicators:

One - Inconsistent Eye Contact

Avoiding your gaze can suggest discomfort, while excessive staring might be overcompensation.

Example: A developer who avoids looking at you when asked about environmental risks may not have clear answers.

Two - Fidgeting or Restless Movements

Shuffling papers, tapping fingers, or shifting their position may indicate nervousness.

Example: A representative starts adjusting their tie when pressed on liability for drainage issues.

Three - Touching the Face or Neck

Scratching their neck, rubbing their nose, or touching their face are classic signs of anxiety.

Example: A speaker tugs at their collar when asked how soil contamination will be managed.

Four - Sudden Changes in Tone or Pace

Speaking faster, slower, or pausing awkwardly can reveal discomfort.

Example: If someone speeds up when explaining water safety, it might mean they're rushing over key details.

Five - Excessive Sweating or Flushing

Visible signs of stress, like sweating or a reddened face, suggest unease.

Example: A spokesperson starts sweating when asked about long-term project liabilities.

Six - Closed or Defensive Posture

Crossing arms or leaning back can signal defensiveness.

Example: A developer leans away or crosses their arms when asked why farmers weren't included in early decisions.

Seven - Overly Dramatic Gestures

Exaggerated hand movements or forced smiles can indicate someone is compensating for a lack of confidence.

Example: A speaker who waves their arms widely while discussing job creation may be distracting from vague details.

Eight - Inconsistent Statements

Contradictions or backtracking can indicate dishonesty or lack of preparation.

Example: A representative claims no harm to crops but later admits drainage studies aren't complete.

Nine - Hesitation or Stammering

Frequent “uhs,” “ums,” or unnatural pauses can suggest discomfort.

Example: If they stammer when asked about zoning compliance, they may not have a clear answer.

Ten - Defensive Reactions

Raising their voice, becoming irritated, or attacking the questioner can indicate dishonesty or uncertainty.

Example: If they respond to your question about toxic runoff with, “Why are you asking this?” it may be a deflection tactic.

Final Thoughts

We've all trusted our gut instincts at one time or another, and those instincts are valuable. Still, these tools—both verbal and non-verbal cues—can help sharpen your sense of judgment and give you confidence in spotting evasion. Stay calm, persistent,

and respectful, and you'll be better equipped to get the answers you deserve about the issues that matter to your land and community. Remember, just because you might experience, or believe you are experiencing signs of evasion or dishonesty, the person you are speaking with just might be as nervous as you are. Again, trust your instincts/gut.